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# Russian Policy in the Arctic after the Ukraine Crisis

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*Denne rapport er en del af Center for Militære Studiers forskningsbaserede myndighedsbetjening for Forsvarsministeriet. Formålet med rapporten er at undersøge, hvad Ukraine krisen har betydet for Ruslands politik i Arktis. Rapportens analyse peger på en høj grad af kontinuitet i den russiske arktispolitik. Krisen har således ikke ledt til et skifte i Ruslands politik. Rapportens analyse peger imidlertid samtidig på en række sikkerhedspolitiske risici knyttet til Ruslands interesser i Arktis. På den baggrund afsluttes rapporten med en række prioriteter og principper for dansk sikkerhedspolitik i Arktis.*

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*This report is a part of Centre for Military Studies' policy research service for the Ministry of Defense. Its purpose is to examine the impact of the Ukraine crisis on Russian policy in the Arctic. The report's analysis points towards a high level of continuity in the Russian Arctic policy. Thus the crisis has not led to a shift in Russian policy. However, at the same time, the report's analysis does suggest that there are a number of security related political risks tied to Russian interests in the Arctic. On this basis, the report ends with a number of priorities and principles for Danish security policy in the Arctic.*

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## Abstract

How significant have the Ukraine crisis and the deteriorating relations between Russia and the West been for Russia's policies in the Arctic since 2014? Is it possible to discern a change in Russian policy or can a case be made for continuity? These are the essential issues examined in this report. Russia is an actor of central importance in the Arctic. Consequently, the development of Russia's policies in the Arctic is of paramount importance to the Danish Realm and the conditions governing Danish foreign and security policy. This report, therefore, sets out to analyze two aspects of Russian policy – the military and the diplomatic – before and after the Ukraine crisis, respectively. Firstly, the analysis indicates that a line of continuity rather than change prevails in Russian policy. Since 2008, Russia has consistently opted for a generally pragmatic and accommodating diplomatic course combined with a wide-ranging modernization and reinforcement of Russia's military capabilities in the region. Secondly, the report interprets this political trajectory as a consequence of Russia's core interest in the economic development of Russian Arctic territory. This core interest indicates that Russian policy is likely to focus on international stability and on the development of regional relations as long as they support Russian interests. Even so, other concerns – especially in terms of military strategy and symbolic politics – can potentially lead Russian policy in a different direction, risking increased instability in the Arctic. Further, Russia will, from time to time, carry out diplomatic and military actions that decrease her trustworthiness, stepping up conflict dynamics and potentially contributing to undermine Russia's own key economic interest in maintaining regional stability. Thus, there are risks associated with the future development of Russia's policy in the Arctic. Thirdly, therefore, the report discusses the challenges that Russia's policy in the Arctic is likely to present to the Danish Realm. On this basis, the report concludes by outlining a number of priorities and principles that may be used as a starting point for developing specific initiatives with which Danish diplomacy can contribute to maintaining the Arctic as a stable geopolitical region characterized by relatively low tension.

## Dansk resumé

Hvad har Ukraine krisen og det forværrede forhold mellem Vesten og Rusland siden 2014 betydet for Ruslands politik i Arktis? Kan man se forandring i russisk politik, eller er der tale om kontinuitet? De spørgsmål er omdrejningspunktet for denne rapport. Rusland er en afgørende aktør i Arktis. Udviklingen af Ruslands politik i Arktis er således af afgørende betydning for rigsfællesskabet og betingelserne for dansk udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitik. Rapporten undersøger derfor udviklingen i russisk politik i Arktis på to dimensioner – diplomati og militær – før og efter Ukraine krisen. Rapportens analyse viser, for det første, at der i vidt omfang er tale om kontinuitet fremfor forandring i russisk politik. Rusland har konsekvent siden 2008 kombineret en overordnet set pragmatisk og imødekommende diplomatisk linje i Arktis med en bredspektret modernisering og styrkelse af Ruslands militære kapaciteter i regionen. Rapporten tolker, for det andet, den politiske linje som et resultat af Ruslands overordnede interesse i økonomisk udvikling af russisk territorium i Arktis. Den kerneinteresse tilsiger, at russisk politik vil fokusere på sikkerhedspolitisk stabilitet og fokusere på at udbygge regionale relationer, så længe de understøtter den russiske interesse. Samtidig eksisterer der imidlertid andre russiske hensyn – ikke mindst militærstrategiske og symbolpolitiske – der potentielt kan lede Ruslands Arctic politik i en retning, der risikerer at skabe ustabilitet i Arktis. Samtidig foretager Rusland jævnligt diplomatiske og militære handlinger, der medvirker til at underminere tilliden til Rusland, virker konfliktskabende og dermed potentielt går imod Ruslands egen nationaløkonomiske interesse i stabilitet. Der er således risici knyttet til udviklingen af Ruslands fremtidige politik i Arktis. Derfor diskuterer rapporten for det tredje, hvilke udfordringer Ruslands politik i Arktis stiller rigsfællesskabet overfor. På den baggrund opridser rapporten afslutningsvis en række principper og prioriteter, der kan danne udgangspunkt for udviklingen af konkrete initiativer, hvormed dansk diplomati fortsat kan medvirke til at fastholde Arktis som et stabilt geopolitisk område præget af relativt lav spænding.

# Recommendations: Five Principles and Priorities for Danish Security Policy in the Arctic

- Diplomatic responsiveness:

The rationale behind Russia's pragmatic and regionally oriented diplomacy in the Arctic is to promote Russian interests. Consequently, it makes sense for Denmark to pursue a similarly pragmatic and responsive course towards Russia in the Arctic. This will serve Danish interests. Not to be confused with compliance, responsiveness should focus on regional themes and should, needless to say, be practised within the context of Western sanctions regimes. This principle should be brought to bear on the many concrete issues addressed by the Arctic Council, as well as on new initiatives that may potentially bolster regional institutions and regional diplomacy while at the same time showing Russia the value of maintaining her present line of diplomacy.

- Military transparency:

At present, insecurity, distrust, and unpredictability concerning military initiatives and activities contribute to undermining stability in the Arctic region. A prominent Danish priority should be to promote military transparency. Denmark could set a precedent by informing about and encouraging participation in Danish or Danish-led exercises in the Arctic as a step towards encouraging reciprocal measures in Russian exercise programmes. Denmark should strive towards establishing a set of agreements in the Arctic that would promote transparency and communication between the military forces of the Arctic states. This would reduce the risk of misunderstandings and of escalating crises. Mechanisms for crisis handling and communication are generally in demand where Russo-Western relations are concerned. This could be tested out in the Arctic and Denmark could put confidence-building initiatives on the Arctic agenda as a step towards securing a stable situation in Europe less prone to crises.

- Practical collaboration:

The Norwegian and Russian coast guard authorities have sustained a close and efficient practical collaboration in spite of the Ukraine crisis. Further, a regional Coast Guard Forum has been successfully established where all Arctic states can collaborate on consolidating maritime security in the region. Notwithstanding the sanctions regime, there are alternative options for developing practical collaboration with Russia. There will be opportunities for extending Arctic

collaboration in the field of science. This could also include cultural information- and knowledge-sharing. All of it perfectly compatible with the Russian picture of future Arctic developments and, not least, Russia's role in these.

- Clear communication:

While attempting to be responsive, it will be necessary for Denmark to unequivocally communicate her own initiatives, intentions, and plans as well as her position on Russian initiatives and actions. Danish authorities must ensure that diplomatic and military signals coming across correlate with external and internal communication. Even minor, effectively insignificant, Danish actions might inadvertently stimulate powers in Russia wanting to switch to a policy of increased military confrontation and diplomatic isolation. At the same time, it should be made clear from a Danish perspective that excessive Russian military activity is viewed by all other Arctic states, including Denmark, as counterproductive with a risk of foreshadowing the highly militarized situation that Russia, apparently, is striving to avoid.

- Actively bolstering Arctic consensus:

To Denmark, a meaningful policy in relation to Russia's role in the Arctic is dependent on the remaining Arctic actors. Consensus between the USA and the other Western Arctic countries on the political line towards Russia is of paramount importance. This will require a continuous and goal-oriented diplomatic effort. On the strength of Greenland's location and American military-strategic interests there, the geopolitical role and significance of Denmark is unique from a Washington perspective. This means that Denmark has access to and a legitimate opportunity to exerting influence on American policy in the Arctic. A meaningful policy in relation to Russia in the Arctic is also about ensuring that Danish attitudes, initiatives, and plans are being heard in Washington.

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# 1. Introduction

In 2015, approximately 100 paratroopers were air-landed by Russia on the ice near the North Pole.<sup>1</sup> The air landing is just one example of a series of remarkable Russian actions in the Arctic, conceivably indicating a confrontational and potentially aggressive Russian policy. The landing exemplifies a consistent Russian line of symbolic politics in the Arctic. A line initiated in 2007 when the Russian Arctic explorer Chilingarov headed an expedition to the Arctic Ocean and an unmanned submarine planted a Russian flag at the bottom of the sea near the North Pole, triggering much international attention.<sup>2</sup>

Hence Russia's actions have contributed to focusing world attention on the Arctic, fuelling the popular dystopian vision of the Arctic defined by geopolitical confrontation as well as by competition for, and disputes about, territory and natural resources. Moreover, such actions fill Russia's Arctic neighbours and the rest of the world with apprehension and uncertainty about her intentions in the Arctic.

At the same time, Russia has taken an active and pragmatic part in establishing broad multilateral regional collaboration pivoting on the Arctic Council, as well as organizing practical bilateral collaboration in numerous areas. Russia has also ratified the Ilulissat Declaration from 2008 where the five Arctic coastal states jointly declare their actions to be subject to international law, which, in turn, will provide the framework for settling prospective territorial disputes.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, there is consensus among academics, observers, and practitioners that, despite Russia regularly acting in ways suggesting an aggressive political line and, despite Russia currently investing in military capability in the Arctic, the likely outcome is that overriding Russian economic interests and a central Russian desire for regional (economic) development will maintain Russian Arctic policy within a regulated Arctic order focusing on compromise, collaboration, and stability.<sup>4</sup>

However, Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2014 have caused serious rifts in general Russian-Western relations. In Ukraine, Russia has shown deployment of military force to be part of her foreign policy and, moreover, shown a willingness to break international law. Russia's actions in Ukraine

have clearly caused antagonism between Russia and the West on security policy, undermining Western confidence in Russia.

Since the Ukraine crisis, there has been substantial military activity in the Russian Arctic and Russia has carried out a series of military exercises, both minor operations, including air-landing paratroopers on ice floes near the North Pole as mentioned earlier, and large joint exercises deploying hundreds of aircraft, numerous ships, and thousands of troops. Further, a number of old Soviet bases have been reopened and new ones established, a new central unified Arctic strategic command has been set up, and designated Arctic brigades are in place.

Does all this activity signify a shift in Russia's Arctic policy in line with the policy adopted for Ukraine? Will we be witnessing a definitively more aggressive and less collaborative Russia in the Arctic as a consequence of the Ukraine crisis? In other words, an Arctic spill-over effect where the Arctic region will increasingly reflect the general tension between Russia and the West?<sup>5</sup> These questions have only been scantily clarified. Relatively few academic analyses of Russian security policy in the Arctic have been made and several of these are, for good reasons, primarily based on empirics prior to the Ukraine crisis.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Russia's future policy in the Arctic is decisive for the Danish Realm. Intensified security policy and the possibility of military tension in the Arctic risk a serious downscaling of opportunities for economic and social development in the Arctic – including Greenland. Furthermore, an increasingly tense Arctic region risks placing Denmark in a distinct, perhaps even vulnerable, antagonistic position *vis-à-vis* Russia. Consequently, there are serious Danish interests at stake in relation to Russia's policy in the Arctic. The purpose of this report, therefore, is to examine and interpret continuity and change in Russia's Arctic policy after the Ukraine crisis and, on the basis of this, identify potential consequences and opportunities for the Danish Realm with regard to future Arctic policy.

Aside from this introduction, the report is divided into five chapters. Chapter one is a presentation of a model for analysing Russia's policy in the Arctic and, by breaking the policy down into two dimensions – a diplomatic and a military – the report will construct four ideal-typical trajectories for Russian foreign policy. On the basis of this, chapter 2 will address Russia's policy in the Arctic from 2007-2014 prior to the Ukraine crisis. Chapter 3 provides an analysis of Russia's policy in the Arctic after the Ukraine crisis. This leads to an analysis in chapter 4 of the underlying intentions of the policy, its drivers, and a discussion of continuity, change, and risks in connection with Russia's

policy in the Arctic. Finally, chapter 5 identifies a number of principles and priorities to inspire the formulation of a policy on Russia in the Arctic for the Danish Realm.

The analyses in this report are based on freely accessible information from observers, governments, and civil service establishments. In addition to a broad literature review, the authors have conducted interviews with both Danish and foreign experts and practitioners in the field. The report forms part of the Centre for Military Studies' (CMS') research-based service to public authorities, providing research-analytical input in support of Danish defense policy decisions and accumulation of knowledge. Hence the report is subject to CMS' quality assurance procedures, including internal and external peer reviews. The authors of the report would like to thank all those who have generously taken time to answer questions and discuss Arctic politics with us. Thanks are also due to our colleagues at the CMS and to the external reviewer for providing much valued input, ultimately improving this report. The analyses and conclusion are the sole responsibility of the authors.

