

Western Militarization of the Arctic

By [Global Research](#)

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Part I

A monumental struggle for the Arctic is taking place almost unnoticed amid the on-going geo-political upheavals in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

The world was used to the fact that major intrigues are invariably related to the Arctic Council, which was set up back in 1996 to settle territorial disputes between the northern countries, namely Russia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the United States and Iceland.

Things have changed other countries now seem to resent this approach, for they would also like to take part in the division of the Arctic pie. Following in the footsteps of the UK, Germany, France, Spain and Poland are India, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Brazil and China, which are knocking at the Council door, insisting that the Arctic should belong to everyone.

The Chinese proved the quickest in taking action. They launched several polar expeditions, set up a polar station on Spitsbergen Island and got an icebreaker of their own.

The Arctic has not yet been proclaimed to be available to one and all, but the issue of free access to its riches has already been raised, and this has at once added to the importance of the use of force.

In May of this year mass media carried details of Denmark's "Strategy for the Arctic". It follows from the document that Denmark claims the continental shelf in five areas around the Faroe Islands and Greenland, and also the North Pole, which it sees as part of the Greenland shelf and Copenhagen plans to make a relevant submission to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf no later than 2014.

The news drove Canada crazy, since Ottawa proclaimed its sovereignty over the North Pole back in the 1950s. Under the International Court ruling, the claim may be granted if no other country proves, within 100 years, that the Arctic Ocean floor belongs to it. More than half of the term has elapsed since, but in recent years the demonstratively peaceful Canada, which has actually never fought a war, has started showing unprecedented alarmism.

When it became clear five years ago that global warming is making it possible to navigate through the Northwest Passage from the Baffin Bay to the Lincoln Sea, the Canadian authorities sent six patrol boats to the region.

At first, Ottawa aimed its demarche at Washington, which also sought control over the route. But Canadian officials started fulminating against everyone when Denmark, too, marked its military presence in the region; for Denmark has been vying with Canada for Hans Island (Tartupaluk) for half a century.

While Denmark was gathering documentary evidence to substantiate its claims, Canada allocated funds for building a deep-sea port and a naval base in the once abandoned Nanisivik. That effort was followed by rebuilding and expanding the Resolute army training centre, as well as by the construction of new Arctic patrol vessels.

Canada also boosted the strength of its military force in the Arctic area tenfold. Canada has now made it a point to hold war games in the Arctic every summer, and no one can say how things would have worked out in the long run, if the UK had not unexpectedly suggested that the Arctic should be divided between Canada and Russia.

Canada has got a kind of special status as a result, that of a NATO interest representative in the Arctic and Russia's chief opponent in the region. The United States and Denmark are now taking part in the Canadian naval force war games in the Arctic in the framework of the strategy, with the NATO war games gaining in scale by the year.

Canadian politicians have simultaneously focused their aggressive rhetoric on Russia; they no longer mind ethics and tell Moscow bluntly not to barge in. Russia is now concerned about an increase in military control of the Russian water area, the more so since British yachts and Chinese schooners have been regularly visiting the coastal waters that are part of the Northern Sea Route.

Russia has set up motorized infantry brigades for the Arctic that will reinforce the aircraft and coast defence ships patrolling the Northern Sea Route. Meanwhile, the Commander-In-Chief of the Russian Navy, Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky, has voiced concern about the fact that the North Atlantic Alliance has defined the Arctic as part of its zone of interest and that NATO's moves, aimed at establishing the Alliance's dominant position in the region, have been growing systemic and "coalition-based" in character.

Russia is forced and compelled to fight off the challenges in question, and is reinforcing its Northern and Pacific Fleets. Meanwhile, the United States is actively developing its sea-based ABM system, and it would seem that nothing can prevent it from deploying the elements of the system in the Arctic Ocean to control the greater part of Russian territory.

