



House of Commons
Defence Committee

On Thin Ice: UK Defence in the Arctic

Twelfth Report of Session 2017–19



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*Report, together with formal minutes
relating to the report*

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The Defence Committee

The Defence Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Ministry of Defence and its associated public bodies.

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The Sub-Committee

For this inquiry, the Chair of the sub-Committee was Mrs Madeleine Moon MP.

The Members of the sub-Committee were Martin Docherty-Hughes MP, the Rt Hon Mr Mark Francois MP, Gavin Robinson MP, Ruth Smeeth MP and Phil Wilson MP.

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The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

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Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/defcom and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry page](#) of the Committee's website.

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Summary

The change in the natural environment in the Arctic and High North is driving a change in the security environment. As the ice recedes and the Arctic becomes more accessible to navigation and the exploitation of its extensive natural resources, a region that has been characterised by low tension and multi-lateral co-operation has in recent years begun to see an increase in military activity.

At the forefront of this activity is the Russian Federation. Although there is a divergence of views on Russia's motivations, it is difficult to conclude that this build-up of military strength is proportionate to an exclusively defensive outlook. Russia has shown itself to be ready to use military force to secure political advantage and the disputed operation of a number of international legal norms in the Arctic is vulnerable to exploitation by a revisionist state.

The Arctic and the High North are central to the security of the United Kingdom and history has shown that its domination by a hostile power would put the security of the wider North Atlantic Ocean at considerable risk. The leadership which the UK has previously shown in the defence of the region should be reinstated, and the new priority which NATO has given to the North Atlantic should be accompanied by a renewed focus of the source of the threat in the High North.

The UK continues to sustain capabilities and expertise which can play a leading role in the Arctic and High North, but the focus on operating in this challenging environment has been reduced over the long years of engagement in expeditionary operations in hot weather climates. The multi-role nature of these specialist capabilities also leads to them being in high demand elsewhere, an indication of the wider resource pressures in Defence that are resulting in the Armed Forces struggling to meet commitments and sustain levels of training.

If the definition of a leading defence nation is one which has the ability to deploy a range of capabilities anywhere in the world, then this includes the unique operating environment of the Arctic and the High North. Being able to do so is ultimately a question of resource and a question of ambition; the Committee calls upon the Government to show leadership in providing both.

ARCTIC REGION



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Source: Central Intelligence Agency

1 Introduction

1. In its report *Russia: Implications for UK defence and security* published in July 2016, our predecessor Committee identified the Arctic and the High North as an area of concern, largely due to the increasingly clear evidence of Russian military expansion. The predecessor Committee also resolved to undertake a closer examination of the region in a dedicated inquiry.¹ Accordingly, the Defence Sub-Committee put out an initial call for evidence in December 2016, seeking submissions on the following issues:

- The security and defence implications for the UK of the melting Arctic ice cap;
- Recent military activity in the Arctic, including the main actors and their current capabilities and intentions;
- The bilateral frameworks for co-operation in the Arctic, including with Norway and Canada;
- Geopolitical developments in the Arctic, including West-Russia tensions, low oil prices, Asian interests, and their consequences for defence in the Arctic;
- Possible hotspots of conflict in the region and how the UK might contribute to the de-escalation of any such military tensions;
- What role any of the existing forums for discussion of Arctic matters can play in de-escalating risk;
- Whether the UK Armed Forces have the necessary numbers, training and equipment to operate effectively in the Arctic if needed; and
- Whether NATO should increase its focus on the Arctic

2. The inquiry was still in the process of taking evidence when Parliament was dissolved ahead of the 2017 General Election, and was revived by the re-established Defence Sub-Committee in the new Parliament. Across the previous and the current Parliament a total of five oral evidence sessions have been held and 29 submissions of written evidence have been received. We would like to express our gratitude to the individuals concerned for their contribution. The Sub-Committee visited Norway in February 2017 to hold meetings with Norwegian defence and security officials and to observe the Royal Marines and attached units during annual winter training exercises in Northern Norway. We would like to thank all personnel involved in facilitating and supporting the visit and place on record how impressed we were with the quality of the people on these exercises and the level of their training. The Sub-Committee has had the advantage throughout of the expertise of our specialist adviser Dr Duncan Depledge and extend our thanks to him.² We would also like to recognise the contribution of James Gray MP, who chaired the predecessor Sub-Committee in the last Parliament and whose interest and expertise in defence and the polar regions were the driving force behind the inquiry from the outset.