## **2. A Model for Russia's Policy in the Arctic**

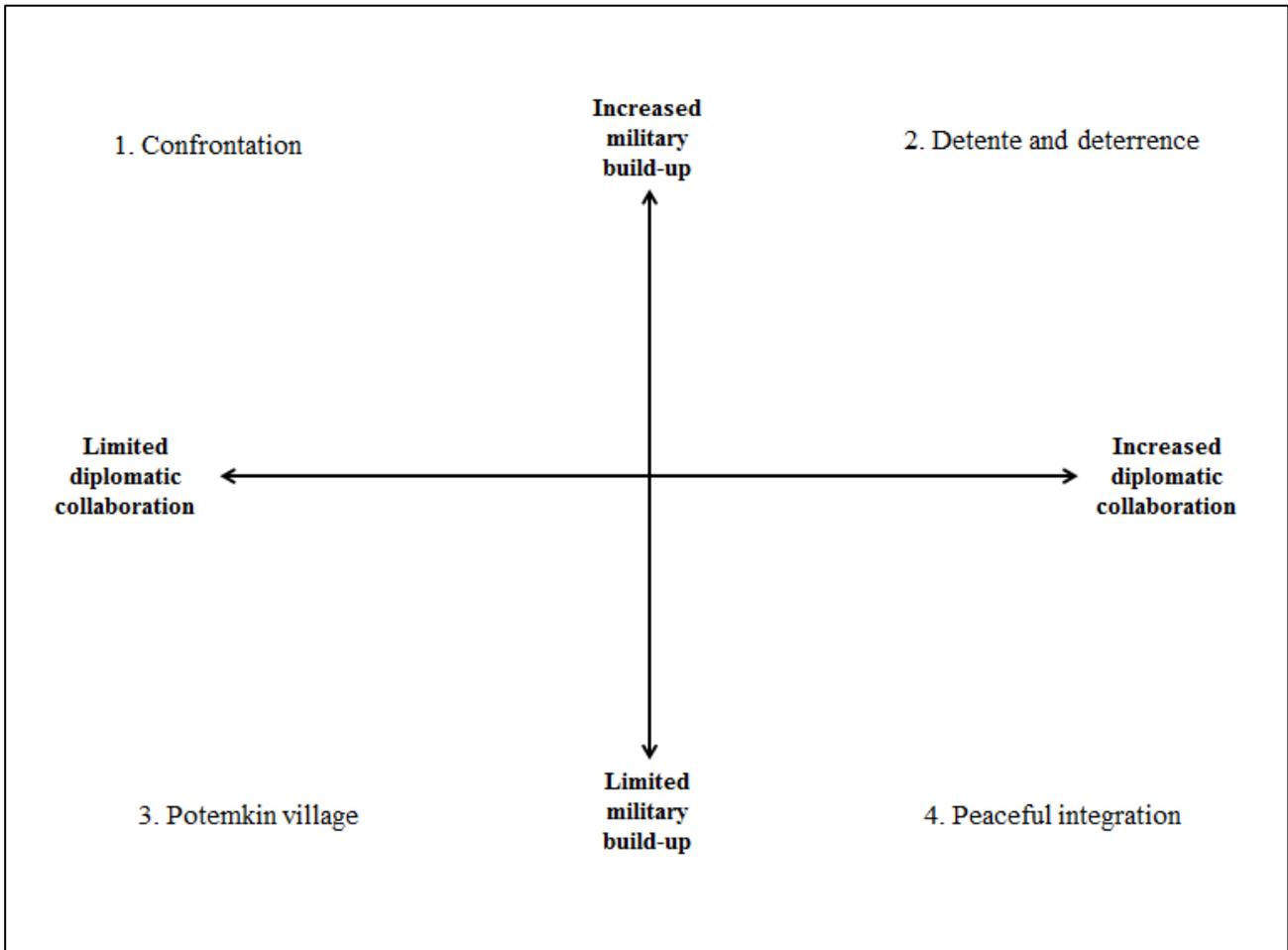
How can Russia's policy in the Arctic best be examined and, not least, how can the significance of the Ukraine crisis for Russian policy best be assessed? This chapter presents a simple model for Russia's Arctic policy in order to limit the complexity of Russian politics. Restricting our analysis of Russian policy to two parameters enables us to analyze a general trend in Russian Arctic policy and to identify significant shifts. Although the model is a simplification, it is an important tool when attempting to provide an answer to the main question in this report: whether the Ukraine crisis has had any bearing on Russian foreign policy in the Arctic and, if so, which.

In our analysis, Russia's Arctic policy is reduced to a military and a diplomatic dimension. Both can be viewed as more or less confrontational, construed as the degree of diplomatic collaboration and responsiveness in one and, in the other, the degree of military build-up and provocative military actions. The empirical background for the two dimensions is actions by Russia such as political decisions, statements, and initiatives affecting the Arctic and conceivably impacting on Russia's relations to other Arctic states.

**Diplomatic Arctic policy** marks Russia's political behaviour towards other Arctic states. This dimension may vary from being constructive, consensual, and collaborative to being destructive,

overly sensitive, and subversive. A **military Arctic policy** is characterized by Russian military escalation, or de-escalation, in the region in terms of investments, reorganization, or modernization as well as military exercises and provocative military shows of power. When combining these two dimensions, four separate lines of Russian policy in the Arctic emerge, each with an ideal-typical position. These are illustrated in figure 1.

**Figure 1: A model for Russia’s policy in the Arctic**



We call the first line of approach 'confrontational'. This implies a clear military build-up and may contain elements such as a quantitative or qualitative reinforcement of Russian Arctic military capabilities combined with a military show of power and intentional provocations, including territorial incursions, aggressive exercise activities, and interruption of marine and air traffic. At the same time, in the diplomatic dimension, Russia is disinclined to collaborate, being unwilling to enter into new regional agreements, hampering the work of existing agreements, or even breaking these agreements, for example. Russia will adopt a confrontational diplomatic line, explicitly questioning the institutional framework of the region, including the process of parcelling out the Arctic sea-bed under the auspices of the UN as set out in the Ilulissat Declaration. Instead of

pragmatic diplomatic collaboration and a political will to compromise, Russia will adopt a diplomatic line of fighting fire with fire.

We will call Russia's second line of approach 'detente and deterrence'. This concept is inspired by NATO's policy during the Cold War following the Harmel report from 1967 when NATO adopted the policy of combining diplomatic responsiveness with military strength. This is also true of Russia in the Arctic in this specific line of approach. Diplomatically, Russia pragmatically and accommodatingly adopts a collaborative course. This implies active diplomatic work in order to strengthen regional – and bilateral – collaboration. At the same time, compromises on important issues are willingly made and foreign policy is generally conducted within the framework dictated by the institutions in the region, for example, constructively and accommodatingly working to divide up the seabed among the prospective claimants according to the guidelines issued by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). All the while, there is a substantial military build-up and Russian capabilities in the Arctic are reinforced considerably. Furthermore, reinforcing existing capabilities involves increased exercise activity and military show of force.

The third line is designated the 'Potemkin village'. With this line of approach, Russia will reduce her military capabilities. This may result in a generally low-level combat readiness of Arctic military forces, less exercise activity, and less aggressive demonstrations of military capability. This reduction may also result in a *de facto* reduction in the number of ships, aircraft, and troops, combined with a reduced presence brought about by base closures and a generally reduced level of activity. With this line of approach, Russia is not showing any political interest in diplomatically supporting the extension of regional collaboration, on the contrary, fighting fire with fire in a confrontational diplomatic line of approach. Rather than getting diplomatically involved in the region, Russia isolates herself.

Finally, the fourth ideal-typical line of approach is the 'peaceful integration'. This approach to Arctic policy means that Russia diplomatically adopts an active collaborative line which, like the one involving great willingness to compromise, focuses on extending the regional institutions and regional collaboration. In military terms, diplomatic responsiveness is supplemented, as is the case in the Potemkin-village approach, by a marked reduction of Russian military activities and Russian presence in the region.

Thus the model's two dimensions construct four ideal-typical lines of approach for Russia's policy in the Arctic while focusing on Russian diplomatic and military practice. The model provides a framework for discussing and assessing the status as well as new developments in Russia's Arctic policy. At the same time, the two dimensions are relative. Russian diplomatic practice, for example, can be more or less collaborative. Moreover, the model is entirely descriptive and has no causal content. The underlying reasons for specific developments in Russia's Arctic policy are rather more complex than the nature of the policy itself and its subsequent evolution. However, conceptualizing and modelling the policy and its evolution are prerequisites for being able to discuss its status, emergence, and potential shift.

To address the report's question as to the significance of the Ukraine crisis for Russia's policy in the Arctic, it is essential to empirically isolate a 'before' and 'after' the crisis in both the diplomatic and the military dimension. The above model thus defines the report's analytical context and perspective. The first step, therefore, is to assess the shifts in Russia's Arctic policy up to the events in Ukraine in 2014. This will be a precondition for analyzing subsequent changes.

### **3. Russia's Policy in the Arctic During 1989-2014**

This chapter addresses Russia's policy in the Arctic from the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 to the start of the Ukraine crisis in 2014. There is a subdivision in the chapter covering the period 1989-2007 when Russia, like most other Arctic states, was relatively inattentive to the future opportunities and problems with regard to the Arctic as well as international relations in the region. 2007 saw a renewed Russian interest in the Arctic. This is a general interest whose primary significance fuels Russian political narratives,<sup>7</sup> secondly, it is central in terms of military strategy, and thirdly, it is crucial to the future of Russian economy. The newly discovered Russian interest in the Arctic is symbolically cemented by the Russians planting a flag on the seabed below the North Pole, also in 2007.<sup>8</sup>

#### **3.1 1989-2007: Depopulation, economic recession, and political drought**

Exploration, development, and exploitation of the Russian Arctic territory were high on the agenda under Soviet rule. A political ambition about regional development of the Russian Arctic territory led to extensive state support and state-financed economic activities ranging from industrializing reindeer stocks to extensive military industrial investments in, not least, the Northern Fleet and

Russian strategic nuclear strike forces – in the Arctic primarily nuclear submarines.<sup>9</sup> Industries, infrastructure, and entire cities were built.

Shortly before the final collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a serious economic recession and a major demographic decline had set in. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Arctic Russia was more or less left to its own devices. Paul Josephson even speaks of a deindustrialization of Arctic Russia.<sup>10</sup> During the economic and political chaos in Russia in the 1990s, most of the state support to the region vanished, the price of goods rose, factories closed, jobs disappeared, and research projects lost their financing.<sup>11</sup> Deindustrialization resulted in depopulation with several Arctic cities losing 20 percent of their population since 1991,<sup>12</sup> leading to one in six inhabitants migrating from Arctic Russia between 1989 and 2006.<sup>13</sup> Seen in a military perspective, the situation is equally critical. Notwithstanding that capacities in the Arctic region – especially the Northern Fleet and the strategic submarines – were given high priority by Russian decision-makers<sup>14</sup>, it was a major economic, organizational, and administrative challenge to maintain operative capability, even in terms of highly prioritized weapon systems. The accident involving the nuclear submarine Kursk in 2000 is a clear and tragic example of this.

### **3.2 2007-2014: Russia rediscovers the Arctic**

Concurrently with the increasing international interest in the Arctic, the anticipated future climatic changes in the region and, not least, enhanced administrative and economic capacity in Moscow, Russian political interest in the Arctic is rekindled. Already in 2001, a Russian strategy for the Arctic is publicized and, from about 2005, the Kremlin regime began seriously mentioning reinvestments in the Arctic as being high on the political agenda. In 2007, the renewed interest in the Arctic is illustrated by the symbolic planting of a flag on the seabed below the North Pole.<sup>15</sup> This is followed up in 2008 with a specific new Russian national Arctic strategy. In 2009, this is complemented by a new national security strategy in which the development of the Arctic is set to play a significant role for future national security in Russia. The importance of the Arctic for Russian decision-makers chiefly pivots on the exploitation of natural resources and the Russian national energy strategy from 2009 also points to the Arctic as a central area for future development and the extraction of oil and gas.<sup>16</sup> After 2007-2008, a completely new Russian policy for the Arctic has, in reality, been formulated.<sup>17</sup> From this point onward, the national symbolic significance of the Arctic, the economic potential of the natural resources, and the role of the region in terms of security combine to form a new Russian policy in the Arctic and a new understanding of the significance of the Arctic region for Russia. At this time, Russian symbolic actions and official

Russian strategic documents jointly contribute to placing the Arctic and the future development of the Arctic on the international agenda. Further, and to a large extent, Russian politics and political declarations are central to fostering the idea of an Arctic race for resources with implicit conflict potential – in the West and in Russia – demanding capability and presence, especially of a military kind. This is exemplified by Russia resuming her strategic airborne missions to the Arctic in 2007.<sup>18</sup>

### **3.2.1 The diplomatic dimension**

The increased importance ascribed to the Arctic in Russian politics is also mirrored in Russian regional diplomacy. The idea of the Arctic – and notably the Russian Arctic – being a strategically crucial region for Russia's future and repeated declarations by Russian military and political decision-makers about a potentially conflict-ridden Arctic region, to which Russia has special claims and rights,<sup>19</sup> is complemented by Russian initiatives and declarations highlighting the necessity of, and opportunity to, retaining the Arctic as a peaceful and stable region to safeguard economic development and the benefits associated with the great future potential of this region. Thus Russia has co-ratified the Ilulissat Declaration of 2008 where the five Arctic coastal nations have indicated that they intend to file their claims to the extended continental shelf in the Arctic floor beyond the 200-nautical mile exclusive zones according to the principles set out in UNCLOS. Further, Russia has taken an active part in extending regional collaboration via the Arctic Council and was party to ratifying the first binding agreements under the auspices of the Arctic Council in 2011 and 2013 about collaborative efforts in search and rescue work, as well as maritime oil pollution. Similarly, in 2010, Norway and Russia settled an almost 40-year-old demarcation dispute about a contested area of the Barents Sea.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Russia is part of a long-standing, modern, and efficient bilateral coast guard collaboration with her immediate Arctic neighbours, Norway and the USA.

