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## **Written evidence submitted by Professor Alexander Sergunin**

### **Russian military strategies in the Arctic: change and continuity**

In contrast with widespread perceptions of Russia as an expansionist/revisionist power in the Arctic, this evidence argues that Moscow does not seek military superiority in the region.

As far as Russia's threat perceptions are concerned there is a clear tendency towards the increasing role of the soft security-related interests such as ensuring Russia's access to the natural resources and transport routes in the region, climate change mitigation and cleaning up the environmental mess. At the same time, as some Russian strategists believe, there are a number of security threats and challenges in the region that require preservation and further development of a certain military potential and presence in the North. They took a notice that the ongoing Ukrainian and Syrian crises have negatively affected the overall Russia's relations with NATO and its member states which unilaterally suspended several cooperative projects with Russia, including military-to-military contacts and the development of confidence and security-building measures.

It is argued that the very nature and roles of military power in the Arctic have been radically changed since the Cold war era. Instead of being a coercive instrument in a global military confrontation between two superpowers and capitalist and socialist systems, now military power has new functions. Currently, Moscow's military strategies in the Arctic pursue several major goals:

- to ascertain Russia's sovereignty over its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in the region, including disputable areas;
- to protect Moscow's economic interests in the North, including mineral and bio-resources, fighting smuggling and poaching;
- to prevent illegal migration which can potentially undermine social stability in the Russian Arctic;
- to prevent potential terrorist attacks against critical industrial and infrastructural objects, including oil and gas platforms, nuclear plants and nuclear waste storages;
- to fulfil some dual-use functions, such as search and rescue operations, monitoring air and maritime spaces, providing navigation safety, mitigating natural and man-made catastrophes, etc.;
- to help the Russian academic community in developing Arctic research, and
- carry some symbolic functions, such as, for example, demonstration of the fact that Russia still retains its great power status and has world-class military capabilities.

These new roles, however, do not preclude military power from fulfilling its traditional functions, such as territorial defence, power projection, deterrence, containment, etc.

### **Military modernization programs**

Since the Soviet-time military machine in the Arctic has significantly degenerated in the 1990s and early 2000s the Russian nuclear and conventional forces badly need modernization to effectively meet new challenges and threats. The main idea behind the modernization plans is to make the Russian armed forces in the Arctic more compact, better equipped and trained. The Russian armed forces' modernization has started with the launch of the third State Rearmament Program (2007-2015) which covered both nuclear and conventional components.

### *Strategic forces*

It should be noted that the nuclear deterrent and MAD doctrine still remain a key element of Russian military strategies. Maintaining strategic nuclear capabilities and modernization of strategic nuclear forces are, therefore, the highest priorities of Moscow's military policies both in the High North and globally.

The fleet of nine strategic nuclear submarines (SSBNs - Ship Submarine Ballistic Nuclear) is a backbone of the Russian strategic forces in the North. Only Delta IV-class submarines undergo the process of modernization. They will be provided with a new sonar system and the new submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) *Sineva* (Skiff SSN-23) which entered service in 2007. *Sineva* is a third-generation liquid-propelled SLBMs which is able to cover a distance up to 8,300 km and to carry either four or ten nuclear warheads. Russia is planning to equip its Delta IV class submarines with at least 100 *Sineva* missiles which are to stay on alert status until 2030. The *Sineva* missiles can be launched from under the ice while remaining invisible to enemy's satellites until the last moment.

Another class of the Russian strategic submarines, the *Typhoons* which are considered as the world's largest, will be reequipped with long-range cruise missiles. For the time-being, only one *Typhoon*-class strategic submarine, the *Dmitri Donskoy*, has been modernized and deployed to the Northern Fleet. It serves to conduct test firing for the *Bulava* system, a new generation solid-fuel SLBM, designed to avoid possible future U.S. BMD weapons, and which can cover a distance of more than 9,000 kilometres.

It is planned that in the future, the *Typhoon*-class submarines should be replaced with the new *Borey*-class fourth generation nuclear-powered strategic submarines. The first *Borey*-class submarine, the *Yuri Dolgoruky*—that was the first strategic submarine to be built in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union—has been in operation by the Northern Fleet since January 2013. Two other *Borey*-class submarines, the *Alexander Nevsky* and the *Vladimir Monomakh*, run the sea trials and the fourth one, *Prince Vladimir*, is under construction at the Severodvinsk shipyard ([http://bastion-karpenko.narod.ru/955\\_more\\_01.html](http://bastion-karpenko.narod.ru/955_more_01.html)). These three submarines will be placed with the Pacific Fleet. The *Borey*-class submarines which are to be deployed to the Northern Fleet will be based at the Gadzhievo navy base (about 100 kilometres from the Norwegian border), where new infrastructure is being built to host them.