1 Defence Committee, [Russia: Implications for UK defence and security](#), First Report of Session 2016–17, HC 107, paras 84–87

2 Specialist Advisers' declarations of relevant interests are recorded in the Committee's Formal Minutes which are available on the main Committee's website.

2 The Arctic and the High North

Definition

3. The Arctic is a region that defies easy definition. Scientists tend to disagree over how to define the southern boundary of the Arctic expanse. The bound of the Arctic Circle running at 66.6° north of the Equator does not necessarily reflect the physical characteristics of the Arctic environment, however it provides a stable basis for considering how the region is constituted geopolitically. Eight countries (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the USA—often known collectively as the ‘Arctic States’ or A8) have territory within the Arctic Circle. Five of those states (Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the USA) are littoral states to the Arctic Ocean. Four million people live north of the Arctic Circle, around half of these in Russia.

4. A range of definitions can also be applied to the term ‘High North’. In this inquiry we have generally taken it to apply to the ‘European Arctic’, roughly stretching from Greenland in the West to the Norwegian/Russia border in the Barents Sea in the East, and encompassing areas of strategic importance such as the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) Gap and Svalbard.

Governance

5. An array of legal and governance regimes operates in the Arctic. These regimes include generally applicable international treaties, as well as a range of multilateral agreements relating to scientific, environmental and commercial activity. The leading intergovernmental forum is the Arctic Council. Instituted by the Ottawa Declaration in 1996, the Council brings together the A8 and representatives of Arctic indigenous communities. The United Kingdom was present as an observer at the inaugural meeting in 1996 and has held observer status since 1998. As Jane Rumble OBE, the Head of the Polar Regions Department (PRD) at the FCO told us, the UK is an engaged and influential participant in the Council’s work.³ ‘Military security’ is specifically excluded from the Council’s remit by the Ottawa Declaration.⁴

The changing Arctic

6. The Arctic is changing in rapid and profound ways. The region is warming twice as fast as anywhere else on Earth. The Arctic Ocean is transitioning from being permanently ice-covered to seasonally ice-free.⁵ The general consensus is that without action to mitigate human sources of greenhouse gas emissions, the Arctic Ocean could be ice-free during the summer months before 2050, and possibly within the next decade or two. Since the mid-2000’s low minimum ice extents have become the norm.⁶

7. The environmental changes that arise with the melting ice are likely to be accompanied by changes in human activity. A leading example of this which witnesses mentioned to