These bilateral and multilateral collaborative ventures, agreements, and initiatives are largely in line with the Russian Arctic strategy from 2008, *Foundation of the State Politics of the Russian Federation on the Arctic for 2020 and in the Longer Perspective*, outlining among other things Russia's goal of maintaining a steady development curve in the Arctic through collaboration, in order to exploit the region's economic potential and to establish rescue and search capability as well as navigation and surveillance systems jointly with the other Arctic states.<sup>21</sup> In overall terms, these events point to ambiguity in Russian Arctic diplomacy. On the one hand, statements, like the one by Lieutenant-General Shamanov, to the effect that the actions of other Arctic countries necessitate Russian troops practicing 'Arctic combat mission',<sup>22</sup> have repeatedly been put forward by leading

Russian politicians and military representatives during the period 2007-2014, insinuating the likelihood of a future conflict in the Arctic where Russia might risk having to use military capability to safeguard her interests. On the other hand, as in the words of the Russian foreign minister Mr. Lavrov, Russian decision-makers have often pursued a line of seeing no reason to view the Arctic as 'a potential conflict zone'<sup>23</sup>. However, a look at Russian diplomacy in the same period indicates a consistent multilateral, regulated, and collaborative line of approach. This political trajectory is interpreted by many as being in line with important Russian economic interests.<sup>24</sup> Stability will increase the economic potential of the region and is viewed as a decisive factor in Russia's policy. Russia's policy in the Arctic, rooted in diplomacy up to the Ukraine crisis, should also be seen in relation to military developments. This aspect will be examined in the following section.

### **3.2.2 The military dimension**

The beginning of the period 2007-2014 also marks the beginning of a long-term modernization and consolidation of Russian military capacities generally – including Arctic capacities. The Russian Arctic strategy from 2008 only vaguely addresses future military plans.<sup>25</sup> According to the strategy, Russia should possess sufficient combat readiness to safeguard national interests, be able to handle increased activity in the region, and prevent smuggling, terrorism, and similar threats to internal security.<sup>26</sup> However, the strategy lists a series of long-term objectives to channel more military capacities to the Arctic, which, if realized, would amount to a military build-up.

The war in Georgia in 2008 disclosed the actual and very poor condition of the Russian armed forces, galvanizing the Putin administration into initiating an extensive and radical modernization of Russian military forces. Some commentators compare these reforms and their radical nature with Stalin's military reforms back in the 1930s.<sup>27</sup> The reforms have led to large-scale investments in equipment and comprehensive doctrinal and organizational changes of the Russian armed forces. This includes the Arctic where, for a long period, Russian military forces had suffered neglect: bases were closed, aircraft and ships were scrapped, and maintenance and training were extremely poor. Naturally, this has had an adverse effect on the combat readiness of the forces. Consequently, plans for modernization include increased focus on the Northern Fleet and on Russia's nuclear capacities – not least the submarine force and its support functions. Separate Arctic capacities, including coastal defense, base and infrastructure, rescue centres, radar surveillance, air defense, as well as equipment for individual personnel and units, will also be upgraded by reinvesting. The question remains whether these investments will constitute a decisive build-up or simply maintain

some sort of status quo. For example, the major part of the ships in the Russian navy will be scrapped over the next 15-20 years<sup>28</sup> and all Russian nuclear icebreakers are due for replacement around 2020.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the grounding of Russia's ageing strategic bombers, Tu-95, in June 2015<sup>30</sup> is an indication that air force units will soon be due for replacement if Russia wants to retain existing capacities.

Back in 2007, Russian strategic air patrols are again carried out in the Arctic for the first time since the Cold War and, in 2008, the Russian Northern Fleet announces that it has resumed patrolling in the Arctic.<sup>31</sup> This escalating level of activity is complemented by a series of plans, initiatives, and announcements intended to reinforce Russian military capacities in the Arctic, the strategic significance of which is emphasized in the Arctic strategy from 2008. In 2010, Katarina Zysk notes that Russian plans for the navy, besides reinforcing strategic submarines, for example, include the addition of 20 new frigates and 20 corvettes to the Northern Fleet. Simultaneously, plans are announced to establish a new Joint Arctic Command.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Arctic capacities are being reinforced for internal security, with the Federal Security Service (FSB) announcing that new Arctic border control units have been set up and capacities under the Russian Ministry for Internal Affairs have resumed patrolling along the North-East Passage.<sup>33</sup> Further, in 2009, the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations announces plans to establish ten search and rescue bases (SARs) with a total of 980 staff along the Arctic coast until 2015.<sup>34</sup> Funds are earmarked in 2011 and, in 2013, the first SAR centre opens in Naryan-Mar.<sup>35</sup> Notwithstanding that SAR bases, coast guard and border control capacities administratively are separate from the armed forces, this report regards them as part of a general military build-up. The expansion of the Russian SAR infrastructure and SAR bases can equally, for example, serve as support and logistics centres for the Russian navy and air force.<sup>36</sup>

Further, in 2011, plans are first announced to set up an Arctic brigade stationed in Petsjenga close to the Norwegian border – according to Russian generals, to 'balance the situation' in response to Norwegian and Canadian Arctic military deployment. Initially planned to be operational that same year, it is eventually deferred to 2015.<sup>37</sup> The Arctic infrastructure is similarly reinforced during this period and, in 2013, the airfield on the island of Kotelnyj on the Northern Siberian islands is reopened after 27 years<sup>38</sup> and, in July 2012, the new equipment plan for the navy is announced, anticipating investments of 4700 billion roubles to purchase 51 surface vessels and 8 strategic submarines as well as 16 multipurpose submarines – a large part of these are expected to be deployed in the Northern Fleet.<sup>39</sup>

Prior to the Ukraine crisis and Russia's annexation of Crimea, Putin announced that the decision had finally been made to reorganize Russian forces in the Arctic under a new command structure with an independent Arctic command: Northern Fleet – United Strategic Command, headquartered in Murmansk<sup>40</sup>. This command is responsible for the Northern Fleet and a number of smaller units reporting directly to the military command in Moscow.

Russia also carried out a number of military exercises during this period, some of them jointly with NATO member states. Annually in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013, Russia and Norway carried out a major joint naval exercise called Pomor.<sup>41</sup> Russian and Norwegian warships, fighters, helicopters, surveillance aircraft, and various coast guard units trained a variety of operations in the Norwegian Sea and the Barents Sea, including anti-submarine warfare, counter-terror and counter-piracy operations, rescue operations, target practice of various kinds, etc.<sup>42</sup> The Russian Northern Fleet also repeatedly carried out exercises in the Atlantic, the Mediterranean Sea, the Baltic Sea, and in the Caribbean Sea, on their own and in joint international exercises; for example, with the Venezuelan navy in 2008<sup>43</sup> and jointly with the USA, Great Britain, and France in the annual FRUKUS exercise during the period 2003-2013<sup>44</sup>.

At the same time, the frequency of Russian exercises and the level of general preparedness have clearly risen during this period, also in respect of the Russian Arctic military forces. For example, the Northern Fleet once again patrols the Arctic near Norwegian and Danish territorial waters, in 2008 carrying out exercises near Svalbard.<sup>45</sup> This includes the air force which, as mentioned, has resumed strategic patrolling of the area, and the missile-carrying submarines that, in 2006, resumed their Arctic patrolling activities under the ice-sheet. The increased activity is exemplified by two joint exercises: in the so-called Ladoga exercise in 2009, at least 7000 troops from the joint forces led by the commander-in-chief of the Russian ground forces practiced e.g. submarine missile launching and brigade-sized landing exercises in north-western Russia as part of a combined exercise featuring both conventional and asymmetrical elements.<sup>46</sup> The exercise, held in what was then the Leningrad military district, is believed to be the largest since the end of the Cold War. In 2012, near Petsjenga, a similar exercise was carried out where 7000 troops on board more than 20 ships, 30 aircraft, and 150 military vehicles practiced the defense against a simulated air- and sea-based conventional military attack on Russian Arctic territory.<sup>47</sup>

It is difficult to estimate military capability, including Russia’s military capability in the Arctic – particularly from open sources as attempted here. For one thing, the Russian authorities are very much aware of the signals, they are transmitting – and not transmitting – about the status on Russian military forces. Also, there is often little correlation between announced modernization plans and actual capacities. Finally, Russian politicians are very good at selling the same capability several times over. In overall terms, there will be a significant degree of uncertainty whenever attempts are made to estimate Russian military capability. Generally speaking, it would seem reasonable to conclude that the Russian authorities are making great efforts – certainly since 2008, and not only on paper – to optimize, reinforce, and extend Russian military capacities – including Arctic ones.

The figure below shows the development of the Russian military budget’s share of the GNP during the period 2005-2014. Since the Russian GNP was also rising during this time, a considerable amount of resources has been allocated. Marlene Laruelle notes that the defense budget has risen by 500 per cent during Putin’s first two periods in office.<sup>48</sup>

**Figure 2: Russia’s defense budget as a share of the GNP<sup>49</sup>**

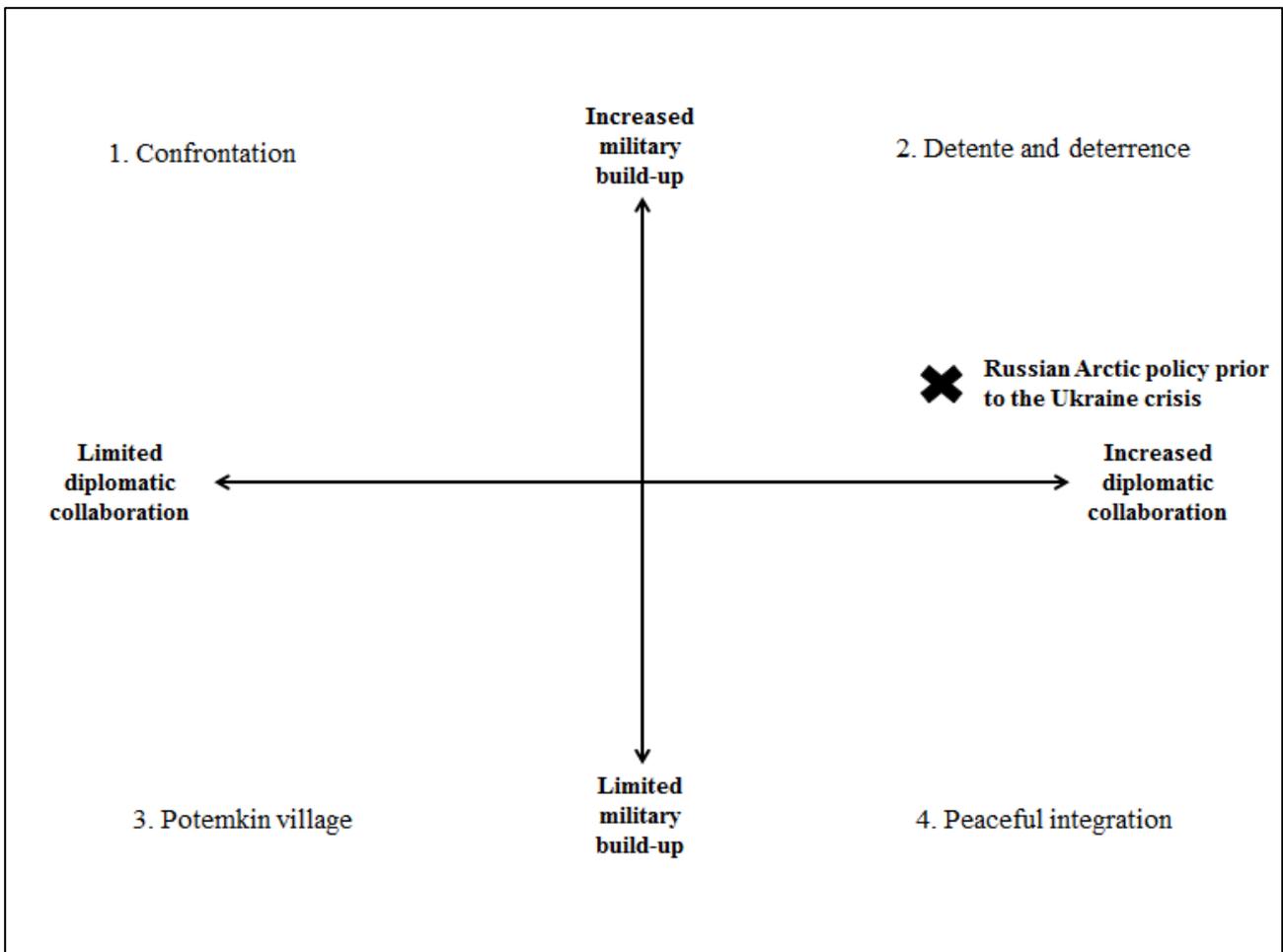


Further funding will, or are expected to, be allocated to reinforce and optimize all forces operating in the Arctic region and command and control structures will be optimized. Also, there will be focus on increasing Russian military presence and reaction capability – not least on domestic Russian territory – by reopening a number of bases. This is going on while increased exercise and patrolling activities are being registered both inside and outside Russian territory.