The struggle for mineral resources and transport routes, differences on approaches of principled importance, and also militarization and global warming are turning the struggle for the Arctic into a complicated multiple-factor game, in which the military component is looming increasingly large.

Part II

Nobody regards the Arctic as a dead zone anymore. Its vast ice caps hide 7% of the world's oil and 33% of its gas reserves, together with gold, diamonds and other minerals. Global warming and the melting of the Arctic permafrost will soon unlock the Arctic Ocean treasures.

This prospective change has caused the Arctic to now be wrangled over by the Arctic Five -

Russia, Canada, the US, Denmark and Norway, of which only Russia, it must be noted, is not a NATO member. The alliance clearly specified its interest in the Arctic at the November 2010 Lisbon summit. The situation gets more complicated due to internal bickering over territorial claims amongst the Five. The US and Canada can not reach agreement on the Beaufort Sea (a marginal sea of the Arctic Ocean) while Canada is also battling over Hans Island with Denmark.

Even China that lies far away from the Arctic wants a stake in the region. Its Snow Dragon icebreaker has entered the Arctic waters twice. S. Korea is also getting icebreakers ready.

The head of the Russian Center for Analysis of the World Arms Trade, Igor Korotchenko, says that a report for the US Navy says that America urgently needs to build up its military potential in the Arctic. It proposes that the Navy begin intensive Arctic training, acquire new Arctic-class vessels and icebreakers and set up ground and undersea surveillance and monitoring stations. US multipurpose nuclear subs are constantly patrolling the Arctic Ocean and their goals are far from being scientific he stated in an interview for the Voice of Russia

The Pentagon has a permanent rapid response missile groups at high latitudes including 3-4 cruisers and 4-6 destroyers. It has 11 Air Force fighters deployed in Alaska while US Air Forces and subs patrol the Arctic Ocean area and are equipped with high-precision weapons. The US Defense Department is also training ground forces for operations in the Arctic and plans to construct two Naval bases in Alaska.

Canada allocated money to build a deep water port and a Navy base in the abandoned town of Nanisivik and the launched the renovation and the expansion of a military training base in Resolute Bay and ordered the construction of new Arctic patrol ships. The country's Arctic military contingent has also been increased tenfold. Even though Canada has no constant military presence in the Arctic it has been carrying out annual drills called Operation Nanook to train for emergencies and disasters and since 2007 it has been conducting sovereignty patrols in the Arctic.

In 2010 the Canadian war games, for the first time, featured troops from the US and Denmark which gave Canada official status as a NATO observer in the Arctic. In summer 2011 the exercises were joined by the US and NATO Air Forces and included jet fighters, spy planes and cargo aircraft.

Norway, for its part, opened a new hi-tech Arctic Circle Centre north of Mo i Rana near the Arctic Circle. The country also moved its main military base to the location and used it as the venue for the Cold Response drills in the summer of 2011 which featured 10,000 NATO and Norwegian troops.

Russia, 1/5 of which is located in the Arctic has to respond to the region's militarization. It intends to create a separate Arctic division to provide for the safety of its Arctic territories in a changing military and political environment. Russia also has an Arctic strategy worked out by the country's Security Council that envisages moving the region under the Federal Security Service's jurisdiction and making it Russia's leading resource base by 2016.

In the spring of 2011 Russia's Minister of Defense stated that an Arctic motorized infantry unit had been created on the Kola Peninsula. The troops will be specially equipped for operating in the region. A Russian expert on the subject Igor Korotchenko told the VOR Russia's military equipment complies with the specific standards required and is resistant to

high and low temperatures. Ground troops will be supported by ice breaking warships that are capable of not only escorting vessels but also of carrying out military missions he said.

Unfortunately the Arctic has become a militarized zone and the only way out is for the Arctic countries is to peacefully divide the area into zones of responsibility and to launch peaceful exploration of the region as soon as possible. They must thus not allow non-Arctic states the chance to make claims using military force.

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