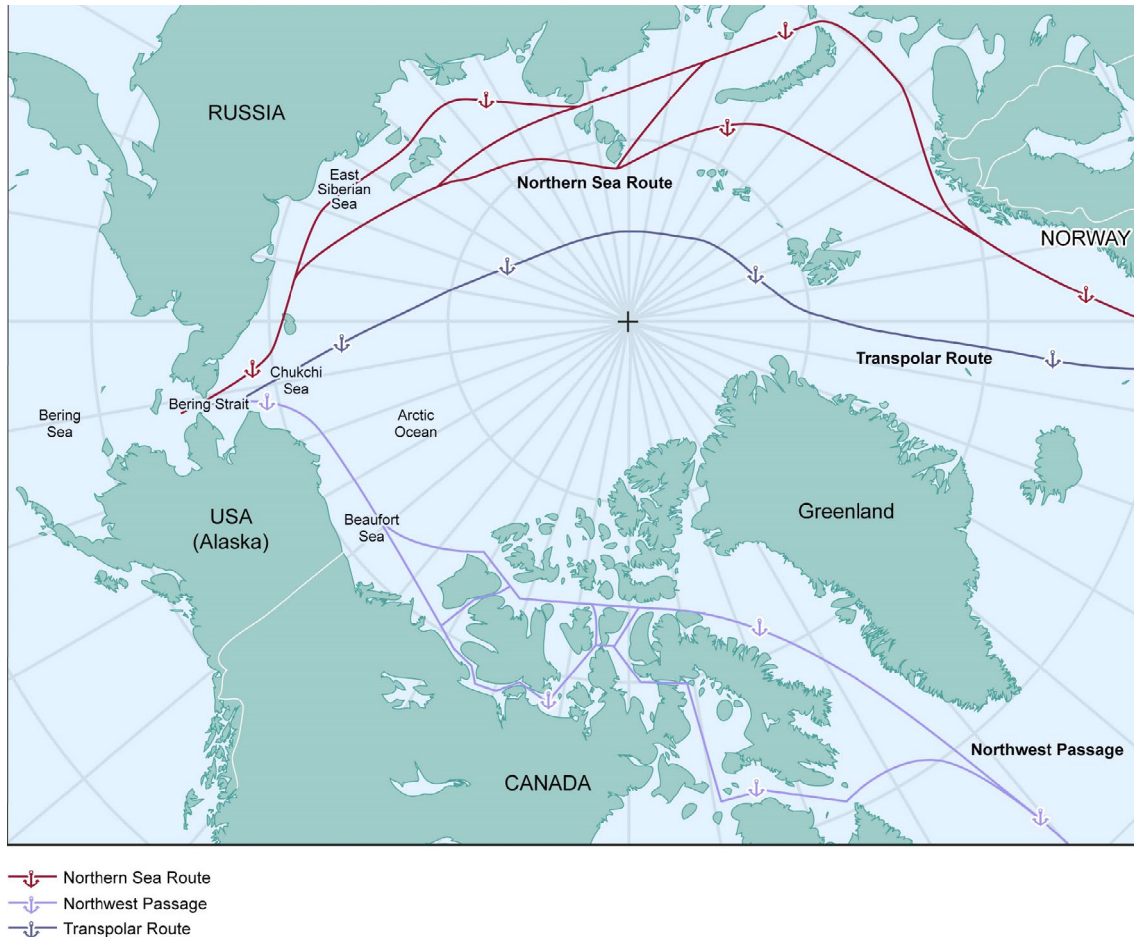
3 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Qq58–61

4 [Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council](#), 19 September 1996, Article 1.

5 Dr Brooke Smith-Windsor ([DIA0008](#));

6 Overland, J E, and Wang, M (2013), ‘When will the summer Arctic be nearly ice free?’, *Geophysical Research Letters*, Vol 40, 2097–2101; Arctic Program, [Arctic Report Card 2017](#), accessed 16 July 2018

us is the increase in commercial activity relating to natural resources. As ice melts, the possibility of exploiting resources that have previously been inaccessible or commercially unviable to access increases. In 2008, the US Geological Survey (USGS) estimated that technically recoverable resources in the Arctic amount to around 30% of the world's undiscovered gas and 13% of the world's undiscovered oil.⁷ In its written evidence the MoD says that "Easier access to resources raises the potential for regional competition and conflict."⁸ The region is also thought to contain considerable reserves of rare earth metals and minerals.⁹



Source: US Office of Naval Intelligence/Us Government Accountability Office

8. A second aspect of human activity likely to change is shipping activity along the new sea routes which are becoming increasingly navigable as the ice melts. The North West Passage passes mostly along the northern coast of North America and the North East Passage, of which the Northern Sea Route is part, passes along the northern coast of Russia and Scandinavia. The latter was identified in evidence as having the potential to