We conclude, therefore, that the military part of the Arctic policy in our model must be categorized as build-up. However, the extent of this build-up should not be overrated. Russia's Arctic military capacities have long been at a low, and merely to maintain present capacities would require massive investments. There are, nevertheless, widespread attempts at modernization.

In overall terms, the preceding review indicates that Russia's policy in the Arctic, when examined from the perspective of our two chosen dimensions, will end in the top right-hand corner of our four-field table. This policy combines military modernization with a responsive diplomatic approach. Detente and deterrence go hand in hand.

**Figure 3: Direction taken by Russia's Arctic policy prior to the Ukraine crisis**



This combination of diplomatic responsiveness and military modernization has, according to the above, characterized Russia's Arctic policy since 2008. Russian decision-makers have consistently combined aggressive diplomatic and military signals and a reinforcement of Russian military capacities in the Arctic with constructive and receptive diplomacy. The next question begging an

answer is the kind of situation facing us after the Ukraine crisis. Is it possible to identify new or different trends in Russian policy? Is Russia's Arctic policy characterized by continuity, or does the crisis mark a break? This will be addressed in the following chapter.

## **4. Trends in Russia's Arctic Policy after the Ukraine crisis**

This chapter addresses trends in Russia's Arctic policy following the Ukraine crisis, trends that accelerated when the pro-Russia president Viktor Yanukovich was toppled on 24 February 2014. The crisis led to serious problems of international security when Russian groups, with varying support from Russia, assumed control of several regions in Eastern Ukraine and the whole of the Crimean Peninsula – and particularly when the latter was officially annexed by Russia on 18 March 2014. General relations between Russia and the West deteriorated dramatically as a consequence of events in Ukraine.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, several observers point out that the Ukraine crisis may have had a kind of negative spill-over effect on regional Arctic policy, importing security issues of a European or global nature and origin to the Arctic.<sup>51</sup>

The Ukraine crisis has led to a cessation of all military collaboration between Russia and Arctic members of NATO – also in the Arctic – and to dedicated sanctions against the Russian oil and gas industry in the Arctic as well as a boycott by the USA and, not least, Canada, of a number of meetings at government official level in the Arctic Council. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to map the line of Russia's Arctic policy from the end of February 2014 until the drafting of this report in early 2016. Thus the report will be able to provide an answer to whether and to which extent the Ukraine crisis has exerted influence on Russia's policy in the Arctic.

### **4.1 The diplomatic dimension**

In April 2015, Dmitry Rogozin tweeted from Longyearbyen in the Svalbard archipelago. Rogozin had landed on the islands without previously informing the Norwegian authorities. Rogozin is, besides being one of the first on the list of sanctioned Russian decision-makers and thus denied entry to e.g. Norway, the chair of the Russian Arctic Commission – the highest authority to coordinate overall Russian Arctic policy directly under the National Security Council.<sup>52</sup> His visit can only be interpreted as a blatant provocation, in part illustrating the limited effect of Western sanctions and, in part, making a point of Norway's limited supremacy over Svalbard and Rogozin's right – in the eyes of Russia – to land there as a result of the special status enjoyed by the islands

via the Svalbard Treaty from 1920;<sup>53</sup> an ever delicate subject in Oslo. Rogozin followed up his visit a month later when he, on the occasion of a major Russian military exercise in the Arctic, pointed out the negligible impact of Western sanctions, since 'tanks don't need visas'.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, he stressed the special importance of the Arctic for Russia and Russia's special national-religious rights and obligations in the Arctic, referring to the area as 'a Russian Mecca'.<sup>55</sup>

Coinciding with these quite provocative diplomatic exploits and statements, Russia has nevertheless continued a collaborative diplomatic way forward since the spring of 2014. Russia continues pragmatically to give priority to being part of the Arctic Council. When the crisis peaked, Canada, then chairing the Arctic Council, decided to boycott working group meetings held in Moscow,<sup>56</sup> and the environment minister Leona Aglukkaq, heading the Canadian chairmanship, criticized Russia's actions in Ukraine, thus contravening normal Arctic Council practice.<sup>57</sup> The official Russian reaction to both these events was very low-key – no tweets from Rogozin signalling a confrontational approach, but a Russian emphasis on the importance of continuing the collaborative approach.<sup>58</sup>

Indications suggest that the collaboration in the Arctic Council is relatively unaffected and new agreements have been made despite a state of general tension. In March 2014, representatives of the member countries in the Arctic Council signed an agreement on establishing an independent economic forum, the Arctic Economic Council (AEC) whose purpose is to strive for economic growth in the Arctic.<sup>59</sup> AEC was officially founded by the eight Arctic member states and six organisations, including the Danish Shipowners' Association, at a meeting taking place on 2-3 September 2014 in Iqaluit, Canada, and, about a year later on 8 September 2015, the Council opened its own permanent secretariat in Tromsø.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, there were ministerial level agreements in 2015 to reduce carbon and methane emissions in the Arctic.<sup>61</sup> Both serve to indicate that uncontroversial and relatively technical subjects with low political factors, typical of much of the work carried out in the Arctic Council, can still be addressed. Neither the work of the Council nor Russia's attitude and diplomacy seem to have been adversely affected by the Ukraine crisis.

Another example of a continued Russian pragmatic diplomatic line is the ratification of a fishing agreement in July 2015 between the Arctic coastal states, prohibiting unregulated fishing in the Arctic Ocean until a mechanism regulating fishing according to international standards has been established.<sup>62</sup> The sea intersecting the Arctic states' exclusive economic zones (EEZs) is the size of

the Mediterranean Sea and is presently covered in ice and will remain so for many years to come. Hence the agreement is preventative.<sup>63</sup> The importance of this agreement, therefore, could be seen by some as marginal. On the other hand, the fact that Russia, too, invests diplomatic and political time and energy in negotiating an agreement to regulate a potential future problem can be viewed as a recognition by Russia of the valuable collaboration in the Arctic and of the diplomatic energy expended to maintain and extend a future regional regulation based on agreements.

In 2014 and 2015, Russia and Norway continued their joint fishing talks in the Barents Sea where, each year, quotas on the various species are determined on the basis of joint research.<sup>64</sup> This is also true of the two countries' close collaboration on coast guard activities.<sup>65</sup> In June 2015, for example, the two countries carried out a joint exercise involving coast guard vessels and helicopters, training rescue operations and marine oil pollution.<sup>66</sup>

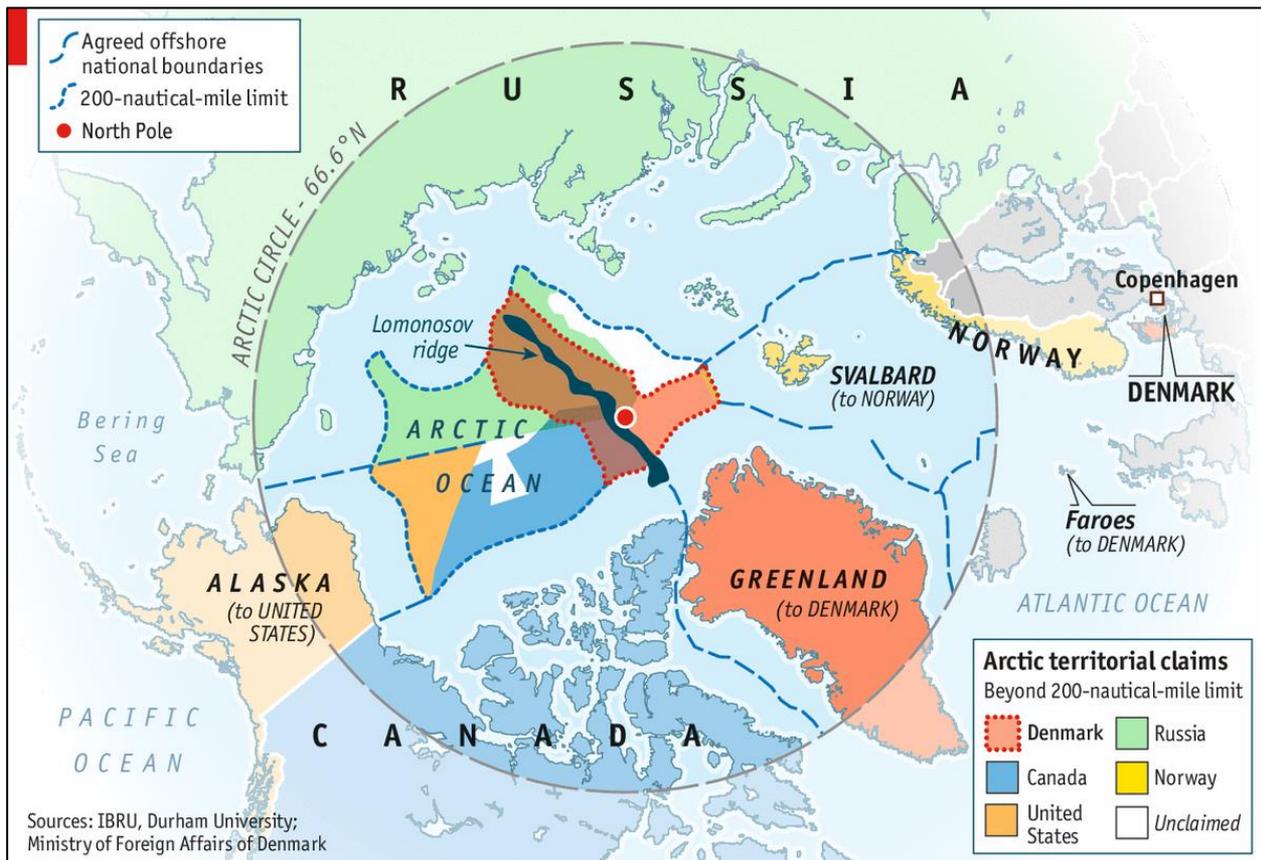
Similarly, international work to regulate shipping in the Arctic has continued. The International Maritime Organization (IMO), an independent agency under the UN, has adopted a so-called polar code in 2014 and 2015 expected to come into force in 2017. The code stipulates a number of guidelines for ships in Arctic waters and the purpose is to prevent environmental disasters and other accidents.<sup>67</sup> The IMO management is elected by the 170 member states, each committed to following the rules set out by the organization. All the Arctic states are members of IMO and, here too, an unhelpful Russian line would potentially have thrown a spanner in the works.

Further, in 2015, the Arctic Coast Guard Forum was successfully established and the first meeting held.<sup>68</sup> The coast guard authorities from all eight Arctic states conducted a high-level meeting to discuss how maritime security and other coast guard duties in the Arctic could be strengthened via extended regional collaboration. Although the meeting was apparently deferred due to the Ukraine crisis, the establishment of the forum also signals a Russian line attaching priority to collaboration, even in semi- or paramilitary organisations such as coast guard authorities.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, mention should be made of the process of parcelling out the Arctic sea-bed beyond the EEZs of the Arctic states. There are two important angles when discussing Russia's policy in the Arctic and the diplomatic dimension of this. Firstly, Russia's handling of Denmark's claim and, secondly, Russia's handling of her own claim.

As anticipated, Denmark submitted her claim to the UN's Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) in December 2014, treating territorial claims from states that have ratified the Law of the Sea Convention UNCLOS.<sup>70</sup> The Danish claim follows the Lomonosov Ridge across the Arctic floor as far as the Russian EEZ, 200 nautical miles from the Russian coast. The area largely covers Russia's earlier, but rejected, claim submitted to the CLCS.

**Figure 4: Territorial claims in the Arctic**



The Danish claim, including the symbolically significant North Pole, judging by the Russian flag issue, was surprisingly large, apparently taking several Arctic states and observers aback.<sup>71</sup> This was also seemingly the case in the Russian foreign ministry. In a memorandum from a meeting between Kristian Jensen, the minister for foreign affairs, Denmark, and Vladimir Titov, Russian vice foreign secretary, brought by the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, Titov notes that the Danish claim is considered 'surprisingly extensive'.<sup>72</sup> Russia, however, does not alter her course and later press releases express the sentiment that the Danish claims are unproblematic, referring to the generally smooth collaboration between the Arctic states, and that any overlaps will be managed in accordance with international law and bilateral negotiations, the future work of the Commission, and Russia's

future claims.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Russia submitted, according to the law of the sea, a so-called non-objection note indicating that Russia acknowledges Denmark's right to submit her claim. The reaction in Russian media was similarly subdued and Denmark's claim did not cause a stir – nor gave rise to tweets from Rogozin or vociferous reactions from other political actors.