This new generation of the Russian strategic submarines is almost invisible at deep ocean depths and—having several types of cruise missiles and torpedoes—it will be able to carry out multipurpose missions, including attacks on enemy aircraft carriers and missile strikes on coastal targets. According to the Defence Ministry's plans, the building of eight *Borey*-class submarines (four for the Northern Fleet and four for the Pacific one) should be completed by 2020, which seems too ambitious and unlikely in the context of budget constraints caused by the ongoing economic crisis.

### *Conventional forces*

Along with submarine force the Northern Fleet also operates 38 surface ships. These include 11 large surface ships, among them are Russia's only aircraft carrier, 3 cruisers and 7 destroyers. The *Admiral Kuznetsov* aircraft carrier is designed for the global rather than regional military theatre (as demonstrated by its mission in Syria). Two of the cruisers, the *Admiral Nakhimov* (Kirov class) and the *Marshal Ustinov* (Slava class), are currently out of service undergoing modernization. In addition, the Northern Fleet includes 9 corvettes, 12 mine-warfare ships and 4 landing ships. Under the State Rearmament Program Russia is planning to build 51 surface ships, including up to 15 frigates and 25 corvettes. According to some accounts, one destroyer, five

frigates, five mine-hunters and two landing ships will be allocated to the Northern Fleet by the end of 2020.

Russian air force in the Arctic are mainly represented by the Northern and Pacific fleets' naval aviation forces. The majority of such aircraft cannot operate outside the Russian Arctic, but a number of Tu-142 anti-submarine warfare aircraft (13 with the Northern Fleet and 14 with the Pacific Fleet) and Il-38 maritime patrol aircraft (14 with the Northern Fleet and 15 with the Pacific Fleet) are capable of long-distance operations. Russia's strategic aviation is not based in the Far North; however, it does use the region as a transit channel for air patrols in the Arctic and North Atlantic oceans.

Air defence force units are stationed on the Kola Peninsula, near Severodvinsk (Arkhangelsk region), Chukotka and on a number of Russian island territories in the Arctic - Novaya Zemlya, Franz Josef Land, the New Siberian Islands and Wrangel Island. Some of these units have re-established many of the old Soviet airfields and military bases in the Arctic. In October 2014, these units have been united into a joint task force. These units are equipped with, among other things, RS-26 Rubezh coastal missile systems, S-300 air-defence missiles and the Pantsyr-S1 anti-aircraft artillery weapon system. The measures to increase Moscow's military potential in region include creation of a new air-force and air-defence army, including regiments armed with MiG-31 interceptor aircraft, S-400 air-defence missile systems (to replace the S-300 systems) and radar units. One task is to restore continuous radar coverage along Russia's entire northern coast, which was lost in the 1990s. To that end, a total of 13 airfields, an air force test range, and 10 radar sites and direction centres would be established in the Arctic in the coming years.

To reorganize in a more efficient way the Russian land forces in the AZRF there were plans to transform the motorized infantry and marine brigades located near Pechenga (Murmansk region) to the Arctic special force unit, with soldiers trained in a special program and equipped with modern personal equipment for military operations in the Arctic. The Arctic brigade should be operational by 2016. There were also plans to create another Arctic brigade somewhere in the Arkhangelsk region. All conventional forces in the AZRF should form an AGF to be led by the joint Arctic command (to be established in 2017).

However, the Ukrainian crisis has made adjustments to Russia's military planning. While two Pechenga-based brigades were left in place, the Arctic brigade was surprisingly created ahead of schedule (in January 2015) and deployed in Alakurtti which is close to the Finnish-Russian border. Another surprise was that given an 'increased NATO military threat' in the North, President Putin has decided to accelerate the creation of a new strategic command 'North' which was established in December 2014 (three years ahead of the schedule). It was also announced that the second Arctic brigade will be formed soon and will be stationed in the Yamal-Nenets autonomous district (east of the Ural Mountains in the Arctic Circle).

The Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said also that two new Arctic coast defence divisions are to be established by 2018 as part of an effort to strengthen security along the NSR. One of them is likely to be stationed on the Kola Peninsula (in addition the existing military units), the other in the eastern Arctic (Chukotka Peninsula). The new forces can be tasked with anti-assault, anti-sabotage and anti-aircraft defence issues along the NSR. They will both interact closely with law-enforcement authorities like the Ministry of Interior, the National Guard and the Border Guard Service.

As mentioned above, the Border Guards' strengthening is one of the most important priorities of Russia's national security policies in the High North. An Arctic border guards unit was created as early as in 1994. Its aim was to monitor the circulation of ships and poaching at sea. The unit was reorganized in 2004–2005. In 2009, it was announced that new Arctic units had been established

in border guard stations in Arkhangelsk and Murmansk. Furthermore, the FSS has established two new border guard commands: one in Murmansk for the western AZRF regions, and one in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky for the eastern Arctic regions. Now the border guards assigned with the task to deal with the new—soft security—threats and challenges such as the establishment of reliable border control systems, the introduction of special visa regulations to certain regions, and the implementation of technological controls over fluvial zones and sites along the NSR. It is currently controlled from the air by border guard aircrafts and on the land and sea by the North-Eastern Border Guard Agency; the Russian border guards further plan to establish a global monitoring network from Murmansk to Wrangel Island. All in all, Moscow plans to build 20 border guard stations along the Arctic Ocean's coastline.

Another interesting structural change is an ongoing reorganization of the Russian Coast Guard (part of the Border Service). Now the Coast Guard has a wide focus in the Arctic: in addition to the traditional protection of biological resources in the Arctic Ocean, oil and gas installations and shipping along the Northern Sea Route are among the agency's new top priorities. There are plans to equip the Coast Guard in the AZRF with the brand new vessels of project 22100. The Okean-class ice-going patrol ship, the Polyarnaya Zvezda (Polar Star), is currently undergoing sea trials in the Baltic Sea. Vessels of this class can break up to 31.4 inch-thick ice. They have an endurance of 60 days and a range of 12,000 nautical miles at 20 knots. They are equipped with a Ka-27 helicopter and can be supplied with Gorizont UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles).

### **Towards a regional arms control regime?**

Given the fact that the 'hard' security situation in the Arctic is relatively benign, serious threats and challenges such as WMD (weapons of mass destruction) proliferation, large-scale terrorist attacks or military conflicts are hardly probable in the region – at least in the foreseeable future.

However, it should be noted that the Arctic lacks a special arms control regime. There were only two international arms control regimes applicable to the area: The first regime was (and is) a system of the U.S.-Soviet/Russian strategic arms control and reduction agreements. Particularly, these agreements regulate a number of launchers and nuclear warheads on the Russian strategic submarines based on the Kola Peninsula.

The second arms control regime was the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty that was concluded between NATO and the Warsaw Pact in 1990 and adapted in 1999 under the aegis of the OSCE. However, the Baltic States refused to abide by the treaty, because it was concluded when they were still part of the USSR. Finland and Sweden have also refused to sign the treaty referring to their neutral (now non-aligned) status. In addition, none of the Western signatories of the 1999 Adaptation Treaty ratified it. As a result, Russia suspended its participation in the treaty in 2007.

Moscow, however, hopes that the CFE process can be reanimated in the foreseeable future. Drawing lessons from the past negative experiences Russia believes that there are two preconditions for resumption and successful continuation of the CFE process:

- A new treaty should be fully ratified by all signatories and
- All countries of the Arctic region should partake in this arms control regime.

It should also be noted that the CFE treaty was applicable only to land forces. Naval armaments were (and are) mainly excluded from any arms control regime. Unilateral measures were taken by some countries (including Russia) in the 1990s for the reduction of naval armaments and naval activities, but they related only to obsolete weapons and cannot be a substitute for a real arms

control regime. According to some assessments, the basic hesitancy of the EU and NATO nations regarding naval armament limitations in the High North seems to be that if you initiate naval arms control in one of the seas within their zone of responsibility, this could lead to restrictions on maritime flexibility in other seas as well. However, these parties should initiate negotiations on naval arms control if they are serious about further improvement of the security environment in the region.