7 United States Geological Survey, *Circum-Arctic Resource Appraisal: Estimates of Undiscovered Oil and Gas North of the Arctic Circle*, July 2008

8 Ministry of Defence (DIA0020). See also [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q9 [H.E. Torbjörn Sohlström], Q22 [H.E. Mr Claus Grube], Q27 [Professor Dodds], Q37 [Professor Kennedy-Pipe]

9 RUSI (DIA0002); Arctic Advisory Group (DIA0003); Scottish Global Forum (DIA0012); Ministry of Defence (DIA0020)

be a major new shipping route, significantly cutting the transit time between Europe and Asia.¹⁰ There is however some divergence in written evidence about the extent to which the route will become commercially viable in the near future.¹¹

Disputes and sources of tension

9. More recently, and particularly since the end of the Cold War, the Arctic States have sought to characterise the region as one of low tension, where states work through established multilateral mechanisms to build agreement through dialogue and collaboration.¹² From the UK's point of view, when asked if there were any areas of tension in the Arctic which gave her cause for concern, Ms Rumble said that "I don't think there are any significant areas of tension".¹³ Our evidence has nonetheless pointed to several areas which may give rise to tensions in the future. One submission described the legal architecture applying to the Arctic as "precarious".¹⁴ Another stated that:

"High North, Low Tensions;" "Arctic exceptionalism;" "a zone of international peace and cooperation": These are expressions that have been used to describe the Arctic. But recent events do not reflect nor necessarily suggest that the Arctic region will organically remain free of conflict because we wish it to be so.¹⁵

10. The status of the new shipping routes mentioned above in paragraph 8 is contested. The North West Passage and Northern Sea Route traverse parts of the territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of Canada and Russia respectively. Canada claims parts of the North West Passage to be internal territorial waters, a status disputed by the United States, amongst others, who consider these areas to be 'straits used for international navigation'.¹⁶ Russia has asserted similar rights of regulation along the Northern Sea Route through domestic legislation, instituting a high level of state-controlled regulation for foreign registered ships seeking to traverse the route.¹⁷ Two low level maritime disputes are active relating to Canadian claims against Denmark and the USA respectively.¹⁸ Russia's continental shelf claim relating to the area surrounding the resource-rich Lomonosov Ridge is currently under arbitration by a UN Commission, with overlapping claims from Canada, Denmark and Russia being arbitrated.¹⁹

Svalbard

11. The Svalbard archipelago is a group of islands around halfway between Norway and the North Pole. Although part of the Kingdom of Norway, the exercise of sovereignty

10 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q37 [Dr Dimitriy Tulupov]; [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q57 [Dr John Ash]; [Oral evidence taken on 15 November 2017](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q3; [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q67, Q137

11 Dr Pavel Baev ([DIA0014](#)). See also RUSI ([DIA0002](#)).

12 See for example [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q3

13 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q62

14 Dr Sascha Dov Bachmann and Mr Andres B. Munoz Mosquera ([DIA0029](#))

15 Heather A. Conley and Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen ([DIA0011](#))

16 Professor James Kraska and Professor Sean Fahey ([DIA0015](#)); Dr Adam Lajeunesse ([DIA0024](#))

17 Professor James Kraska and Professor Sean Fahey ([DIA0015](#)); Ministry of Defence ([DIA0020](#)); [New restrictions coming up in Russian Arctic shipping](#), *The Barents Observer*, 28 March 2018

18 Dr Peter Hough ([DIA0004](#)); Scott Polar Research Institute ([DIA0009](#)); [Canada, Denmark forge tentative deal on Lincoln Sea boundary](#), *CBC News*, 29 November 2012