In August 2015, Russia submitted her claim. The claim includes large parts of the Lomonosov Ridge as did Russia's original – and rejected – claim from 2002. All in all, the Russian claim covers about 1.2 million sq. km, but is smaller than the original one.<sup>74</sup> Although the Russian claim includes the North Pole, it does not extend as close to the Greenland EEZ as the Danish claim towards the Russian EEZ. There may be good geological reasons for this. But from a political perspective, the extent of the Russian claim can be interpreted as diplomatic responsiveness. Further, diplomatic processes and regional scientific collaboration is emphasized in official Russian statements.<sup>75</sup> Neither did this event trigger vociferous nationalistic, provocative, and confrontational remarks from Russian decision-makers, nor military exercises in the region, for that matter.

In overall terms, the above events may be seen as an indication of a continuation of the pragmatic and collaborative line in Russian policy after the Ukraine crisis. As was the case before the crisis, Russian diplomacy is characterized by pragmatism and responsiveness combined with a few provocative statements. But in the light of the Russian flag planting and earlier declarations, such statements might equally have been made prior to the Ukraine crisis. In diplomatic terms, therefore, there is a high degree of continuity. The Russian political atmosphere could even be said to be more accommodating or pragmatic than before the crisis.

## **4.2 The military dimension**

Prior to the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis and the Russian annexation of Crimea, Putin announced that a decision had been made to reorganize Russian forces in the Arctic under a new command structure with an independent Arctic unit command, Northern Fleet – United Strategic Command, headquartered in Murmansk.<sup>76</sup> This Command is responsible for the Arctic area with the Northern Fleet and a considerable number of smaller air and territorial units under its command. As is evident above, this is not a new idea, and the decision was, as planned, effectuated in December 2014.<sup>77</sup> In connection with the establishment of the Arctic Command, the Russian Ministry of Defense made it known that the first of two Arctic brigades was expected to be set up some time in 2015, stationed close to the Finnish border in Alakurtti while the location of the other brigade had yet to be

decided.<sup>78</sup> This first Arctic Brigade, on the drawing board for several years as mentioned above, was finally established in January 2015, based on the 80th Motorized Rifle Brigade located close to the Finnish border<sup>79</sup>. In 2015 and 2016, this unit trained deployment to various locations in the Russian Arctic.<sup>80</sup> Russia is anticipated to establish a second dedicated Arctic brigade. It is likely to be based on units from the Kola Peninsula only a few kilometres from the Norwegian border.<sup>81</sup>

The Russian Northern Fleet is Russia's largest and most important naval unit, supporting Russia in Syria, among other things.<sup>82</sup> Units from here were apparently also deployed in the Black Sea in connection with the conflict in Ukraine.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, ships or units from the Northern Fleet are frequently used in Russian naval diplomacy. Russia's only aircraft carrier, Admiral Kuznetsov, visited Syria in 2011 and acted as the flagship for a flotilla in 2012,<sup>84</sup> in addition to visiting Egypt in 2012;<sup>85</sup> in 2008, the missile cruiser Pjotr Velikij (Peter the Great) headed a naval deployment to Venezuela.<sup>86</sup> These assignments are over and above the Fleet's primary task of securing Russia's sea-based nuclear strike forces.

Russia's military modernization programme also illustrates the importance of the Fleet. According to the Russian 2020 material investment plan, the investment of 4700 billion roubles is, among other things, anticipated to add 51 new surface vessels to the Northern Fleet.<sup>87</sup> This sounds like an extensive military build-up, but existing ships are mostly dated, and it is anticipated that the majority will need replacing within 10-20 years. Some observers believe that between 40 and 70 per cent of the vessels in the Northern Fleet are not fully operational.<sup>88</sup>

As already mentioned, the area around the Kola Peninsula is the basing- and staging area for the Northern Fleet as well as for a considerable number of Russian strategic nuclear submarines. A total of 81 per cent of Russia's sea-based nuclear weaponry are now, according to estimates from 2014, assigned to submarines attached to the Northern Fleet. Further, the Russian Arctic is also an important test site for Russian nuclear and missile technology. This is the area where Russia is developing and testing new long-distance missiles and conducting training and exercises for nuclear forces. Moreover, the Northern Fleet is where the new – apparently fairly advanced – Borei-class submarines with new and similarly advanced intercontinental missiles of the Bulava type are first tested before being introduced to the Russian armed forces.<sup>89</sup> The introduction of new strategic capacities and the training of Russian nuclear forces have continued in 2014-2015. The Russian bases near the Kola Peninsula, the Northern Fleet, and Russia's strategic deterrence capacities are

continuously being reinforced or optimized following the Ukraine crisis. Elsewhere in the Russian Arctic territory, military or paramilitary structures are also being extended or optimized. In 2014, Russia opened two new bases to support the search and rescue capability of the coast guard.<sup>90</sup> At the same time, two new regional border control units were established in the Arctic under the auspices of FSB in June 2015 while more vessels were added to the Russian coast guard.<sup>91</sup> In addition to the bases already established, a programme to extend or set up bases to support the increased presence of the coast guard in the Russian part of the Arctic is underway. According to Nikolaj Patrusjev, head of the National Security Council, these bases are intended for ‘dual use’ and may thus operate as support for the Russian Northern Fleet. FSB is already running a number of bases in remote parts of the Russian Arctic territory – in Franz Josef’s Land, for example, which is now being upgraded with e.g. new runways. Infrastructure for border guards is also being established elsewhere in the region to which more than 100 million € have been earmarked. According to Putin, this task should be given high priority by FSB.<sup>92</sup> The increased focus on building infrastructure is complemented by larger and more complex exercises in which various Russian emergency and preparedness authorities participate – focusing on counter-terror operations.<sup>93</sup>

Likewise, there have been extensive investments in infrastructure and establishment of bases on the military side. Conley and Rohloff note in their report that the Russian military authorities plan to establish 13 runways, 10 rescue and search centres, 16 new deep-water ports, and 10 new radar installations on Russian territory.<sup>94</sup> The objective of the Russian activities is by maintaining a presence, extending surveillance capability, and, finally, by setting up a logistical structure to enable rapid reaction and the deployment of civilian as well as military capacities throughout the vast Russian Arctic. Some of this work starts from a rather low level. For example, the aim is to set up continuous Russian radar coverage of the coastline – non-existent at present. Essential parts of this (re)structuring programme, capable of supporting surveillance and ensuring a presence in the Russian Arctic were planned before the Ukraine crisis. The crisis does not appear to have led to a reduction in Russian infrastructural investments. For example, Russian authorities announced the establishment of a new drone base in the Arctic in the autumn of 2014 and Mr Bulgakov, vice defense minister, is quoted as saying that ten military airfields would be reopened in the Arctic region before the end of 2015 – seen in relation to the four existing airfields amounting to a significant expansion. In tandem with this, military air bases are opened – on Wrangel Island, for

example, during the second half of the year. At the same time, several of these bases were equipped with various kinds of air defense systems.<sup>95</sup>

Many of these investments have been announced – several times – prior to the Ukraine crisis. For example, the re-establishing of full radar coverage was already mentioned in the Arctic strategy from 2008 while the Russian secretary of defense in 2014 announced that there would be full radar coverage of the Arctic within a year.<sup>96</sup> This could indicate that Russia is attempting to accelerate the construction of installations in the Arctic. However, it is difficult to obtain confirmation as to whether this is actually the case. The Russian Ministry of Defense has announced, however, that two new missile warning radars are being built to upgrade two existing ones.<sup>97</sup>

The map below from the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) report *The New Ice Curtain* offers an idea of existing Russian bases in the Arctic, as well as bases being upgraded or constructed.

**Figure 5: Russian bases in the Arctic**



The map shows that, if Russian plans are realized, we will see a marked upgrading of Russian surveillance and reaction capability within own territory. The map also shows select Russian military exercises after the Ukraine crisis.

All joint military exercises and other kinds of military collaboration between NATO member states and Russia were suspended on 1 April 2014 as a consequence of the Ukraine crisis.<sup>98</sup> In the Arctic, this resulted in the recurrent Northern Eagle Exercise carried out jointly between Russia, the USA, and Norway, and the annual Pomor exercise carried out jointly by Russia and Norway being suspended in 2014 and 2015.<sup>99</sup>

However, Russia has carried out a number of remarkably large-scale military exercises after the Ukraine crisis began. In September 2014, the largest military exercise since the fall of the Berlin Wall was carried out and designated Vostock 2014 and, according to the Kremlin, involving more than 150,000 troops, 600 aircraft, and 80 navy vessels in the Eastern Military District.<sup>100</sup> In 2015, it was the turn of the Central Military District, where an exercise was carried out involving 95,000 troops, 170 aircraft, and 20 ships, according to the Russian Ministry of Defense.<sup>101</sup> In 2016, it might conceivably be the 'turn' of the new United Strategic Command to carry out a large-scale exercise. We are likely, therefore, to see large-scale Arctic exercises involving all forces and combining paramilitary, conventional, and nuclear Russian forces in exercises where vast amounts of equipment and troops will, quickly and with short notice, be deployed to remote areas where they will train very conventional operations.<sup>102</sup>

Russia's Arctic capabilities are not exempt from exercise activities although they have not played a central part in the two large-scale exercises mentioned above. Officially as a counter-measure to the Norwegian-led Joint Viking exercise involving 5000 troops, the Russian Northern Fleet carried out a so-called 'snap check' exercise that, at very short notice, in March 2015 involved between 38,000 and 45,000 troops, 3360 vehicles, 41 naval vessels, 15 submarines, and 110 aircraft.<sup>103</sup> The exercise was, among other things, training the deployment of infantry troops for Novaja Zemlja and Franz Josef's Land. Shortly after this, the joint Scandinavian exercise Arctic Challenge involving 115 aircraft and 3600 troops with the NATO member states Norway, England, Germany, the USA, and the Netherlands together with the NATO partners Sweden, Finland, and Switzerland was held. Once again and, presumably in response to this exercise, Russia carried out an exercise designed to test the newly established Arctic brigade as well as the capability of the air force to deploy its units to Russia's external borders.<sup>104</sup> According to the Russian Ministry of Defense, this exercise involved 12,000 troops and 250 aircraft and helicopters.<sup>105</sup>

The Northern Fleet, too, has carried out a number of minor independent exercises during the summer of 2015, including deploying the newly established Arctic brigade to the Siberian archipelago.<sup>106</sup> In the spring of 2014 and in 2015, Russia also demonstrated her capability to air-land around 100 paratroopers on ice floes in the inhospitable area near the North Pole.<sup>107</sup>

Furthermore, the nuclear submarines in the Northern Fleet and their support vessels repeatedly carried out exercises in 2014, simulating massive nuclear retaliatory strikes and, in 2015, the Northern Fleet trained its intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) submarines in operations below the Arctic ice sheet.<sup>108</sup> All the while, Russian submarine activity is said to be on the increase in the northern Atlantic – not least in the, traditionally, strategically important waters between Greenland, Iceland, and Great Britain.<sup>109</sup>

In overall terms, the period after the Ukraine crisis is characterized by a continued focus on evolving and extending Russian military capabilities in the Arctic. This includes the reorganization of units and staffs, specific military capacities, infrastructure, and logistics as well as exercises to boost preparedness in the Russian Arctic units. This could reasonably be interpreted as a continuous process of modernization or military build-up.

