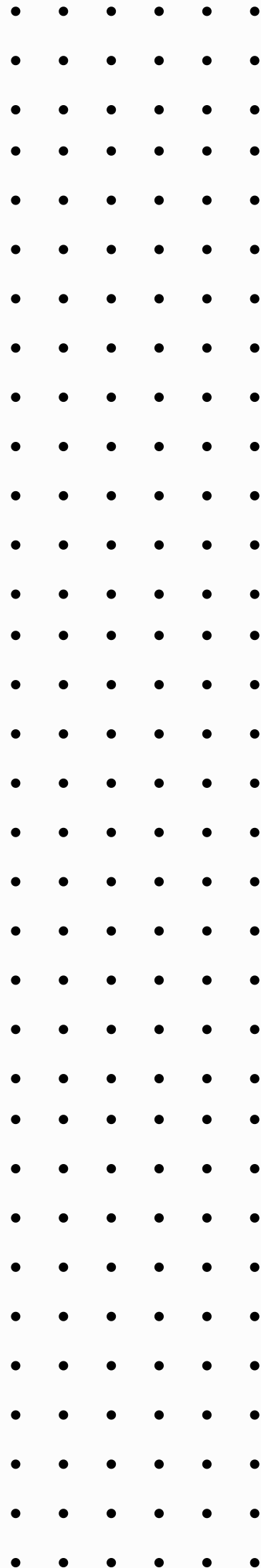


THE US IS INVESTING MORE IN ARCTIC DETERRENCE

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Due to the rapid climate change, which inherently reshapes the Arctic land and prospects, the region is not far away from political tensions it experienced before the collapse of the USSR. The drastically melting ice makes the region and its materials more accessible, hence both the Arctic and non-Arctic states seek to increase their influence in the Arctic through an expanded slate of economic, diplomatic, scientific, and military activities.

The key threats to US interests in the region are Russian military forces in the Arctic and Chinese influence attempts. Acting in a larger role in shaping Arctic governance could also weaken the US's power, which is maintaining Western deterrence in the region which is based on the Arctic Allies. . While climate change reshapes the Arctic landscape, it also intensifies the harsh terrain and weather conditions. Therefore, consequently, more and more security issues will come to the surface due to the high latitudes and harsh weather making make communications, global positioning, and domain awareness a [significant challenge across the Arctic](#).

The US is geographically connected to the Arctic through Alaska, where Washington maintains more than 22,000 active-duty troops nowadays. The US has also kept a military presence in Greenland since 1941. However, there are several problems in the U.S.'s [Arctic defence system](#). [First, it has always been a relatively low-budget priority for the U.S. government](#) and its military services. Consequently, it has an ageing infrastructure in the Alaskan Arctic, consisting of [ground-based infrastructure](#) outside the Anchorage-Fairbanks-Prudhoe corridor, which is localized rather than interconnected and is dependent on bulk summer resupply, and ageing [early warning radars](#) in Alaska and Greenland, defences and significant [5th-generation fighter aircraft](#) in Alaska, [submarines in Arctic waters](#), and modest rotational forces in [Iceland](#) and [Norway](#).

Due to the new geopolitical issues, The US and thus NATO has to face several security issues that require a different lens. Since the US released its last 10-year Arctic strategy in 2013, two main geopolitical changes have been acknowledged.

The biggest security challenge is connected to Russia. Moscow has reopened and modernized hundreds of Soviet-era military bases in the region, which is the main risk the new US foreign policy emphasizes for the region. Vladimir Putin cited Lomonosov in a reshaped way in 2017, stating that in the 21st century, [Russia will not expand through Siberia but through the Arctic.](#)



Russia also claims that Articles 21 and 234 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) give the rights to regulate the Northern Sea Route and some parts of the route that are within their territorial waters. Russians are deploying anti-ship systems at choke points along the passage to deter unauthorized users, essentially [extending their anti-access/area denial capabilities](#) east from the Barents Sea, where Russia protects its submarine-based nuclear deterrent. Russia does not have to destroy violating ships to control Northern Sea Route access but having the ability to harm violators makes possible the threat to board or impound vessels. However, Russia's recent Arctic militarization does not change the fact that they have possessed the ability to attack North America via long-range weapons (on missiles, submarines and bombers) fired through the Arctic for decades.

The other issue is the rising economic assertiveness of China. China has already built several economic and research bilateral cooperation with Arctic states.. However, [Chinese scientific engagements usually](#) mean dual-use research with intelligence or military applications in the regions. For instance, the largest commercial satellite station is also located in the region, on the [Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard](#), where – in addition to Russia – China has already invested in. Since the remote-sensing satellites could be used for everything from intelligence gathering to disaster relief, Chinese scientific activities, therefore, [could easily lay the groundwork for future military activities](#) even with an alliance with Russia, as well. This is the reason why is it a security issue of [gaining influence by investing](#) in scientific activities.

Being more aware of the geostrategic importance of the region, the US released its recent [Arctic strategy \(2022-2032\)](#) on the 7th of October. The recent Arctic security strategy focuses on [detering the Russian and Chinese](#) military attacks and preventing their attempts to weaken the established Arctic international order. It revolves around three goals: deter military attacks against the US or allied territory originating from the Arctic, prevent China or Russia from weakening existing rules-based Arctic governance through coercion, and prevent regional hegemony by either China or Russia. In order to achieve these, the US has to increase its military capacity and soft power in the Arctic.

The US decided to increase and modernize its military presence in the Arctic. As a consequence, the US not only enhances but also modernises its capacities, such as the joint military exercises with partner countries, the NORAD air defence modernization with Canada, and additional Coast Guard icebreakers, as well as better mapping and charting of the region's waters and weather. A crucial element of a successful strategy to maintain the US's active presence is the approval of the administration. Even though the administration's March 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance does not mention specifically the Arctic, under the

scope of its priorities the actions apply to the Arctic as well. Since [Washington supports Arctic deterrence](#), the US continuously builds closer ties with [regional allies and trusted security partners](#) in the region, such as Denmark, the newcomer NATO allies (Finland and Sweden), and Canada.

About the author

Zsanett is a Research Assistant at EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy. As part of EUROPEUM's climate team, her research focuses mainly on raw materials, European green energy security, and the geoeconomic implications of climate change. She has a Bachelor's degree in International Relations from Eötvös Loránd University, during which she also gained experience at Sciences Po Lille, where she studied European Studies. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Geopolitics at Charles University while participating as an Analyst for the Arctic Region at the Prague Geopolitical Collective (PGC). Since Zsanett has long-term research activity in the field of Circumpolar geopolitics and contributes to conferences and political debates about how place matters in geopolitics and the Contemporary World Order.

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