It should be noted, with concern, that the Arctic region currently has no confidence- and security-building measures regime – a gap that should be filled with great urgency because CSBMs development is a very important element of any regional security system. The regional CSBMs could be based first and foremost on the 1994 OSCE Vienna Document which proved to be efficient in Europe. In addition, the following measures could be suggested:

- Given the specifics of the region, CSBMs should cover not only land but also naval military activities.
- Along with spatial limitations, temporal limitations on Russian, NATO and EU military activities in the region could also be established.
- Military-to-military contacts, joint exercises, exchanges and visits should be further encouraged. Since the eruption of that crisis in 2014, however, Russian representatives have no longer been invited to meetings of the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable. Joint military exercises such as Northern Eagle – an operation involving US, Russian, and Norwegian forces – have been cancelled. Cooperation in military affairs has been disrupted almost entirely.
- The countries of the region should intensify exchange information on their military doctrines, defence budgets as well as on major arms export/import programs.
- Not only regional but also bilateral CSBMs should be further encouraged.
- An idea of establishing a limited nuclear weapon-free zone in the Arctic (say, in Central Arctic) can be discussed. For example, Russia and U.S. could consider Canada's initiative to ban nuclear weapons in the region. Russia has responded positively to this initiative (Moscow raised a similar idea under Mikhail Gorbachev), but has questions about the geographical scope of such a zone. Russia supports making the Arctic a nuclear weapon-free zone, provided this would not affect the Kola Peninsula which is a home to two-thirds of the Russian strategic nuclear submarines.

Moscow also considers the field of civil protection as a promising venue for the Arctic regional cooperation. For example, according to the EU-Russia 2005 roadmap to the Common Space on External Security, one of the strategic objectives of Brussels–Moscow cooperation is to strengthen EU–Russia dialogue on promoting common ability to respond to disasters and emergencies, specifically including crisis management situations. The positive experience accumulated in this area could be replicated to the Arctic regional cooperation. The priority areas for such cooperation could be as follows:

- Strengthening coordination of the Arctic states' agencies responsible for civil protection. This requires hard work on implementing the existing arrangements between the Operations Centre of Russia's EMERCOM (Ministry for Emergency Situations) and its foreign counterparts. More specifically this means exchanging contact details for keeping in touch on a 24-hour basis; exchanging templates for early warnings and requests/offers for assistance; exchanging information during an emergency, where appropriate; conducting communications exercises on an agreed basis; and enabling operation staff to spend some time in the operational center of the other partner's service in order to gain practical experience.

- Exchanging information on lessons learnt from terrorist attacks.
- Inviting experts, on a case-by-case basis, to specific technical workshops and symposia on civil protection issues.
- Inviting observers, on a case-by-case basis, to specific exercises organized by the partner countries.
- Facilitating mutual assistance in search and rescue operations for submarines, ships and aircraft in emergency situations.

Hopefully, a steady implementation of this rather ambitious agenda could substantially change the security environment in the Arctic region in a positive way.

## Conclusions

The overall assessment of Moscow's military strategies in the region demonstrates that the Russian ambitions in the High North may be high, but they are still far from being realized, and they are not necessarily implying the intentions and proper capabilities to confront other regional players by military means. Russia may be eager to develop powerful armed forces in the Arctic, but its plans to recreate a strong navy, to modernize its fleet of strategic submarines, to lay down new icebreakers and replace the old ones, to create better-trained and well-equipped land forces and to establish new FSS border control and SAR units are difficult tasks. It is hard to imagine that Russia has the financial and technical capacities as well as managerial skills to meet these objectives in the foreseeable future.

It should be also noted that the Russian military modernization programs are rather modest and aim to upgrade the Russian armed forces in the High North rather than provide them with additional offensive capabilities or restore the Soviet-time huge military potential. Given the financial constraints, these programs have recently become less ambitious and more realistic. Now they are comparable with the military modernization programs of other Arctic players and do not provoke a regional arms race. The Russian military increasingly aims at defending the country's economic interests in the Far North, establishing control over the huge AZRF territory and meeting non-traditional challenges rather than expanding its "sphere of influence" or revising its geopolitical status in the region.

Russia clearly has a preference for soft power instruments (diplomatic, economic and cultural) in the Arctic theatre, as well as activity and discourse *via* multilateral institutions. This preference should be taken seriously by Russia's partners, and reciprocation will be key to decisive in the future of the Arctic and in Russia's prospects in the region.

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