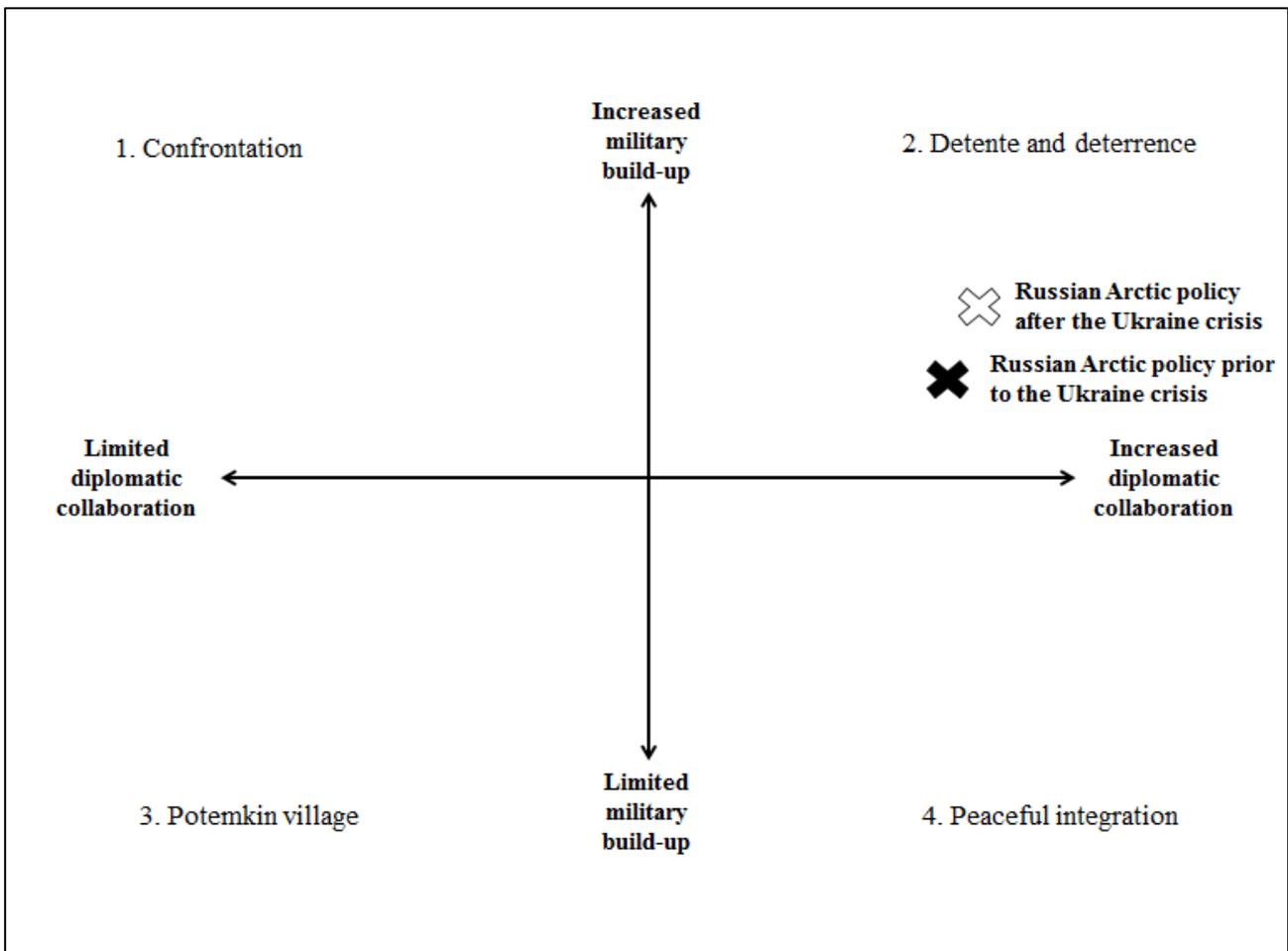
Still, the upgrading of Russian capability following the Ukraine crisis is still not vastly different from the long-term perspectives in place for developing Russia's strategy in the Arctic in 2008, nor from announcements and initiatives during the period 2008-2014 as outlined earlier. It is even possible to view the developments as Russia lagging behind in terms of realizing the many plans and initiatives begun or announced prior to the crisis in Ukraine.

This does not alter the fact, however, that a substantial increase and upgrading of important elements of Russia's capability in the Arctic has taken place. Additionally, a number of the many initiatives planned and started prior the crisis in Ukraine have actually been implemented, presumably resulting in upgraded capability. The reorganization of units and staffs, investment in new infrastructure, and increased readiness of Arctic units as illustrated by the large-scale exercises are an indication of this.

An overall look at diplomacy and the military shows a high level of continuity in Russia's Arctic policy before and after the Ukraine crisis. The decisive shift takes place in 2007-2008 rather than in

2014. Continuity is especially noticeable in diplomacy where the pragmatic line of collaboration has been continuous, possibly even consolidated. As for the military, there is a greater element of uncertainty when attempting a lucid interpretation of developments. In one sense, many of the Russian units are old, run-down, and shortly to be phased out and the question remains open whether Russian reinvestments will be sufficient to replace units being phased out. In another sense, it would seem that the extensive Russian reforms have increased both mobility and preparedness in the military units – also in the Arctic. We do not, therefore, see any signs of reducing focus on Arctic military forces. On the contrary and measured on several parameters, Russian forces appear to be more capable and active than previously. The Russian pattern of exercises is especially indicative of this. The overall result, therefore, is one of slight arms build-up combined with an increase in diplomatic responsiveness. In the figure below, the white and the black crosses illustrate the situation before and after the Ukraine crisis, respectively.

**Figure 6: Trends in Russia’s Arctic policy after the Ukraine crisis**



Thus Russia's policy maintains its position in the top right-hand quarter where military build-up is combined with diplomatic pragmatism and responsiveness. We must conclude, therefore, that if there is any traceable development in Russian policy, it is one of consolidation. In diplomatic and military terms, there is a continuous development trending towards an increased military build-up and diplomatic pragmatism. However, one thing is outlining trends in Russia's policy in the Arctic. Another is how this trend should be interpreted and explained. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **5. Interpreting Russian Policy**

As we have seen in the previous analysis, Russia's policy in the Arctic has been fairly consistent. Events in Ukraine in the spring of 2014 and afterwards have not led to fundamental changes. Optimizing and reorganizing military forces are combined with a constructive diplomatic approach, occasionally interrupted by provocative rhetoric. How can this policy be understood and explained?

To answer these questions, this chapter will address three issues. Firstly, Russian policy will be examined – how solid is it and what is the likelihood of Russia following her present political line in the Arctic? Next, an attempt will be made to dissect the various interests which, in overall terms, could explain why Russia adopts a policy in the Arctic that, although continuous, often appears contradictory or, at best, ambiguous. Finally, the risks associated with Russia's Arctic policy and its pertinence to the Danish Realm will be discussed.

### **5.1 Continuity in Russia's Policy in the Arctic**

This report adopts the view that Russia's present political course is set to continue. There are three reasons for this: firstly, Russia's present policy designated 'deterrence and detente' combines, in a reasonably meaningful sense, a number of crucial Russian national and political interests. Secondly, the policy rests on general consensus and, thirdly, it is clearly sanctioned by the Kremlin inner circle.

Russia's primary interests in the Arctic are linked to the enormous economic potential in the Russian territory. Oil and gas extraction and mining in the Russian Arctic have long been, and still are, an important factor in Russian economy. Around 20 per cent of Russia's GNP is currently produced north of the Arctic Circle.<sup>110</sup> There is still a huge future potential for energy extraction in

the Russian Arctic. Add to this the benefits and economic enhancement for Russia, were the North-East Passage to be opened to commercial shipping.

Thus the economic development of this region is a significant element of the Russian political élite's future vision for Russia. This is also evident from political and strategic documents. The Russian energy strategy from 2009 highlights the importance of Arctic waters and the national security concept from the same year suggests Arctic energy resources to be of central importance to the country's national security.<sup>111</sup> In 2008, Medvedev stated that it was a fundamental task for Russia to turn the Arctic into 'a resource base for Russia in the 21st century'.<sup>112</sup> To Russia, turning the Arctic into a resource base in the 21st century is chiefly a task for domestic rather than foreign policy. By far the majority of Arctic resources are located in the Russian territory and extracting them is a question of investment and infrastructure. The same is true of the development of the North-East Passage where extensive investments are required to enable the sea route for commercial shipping.

The idea of economic development in the Arctic is a classic theme in Russian politics and this has been a consistent objective since Russia, with Putin at the helm, reorganized after the crises and chaos of the Jeltsin years. Further, this is usually considered the most forceful argument against the likelihood of Russia or Russian Arctic policy driving the dynamics of regional conflict.<sup>113</sup> A precondition for economic growth is stability, and economic growth is Russia's core interest in the Arctic. In the Arctic, Russia is a territorial and economic superpower and hence also a status-quo power.<sup>114</sup>

A peaceful Arctic is the best foundation for Russia being able to extend and reinvest in Arctic economic growth within her territory. In this context, Artur Chilingarov, at the Arctic Circle conference in Reykjavik in 2015, is quoted as saying that there are 'no problems that require a military solution'.<sup>115</sup> He is joined at the same conference by Vladimir Barbin, Russia's senior official in the Arctic Council, stressing that Russia focuses on 'peace, stability, and constructive dialogue in the region'.<sup>116</sup>

Chilingarov and Barbin are thus in line with a general consensus among leading Russian decision-makers. Even though Barbin and Chilingarov might be considered two of the more diplomatic Russian voices, their statements are, on the whole, in line with those considered to be hawks in

Russian politics. Aside from his former provocative statements, Dmitry Rogozin is also cited as saying, in his capacity of chair of the Russian State Commission for the Arctic that '[i]t is extremely important that ... the Arctic remains the zone of peace and cooperation. It is in this capacity our country and all the Arctic states regard this region.'<sup>117</sup> Not only does Rogozin, in this way, express the Russian line, but also that it is a general attitude among the other Arctic states. As such, they should not present a threat or a problem to Russia. Similarly, the chair of the Russian Security Council Nikolaj Patrusjev, Putin's old friend from the KGB and, according to Pavel Baev, one of the architects of Russia's Arctic policy,<sup>118</sup> said in 2014 that Russia should develop the Arctic as 'a region of peace and international cooperation'.<sup>119</sup> Patrusjev repeats this view in 2015 saying that an Arctic characterized by dialogue, peace, and neighbourliness is the objective of Russia's strategy in the Arctic.<sup>120</sup> Statements like these about peace, dialogue, and collaboration are often followed by remarks stressing the importance of economic growth and the potential for Russia's future contained in the Arctic subsurface. The coupling of peaceful regional development and economic growth has, on several occasions, been made by Putin,<sup>121</sup> who increasingly refers to the significance of the Arctic region.<sup>122</sup>

So far, so good. But if all is peace and quiet in the Arctic, why provoke the other Arctic states by issuing aggressive statements and why introduce – often offensive-looking – military capability into the area? Jørgen Staun argues that the inner circle around Putin is characterized by working with a specific construct and analysis of Russia and international politics in which the external world is viewed with suspicion, and international politics is seen as a zero-sum game.<sup>123</sup> In this game where Russia, in her own opinion, is often isolated and unjustly marginalized, the state is engaged in a constant geopolitical struggle for a place in the sun.<sup>124</sup> For Russia, a future place in the sun involves securing and developing the Russian Arctic. This is presumably the reason why Russian politicians sometimes find it difficult to trust their own declarations and predictions regarding a peaceful Arctic future. And this is why declarations on peace and collaboration are often followed by a fear of Russian marginalization where Russia has to fight for her rights.<sup>125</sup> The corollary of this Russian analysis might eventually imply a military confrontation, which is why Putin, in 2014, stressed that Russia must be prepared for the possibility of a military attack in the Arctic.<sup>126</sup> It remains unclear, however, whence and why this should be.

Russia's Arctic policy appears to be caught in a dilemma. In one sense, a Russian core interest is the maintenance of regional stability, constructive diplomatic relations, and a fertile climate of

investment: chiefly a line of diplomatic detente. In another sense, however, Russia also considers it necessary to enhance her security, which explains the introduction of military resources and confrontational diplomatic behaviour, which, in a Russian perspective, tends to be viewed as deterrence rather than provocation. Hence this ambiguity where diplomatic responsiveness is combined with military build-up.

A classic concept in the study of international politics is the so-called security dilemma, implying that an actor upsizes military resources for the purpose of increasing security. This often triggers a reaction by other actors whose security has now been reduced, and they will upsize their military resources correspondingly, in turn threatening the first actor. The overall result is one of reduced security for all in spite of increased military capacities.<sup>127</sup>

Notably after the Ukraine crisis and the resulting distrust, it is clear that many of the ingredients required to produce a security dilemma are present in the Arctic – not least as a consequence of Russia's ambiguous military modernization. A potential – and unhappy – paradox of this dilemma is the fact that Russia risks, to a large extent, and via her own actions and ambiguous policies, to be a contributing factor to producing the very Western threat that she is trying to protect herself against. The Russian fear and insecurity outlined earlier risk fuelling increased Western distrust and hence becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>128</sup>

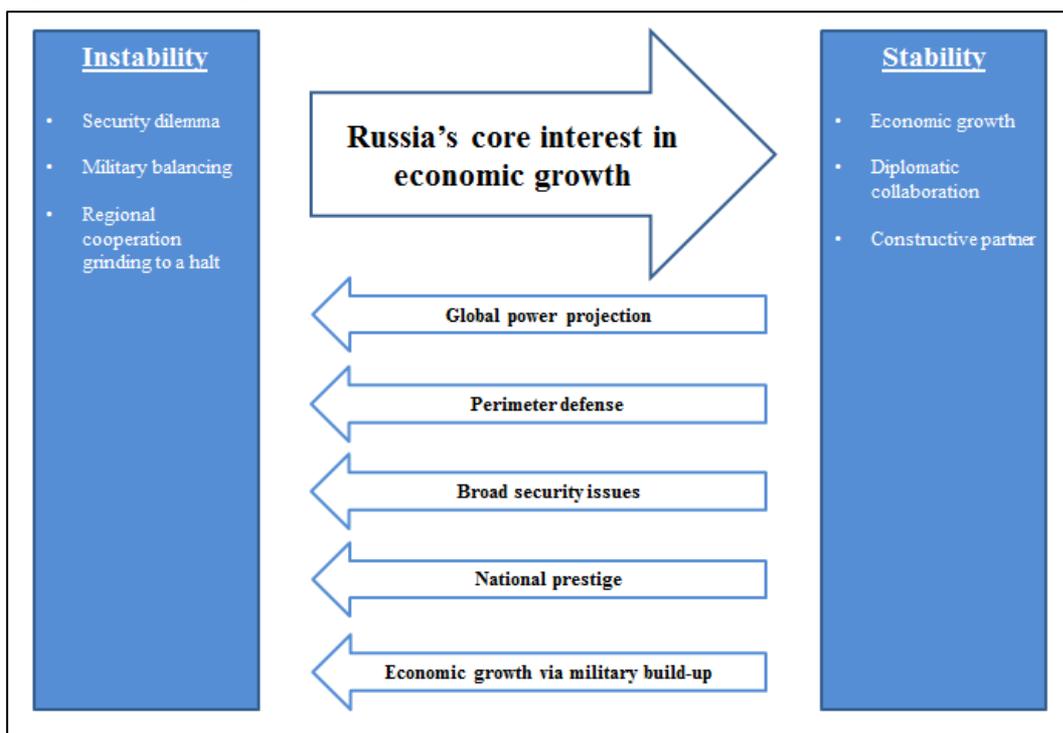
In overall terms, Russia's policy in the Arctic appears to have been stable for a prolonged period. Diplomatic responsiveness goes hand in hand, if not with military build-up, then with a modernization of Russia's military capabilities in the Arctic and the occasional provocative military and political actions and statements. At the same time, beneath this apparent continuity, there is a number of conflicting interests to be taken into account if one is to understand why Russian politics may seem contradictory. Further, these conflicting interests and the dynamic process they might inadvertently give rise to in terms of tension in the Arctic region, contain a number of risks that may further contribute to fuel a regional security dilemma. They are associated with tentative general changes in Russian priorities in the Arctic as well as the insecurity engendered by Russia's military actions and investments in the Arctic. At the same time, such changes may be driven by both internal and external conditions.

## 5.2 Conflicting interests – contradictory policies: continuity and change in Russian politics

As a basic framework for addressing Russia’s policy in the Arctic, this report operates with a diplomatic and a military dimension, respectively. The result is a continuous stance designated deterrence and detente. The above analysis argues that this continuity is relatively solid. However, the figure below illustrates the co-existence of conflicting interests in Russia’s political and military objectives for the country’s actions in the Arctic. This leads to Russia’s policy in the Arctic appearing complex and Russian initiatives or statements being put forward that, seen from the outside or in isolation, risk undermining rather than furthering Russia’s own declared long-term core interests in the Arctic. Hence the figure, on the one hand, distinguishes between Russia’s core interest in economic growth pulling towards stability and, on the other, five potentially conflicting interests pulling in the opposite direction, all of them potentially leading to an Arctic marked by instability and prone to the dynamics of security dilemmas rather than stability.

In military terms, this is a question of a global power projection, perimeter defense, and broad security issues. In political terms, it is possible to distinguish between national prestige and economic growth via military build-up, which, in turn, risk undermining Russia’s objective about economic growth. The five specific interests are outlined below.

**Figure 7: Conflicting interests in Russia’s Arctic policy and their consequences**



The supportive structure of Russia's **global power projection** and position of power are in the Arctic. This is defined by the Russian nuclear strike forces – not least the submarine-borne – and is thus closely linked to the Northern Fleet and centred around base and logistics facilities on or near the Kola Peninsula. In short, Russia's nuclear retaliation capability is dependent on, firstly, Russia being capable of defending her facilities in the area and, secondly, of 'breaking out' of the Barents Sea to deploy her strategic submarines in Arctic waters and in the Atlantic. Hence there is a defensive as well as an offensive aspect of this specific interest. Extended and increased exercise activity, as mentioned earlier, and the high-priority investments in the Northern Fleet and the strategic submarines are indicative of the goal of sustaining an efficient and thus credible nuclear deterrence capability. Simultaneously, some of the Russian investments in infrastructure and deployment of military capacities to the Arctic are an attempt at protecting this very deterrence capability. Proposals for deploying MiG-31 interceptors to various Arctic bases are thus an attempt at reinforcing the air defense – not least against cruise missiles.<sup>129</sup> Further, the introduction of different short-range air defense or point-defense systems for both new and old bases in the Arctic such as the S-400 missiles announced for deployment to Novaja Zemlja in 2015,<sup>130</sup> is chiefly deployed to secure Russia's strategic deterrence. This is also partly the case with the renewed focus on stepping up radar surveillance in the area, which is incomplete and outdated.<sup>131</sup> Such military interests are, in principle, independent from the regional political situation, but are about the global balance of power and Russia's status as a global nuclear superpower.

At the same time, there is concern in Russia about the implications of opening the Arctic in geopolitical terms and with regard to Russia's Arctic **perimeter defense**. Historically, the Arctic has been the only flank whence a direct conventional threat to Russian territory has seemed improbable. With the climatic opening of the Arctic, Russia now has a very long and often unprotected as well as uninhabited border. This produces anxiety and Russian decision-makers are focusing on protecting this perimeter against 'unwelcome guests', as the Russian minister of defense Sjojgu put it in October 2014.<sup>132</sup> Putin agrees, concurring that Russia should be more alert to the danger of an attack on Russia in the Arctic.<sup>133</sup> Thus Sergunin and Konyshv in their analysis of Russia's policy in the Arctic argue that Putin's decision to speed up the reorganization of the military forces in the new Joint Strategic Command 'North' was on the grounds, among other things, of an increased American focus on the Arctic, which in Putin's view, necessitates a general Russian reinforcement of military capacities in the region.<sup>134</sup> Establishing the many new bases, the two new Arctic brigades, as well as the frequency of Russian exercises with a firm focus on speedy

deployment of specialized, well-trained, and well-equipped units, often to remote areas, all illustrate this specific interest. An inherent element of the worrying 'snap' exercises where Putin with very short notice, if any, at all, send various military units off on a military exercise is precisely to train and demonstrate quick joint coordinated reactionary capability for the purpose of defending important locations along Russia's extensive Arctic perimeter in addition to nuclear deterrence.

Finally, **broader security issues** is an important consideration in Russia's modernization of her Arctic capabilities. If the Arctic, in the future, is to function as Medvedev's Russian treasury, extensive investments will be required to safely exploit these treasures. Effectuating the anticipated extraction of oil and gas in inhospitable Arctic areas as well as a notably higher level of shipping through the North-East Passage will require the Russian state to also invest in security. Establishing bases with runways and port facilities along the entire Arctic coastline, investing in coastguard and border control units as well as in smaller surface units in the Northern Fleet are important with regard to building the necessary rescue and search capability to secure rising economic activity. The same is true of investing in full radar coverage of the coastline. As the action against Greenpeace in 2013 showed, broad security in a Russian perspective can imply robust deployment of armed force and, here (as in Denmark), the armed forces can fulfil a role.<sup>135</sup> Counter-terror activities, which, in Russia, also include actions against civilian organizations such as Greenpeace, are seen as an important task for Russian security forces in the Arctic. Hence training exercises were carried out in the Tajmyr region during the summer of 2015 where the Northern Fleet with air support units, paratroopers, the marine infantry, and staff from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Emergencies trained different operations at commercially important installations.<sup>136</sup> Similarly, one of the Russian Arctic brigades trained counter-terror operations later that autumn at Novaja Zemlja.<sup>137</sup>

This all goes to show that different security or military strategic interests are driving Russia to invest in military capacities over a broad spectrum. The mere existence of conflicting interests along with the different – or dual – function of the capacities instil uncertainty about Russia's policies. Moreover, military strategic interests risk undermining political interests or being seen as proving a link between Russian political and military actions that, in reality, do not necessarily exist. All this could lead to undermining stability in the Arctic.

A decisive political consideration is the fact that the Arctic occupies an important role in the Russian national narrative – even in Russian **national pride**<sup>138</sup> and, in terms of symbolic significance, comparable, for example, to the Russian space programme. Thus there is a kind of Arctic exceptionalism in Russia's self-perception where Russia is linked to the Arctic in a special way and, conversely, imparting to the Arctic a unique symbolic quality in Russian politics. This is why Russian politicians sometimes give the impression that Russia has special obligations – for example, to explore and stimulate developments in the Arctic – and also special rights. Without being specific, Medvedev mentioned in 2010 that Russia's freedom in the Arctic is being curtailed and this, according to Medvedev, is intolerable, given Russia's 'geographical location and history'.<sup>139</sup> Intolerable, that is, because of Russia's Arctic history. In 2015, Rogozin also compared the Russian Arctic to the annexation of Crimea and re-incorporating it as a historical part of Russia – not least Sevastopol. 'Basically it is all about the same', Rogozin said.<sup>140</sup> Not that this will necessarily mean that Russia is going to annex former Russian territory in the Arctic, and notwithstanding that the sale of Alaska to the USA is seen by revisionist elements in Russia as a historical betrayal,<sup>141</sup> the comparison stresses the symbolic significance ascribed to the Arctic in Russian politics and the significance Russia attributes to herself in the Arctic. Combined with the propensity for feeling unjustly treated in international politics and a fear of marginalization as expressed by Medvedev above, the issue of the Arctic occupying a prestigious role in Russian politics could risk detracting Russia from a pragmatic international line.

Fulfilling Russia's historical mission in the Arctic is also an important purpose of optimizing industry and the economy. A strategy to secure **economic growth** is **via military build-up**. Many of the national strategies for Russian development attribute the Arctic with a special role.<sup>142</sup> To Russia, economic growth and investment in upgrading the military go hand in hand. Just like bases in the Arctic are dual-purpose in a civilian-military sense, so military investments have, to a large extent, a dual-purpose potential for Russia in an economic sense. In 2012, Putin said that an modernization of the Russian military-industrial complex is crucial to maintaining both civilian and military competences and capacities to be able to develop the Arctic.<sup>143</sup> By way of example, a combined communication and surveillance system is planned for the Arctic,<sup>144</sup> produced by RTI, a company with a substantial military-industrial portfolio. If established, the system will possess extensive military and civilian potential. Rogozin who, besides being chair of the Russian Arctic Commission, is also deputy prime minister with responsibility for the military-industrial complex, also argues in favour of further investments in shipbuilding – civilian as well as military, also

focusing on Arctic capacities – intended to drive economic growth.<sup>145</sup> On the one hand, a desire for economic growth in the Arctic requires more investments while, on the other, the military-industrial complex is a crucial economic sector in Russian economy. Stimulating the latter is thus an obvious macro-economic option while, in the Russian perspective, also containing a huge export potential. According to Putin, defense sector exports totalled more than 15 billion dollars in 2014.<sup>146</sup> Thus military investments in the Arctic are governed by an independent socio-economic logic seen from the perspective of Russian decision-makers.

Accordingly, there are various – potentially conflicting – political interests in play. They must be taken into account to understand why Russia's policy in the Arctic may appear contradictory. From the outside, military investments may appear meaningless, full of hidden agendas, and/or provocative according to the eyes that see. Two relatively conventionally equipped brigades may seem as an excessive way of addressing broader security issues in the Russian Arctic. The same could be said about the deployment of air defense systems to minor isolated Russian bases whose existence is argued as necessary by the Russians for their search and rescue capability, but subject to a very different logic when seen in the context of Russia's strategic nuclear weapons. Further, extensive investments in the Northern Fleet may be seen both as a macro-economic exercise as well as bolstering national security. The consequence of these conflicting political and military issues is a risk of Russian policy appearing ambiguous and diffuse. This may lead to other actors perceiving Russian military build-up as incomprehensible and unnecessary and hence threatening.

### **5.3 Risks and Russia's policy in the Arctic**

Although Russian policy in the Arctic does not appear to have changed substantially as a result of the crisis in Ukraine, there are, however, still risks involved in the Russian political line (or lack of same) and Russia's actions in the Arctic. This is borne out in the above review of conflicting Russian interests. Further, and firstly, it is by no means certain that Russia, in political terms, will consider that a pragmatic and collaborative diplomatic course of action will best serve her interests, nor is it certain that Russia's interests in the Arctic will remain static.<sup>147</sup> The size of the arrows in figure 7 above might well change. Secondly, Russian military activities cause insecurity, risking a further setback of trust between the countries involved.

As indicated earlier, the Arctic is a matter of crucial importance to Russia. On the one hand, the Arctic plays an important historic-symbolic role and, on the other, it constitutes a pillar in future Russian economic growth. Accordingly, much is at stake for Russia in the Arctic and, at present,

the underlying rules governing the Russian game in the Arctic rests on the assumption that collaboration will benefit Russia the most, actively attempting to isolate the Arctic from the deteriorating Russian-Western relations – while modernizing its military forces.

Internal changes in Russia might conceivably alter this course. A deteriorating economic crisis in Russia combined with continuously low oil prices, in turn generating low freight rates, might lead Russian decision-makers to reconsider and lower their ambitions for developing the Arctic region. The importance attached to the stability and positive working relations in the region might thus decrease relative to other Russian interests – including military strategic ones. The end result could be one of increasing the Russian militarized focus on the Arctic. However, the opposite political rationale could lead to a similar result. A continued economic crisis could result in a stronger focus on protecting the Arctic 'treasury'. The relative significance of Arctic values to Russian decision-makers will increase. The combination of the symbolic and historical significance of the Arctic in Russian self-perception coupled with a tendency to view themselves as marginalized in international politics might lead Russian decision-makers to view the Arctic as being more in need of protection, isolation, and defense rather than an area to be developed via international collaboration. Again, the result will be an increasingly militarized Russian Arctic.

Conversely, international factors could, in all probability, contribute to driving Russian policy in a different direction, or lead to Russia focusing more on some of the other conflicting trends outlined earlier. The view prevails in Russia that Western sanctions are not so much linked to Ukraine, but rather to a long-term Western conspiracy to, primarily, undermining the Putin regime and, secondly, Russia's opportunity to maintaining and developing her superpower position generally.<sup>148</sup> In this way, the effect of the sanctions, especially in the Arctic, with the view of the world as it is at present, can be used as an argument against a pragmatic Russian line of action. According to this line of thought, the West will always try to limit or undermine Russian potential – also in the Arctic. If Russia is to realize her rightful interests, a confrontation is unavoidable. The idea that it is necessary for Russia to defend her interests in the Arctic as argued by Medvedev and Putin earlier might partly be rooted in this logic. This might also be the outcome if Russia's collaborative line in the Arctic fails to give results either by virtue of a political and diplomatic marginalization of Russia and Russian views, or if decisions – such as the assessment of the Russian claims by UNCLOS – go against Russian expectations.

At the same time, a number of risks to regional stability may arise from Russia's military activities in the Arctic as such. These are reinforced by Russia's actions in Ukraine and the resulting lowering of trust between Russia and the other Arctic states. Distrust could easily lead to misunderstandings. Russia's actions in Ukraine put a different perspective on the increase in Russian military capacities in the Arctic – also where Russia's Arctic neighbours are concerned. The increasing level of preparedness in the steadily more capable conventional capacities in the Arctic, combined with unannounced exercise programmes highlighting the great mobility of these forces, is a cause for concern. Although the reasons for deploying these forces might be a Russian need to maintain a rapid response capability for what is perceived as vulnerable Russian territory, they also provide Russia with an offensive Arctic capability. Similarly, seen from a Norwegian and Finnish perspective, the fact that both Russian Arctic brigades are based very close to the Norwegian and Finnish borders, respectively, is also a cause for concern. Especially if their task is to respond to threats of a more or less plausible nature to the whole of the Russian Arctic territory. The same argument is true for a number of the newly established Russian bases that, besides their role as the backbone of the Russian search-and-rescue readiness capability, can also be seen as support units enabling offensive Russian military operations in the Arctic.

Similar risks are associated with the Russian capacities supporting Russia's strategic nuclear response. At present, a more general confrontation between Russia and the West is likely as opposed to one centred locally on Ukraine. This rekindles the significance of Russian nuclear weapons and hence the importance of the Arctic region for the USA. Thus a CSIS report from January 2016 recommends that the USA rethink the deployment of submarines in the Arctic and make a 'comprehensive assessment' of her Arctic contribution and strategy as a consequence of Russia's 'current aggressive behavior'.<sup>149</sup> The request for funds in the US 2017 defense budget to be allocated to re-establishing American military presence at the Keflavik base on Iceland expresses a similar line.<sup>150</sup> The increased significance of a nuclear balance between Russia and the USA in the Arctic is serious enough. This development could also have ramifications for non-nuclear forces in the region. A keener balancing act between the USA and Russia will mean increased activity in Russian naval and aircraft units in the region, risking further concern in other Arctic states. A general and nuclear balancing between Russia and the USA in the Arctic will further increase risks of security relations internally in the region will be dominated by unpredictability, insecurity, and distrust.

Consequently, notwithstanding a continuous Russian interest in stability and economic growth, there are substantial politically based risks associated with Russia's Arctic policy. The dynamics of security dilemmas are clearly present in the Arctic. However, it should be pointed out at this juncture that the issues addressed above deal with risks – which is to say potential future challenges. It is critical, therefore, to formulate a policy with the purpose of avoiding or countering any risks that might contribute to increasing the level of tension in an Arctic characterized by the dynamics of security dilemmas. The final and concluding chapter will therefore be discussing how the Danish Realm, via a policy on the Arctic, may contribute to maintaining and developing a stable Arctic in terms of security policy.

## **6. Priorities and Principles of the Danish Realm's Policy on Russia in the Arctic**

Today, the Arctic region acts as a kind of refuge, largely isolated from the, on the whole, strongly deteriorating relations between Russian and the West. Whether this will continue is uncertain, but, at the same time, it remains a core interest to the Danish Realm. Thus it should be a main priority of Danish foreign and security policy to strive, without yielding to Russia and without contributing to undermining the common Western line of approach, to maintain the present situation in the Arctic and to consolidate diplomatic collaboration in the region.

This is by no means easy and there are a number of problems that might hamper the realization of the Danish aims. It will be crucial to secure a balanced approach that will safeguard Danish and Allied interests while at the same time avoiding an acceleration of the Arctic security dilemma or stimulate conflict-seeking elements in Russia.

A recurrent issue in this context is NATO involvement. From a Norwegian perspective, based on legitimate Norwegian issues of security, Norway has, for some time, given high priority to direct focus on a joint NATO defense of the Far North. Traditionally, Denmark along with Canada, have been sceptical about the value of putting Arctic defense on the NATO agenda.<sup>151</sup> With the present strategic discussions taking place in NATO, combined with an increased American focus on the Arctic, the possibility that the Norwegian agenda will gather momentum among NATO members cannot be ruled out. This will be the case both before and after the NATO summit in Warsaw in the summer of 2016. Thus Denmark risks being forced to respond to the Norwegian agenda and its

likely consequences in the Arctic. An increased NATO focus on the Arctic will enhance the risk of Russian countermeasures. Denmark should be prepared for this.

The EU and its role in the Arctic constitute another issue. When the number of permanent observers was considerably augmented at the Arctic Council summit in Kiruna in 2013, EU's application was blocked – for different reasons – by both Canada and Russia.<sup>152</sup> Like the situation with NATO, EU's role in the Arctic also risks becoming a potential bone of contention in relation to Russia. The importance of the Arctic to the EU and EU's focus on the Arctic region is on the increase at the present time. This is true of a number of policy areas – transport, energy, and research. Meanwhile, this is also true of the work with EU's new strategy for a common foreign and security policy. Increased pressure from the EU to play a greater part and gain more influence in the Arctic will give Russia an opportunity to mount a measure of counter-pressure and may thus contribute to worsening diplomatic relations in the Arctic. Russia's perception of the EU has changed radically since the Ukraine crisis. At present, the EU is viewed on a par with NATO, if not exactly hostile then as an organization with which it is not in Russia's best interests to collaborate and whose power and influence should be minimized.

Finally, there is the issue of drawing up a policy to be pursued by the Danish Realm – in the Arctic and in respect of Russia generally. On the one hand, the analysis in this report concludes that Russia, to a great extent, has acted with pragmatism in the Arctic – unlike in other regions. However, on the other hand, there are risks attached to Russia's presence in the Arctic. In a Danish context, this makes it imperative, firstly, to maintain a political dialogue and strengthen consensus among the members of the Realm. A firm political line internally in the Realm is a prerequisite for playing a role in and dealing with a regional Arctic policy. This is true, irrespective of how relations with Russia might progress. Internal concord is particularly important in situations where the Realm risks being forced to make crucial political decisions and to balance several potentially conflicting interests. It is equally important to be able to resist prospective pressure from Russia, especially in situations of potential bilateral discord – for example about territorial claims in the Arctic Ocean. Similarly, it is essential that the military organize, give priority to, and communicate their operations and actions in the Arctic in ways that are rooted in a long-term, cohesive political line of approach in support of the Realm's political aims in respect of Russia in the Arctic as well as Russia outside the Arctic.

Below, five principles or aims are listed, together providing a basis for how Denmark should consider her priorities in relation to a security policy in the Arctic; each one can be used as a header under which specific initiatives and tools can be enumerated. The principles are:

- Diplomatic responsiveness
- Military transparency
- Practical collaboration
- Clear communication
- Actively bolstering Arctic consensus.

### **6.1 Diplomatic responsiveness**

The rationale behind Russia's pragmatic and regionally oriented diplomacy in the Arctic is to promote Russian interests. Consequently, it makes sense for Denmark to pursue a similarly pragmatic and responsive course towards Russia in the Arctic. This will serve Danish interests. Not to be confused with compliance, responsiveness should focus on regional themes and should, needless to say, be practised within the context of Western sanctions regimes. This principle should be brought to bear on the many concrete and often complex and technical issues addressed by the Arctic Council working groups, as well as on new initiatives that may potentially bolster regional institutions and regional diplomacy while at the same time showing Russia the value of maintaining her present line of diplomacy.

### **6.2 Military transparency**

At present, insecurity, distrust, and unpredictability concerning military initiatives and activities contribute to undermining stability in the Arctic region. A prominent Danish priority should be to promote military transparency. Denmark could set a precedent by her own practice of informing about and encouraging participation in Danish or Danish-led exercises in the Arctic. A future repetition or expansion of the training exercise Arctic Response in 2015 held in Greenland could be an opportunity to show Danish transparency as a step towards ensuring reciprocal measures in Russian exercise activities. In the autumn of 2015, the Finnish Defense Command inspected the Russian Arctic brigades' base near Alakurtti.<sup>153</sup> This visit was planned as a result of a bilateral agreement, effectively serving as a confidence-building exercise.<sup>154</sup> Denmark should strive towards establishing a set of agreements in the Arctic that would promote increased transparency and communication between the military forces of the Arctic states.<sup>155</sup> This would reduce the risk of misunderstandings and of escalating crises. Mechanisms for crisis handling and communication are generally in demand where Russo-Western relations are concerned.<sup>156</sup> Perhaps this could be tested

out in the Arctic and Denmark could contribute to putting confidence-building initiatives on the Arctic agenda as a step towards securing a stable situation in Europe.

### **6.3 Practical collaboration**

For example, the Norwegian and Russian coast guard authorities have sustained close and efficient practical collaboration in spite of the Ukraine crisis. Further, a regional Coast Guard Forum has been successfully established where all Arctic states can collaborate on consolidating maritime security in the region, in itself an important issue<sup>157</sup> – at the same time maintaining and, perhaps further evolving, paramilitary and informal channels to Russia.<sup>158</sup> Notwithstanding the sanctions regime, there are alternative options for developing practical collaboration with Russia, which, depending on area, interest, and timing, could generally be in the form of track 2 or track 1½ diplomacy in support of more traditional diplomatic work. In the field of science, at least, there should be opportunities for extending Arctic collaboration. This could also include cultural information- and knowledge-sharing. All of it perfectly compatible with the Russian picture of future Arctic developments and, not least, Russia's role in these.

### **6.4 Clear communication**

At the same time as the pursuing the line of responsiveness above, it will be necessary for Denmark to unequivocally communicate her own initiatives, intentions, and plans as well as her position on Russian initiatives and actions. This means that Denmark and Danish authorities must ensure that diplomatic and military signals coming across correlate with external and internal communication. However improbable this may sound, even minor, effectively insignificant, Danish actions – exercise activities, diplomatic declarations, or the announcement of new Arctic capacities – might inadvertently stimulate powers in Russia wanting to switch to a policy of increased military confrontation and diplomatic isolation. As regards Russia, it should also be made clear that some Russian military activities are viewed by the other Arctic states, including Denmark, as counterproductive and risky in terms of maintaining a peaceful region and risk foreshadowing the very militarized situation that Russia, apparently, is striving to avoid.

### **6.5 Actively bolstering Arctic consensus**

To Denmark, a meaningful policy in relation to Russia's role in the Arctic is dependent on the remaining Arctic actors and on there being a consensus on future significance of the Arctic and Arctic policy. Consensus between the USA and the other Western Arctic countries on the political line towards Russia is of paramount importance. Since any form of active security coordination between the other four Arctic coastal states, any kind of NATO involvement, or establishment of

new policy-coordinating fora in which Russia is not taking part, in themselves risk appearing provocative and hence counterproductive,<sup>159</sup> a continuous and goal-orientated effort will be required. On the strength of Greenland's location and the American military-strategic interests there, the geopolitical role and significance of Denmark is unique from a Washington perspective. This means that Denmark has access, and a legitimate opportunity, to exerting influence on American policy in the Arctic. Thus a meaningful policy in relation to Russia in the Arctic is also about ensuring that Danish attitudes, initiatives, and plans are being heard in Washington.

## 7. Notes

<sup>1</sup> Trude Pettersen, "Russian paratroopers on Tuesday landed on a drifting ice floe near the North Pole", *Barents Observer*, 8 April 2015 (7 April 2016): <http://barentsobserver.com/en/security/2015/04/russian-paratroopers-landed-near-north-pole-08-04>

<sup>2</sup> Tom Parfitt, "Russia plants flag on North Pole seabed", *The Guardian*, 2 Aug. 2007 (7 April 2016): <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/aug/02/russia.arctic>

<sup>3</sup> "Ilulissat Declaration", 28 May 2008 (7 April 2016): [https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/ud/080525\\_arctic\\_ocean\\_conference\\_outcome.pdf](https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/ud/080525_arctic_ocean_conference_outcome.pdf)

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