19 Dr Peter Hough ([DIA0004](#)); Dr Andrew Foxall ([DIA0005](#)); Ministry of Defence ([DIA0020](#)); Bruce Jones ([DIA0026](#))

over the islands is subject to the terms of the 1920 Svalbard Treaty. The treaty extends rights of equal access and commercial exploitation to all of the 46 contracting parties. The treaty also specifically prohibits the establishment of a naval base or any fortifications or structures used for ‘warlike purposes’. A series of events over the past few years has sustained a level of tension on the islands. In 2015 Norway demanded an explanation when the Russian Deputy Prime Minister flew into Svalbard, in defiance of a travel ban on a journey to the North Pole.²⁰ In April 2016 Chechen special forces instructors landed in Svalbard before holding a parachute exercise over the polar ice cap.²¹ It was reported as part of the Zapad 2017 exercise that a simulated amphibious assault masked by extensive electronic warfare capabilities was conducted by Russia against Svalbard.²² Around the same time the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov launched a new attack on a number Norway’s policies on Svalbard and linked the Norwegian position to the wider issue of the militarisation and the stronger role of NATO in the High North.²³

12. Recalling some of these events in oral evidence, Professor Klaus Dodds of Royal Holloway, University of London said “Some obvious flashpoints would be anything to do with Svalbard ... you would not have to be terribly clever to think of scenarios where the delicate relationship that exists between Russia and Norway could be upended.”²⁴ Dr John Ash of the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge took a similar view of Svalbard as a flashpoint:

As far as Svalbard is concerned, there is a potential flashpoint. There is a Russian population on Svalbard. The last population size I saw—this was at Barentsburg—was about 471 people. That could potentially constitute a casus belli under circumstances in which Russia wished to assert greater influence on the archipelago.²⁵

James Gray MP pointed out that the complex position of Svalbard in international law might act as an encouragement to an aggressor, as NATO might be unable to come to a decision on whether it was entitled to intervene.²⁶ Colonel John Andreas Olsen, the Norwegian Defence Attaché to the United Kingdom, addressed the point about the applicability of NATO’s collective security mechanisms to Svalbard:

[Svalbard] is Norwegian territory and where Norwegian law applies. We take that seriously. There is a treaty from 1920, implemented in 1925, that says that we should not use Svalbard for war-like purposes, so we will not build naval bases or other military infrastructure, but it is still Norwegian territory and an attack on Svalbard would constitute an Article 5.²⁷

20 Oxford Research Group (DTA0001); Scott Polar Research Institute (DIA0009); ‘Norway in Arctic dispute with Russia over Rogozin visit’, *BBC News*, 20 April 2015

21 ‘Chechen special forces instructors landed on Svalbard’, *The Barents Observer*, 13 April 2016

22 Oral evidence taken on 15 November 2017, HC 388 [2017–19], Q8; Oxford Research Group (DTA0001); ‘Go West: Analysing “Zapad”’, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 26 October 2017; ‘Zapad exercises underline Russia’s domestic security concerns’, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 31 October 2017

23 Oxford Research Group (DTA0001); ‘Lavrov attacks Norway, says relations on Svalbard should be better’, *The Barents Observer*, 19 October 2017

24 Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017, HC 879 [2016–17], Qq27–29

25 Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017, HC 879 [2016–17], Q53

26 Oral evidence taken on 15 November 2017, HC 388 [2017–19], Q8

27 Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018, HC 388 [2017–19], Q23

New interest from Asia

13. China, Japan, India, Singapore and South Korea were all admitted as Observers to the Arctic Council in 2013. Both India and South Korea had well established polar research programmes and have research facilities on Svalbard. South Korea published its first Arctic policy document in 2013.²⁸ Professor Caroline Kennedy-Pipe of the University of Hull described how:

India is now describing itself as a polar player. It has extensive interests in the South Pole, but increasingly, if one looks at the rate of papers on global warming and climate change, India has a vested interest. As the High North melts, Bangladesh will be hugely affected.²⁹

14. The involvement of a wider circle of nations is a manifestation of what Professor Dodds characterised as the ‘globalisation’ of the Arctic,³⁰ and the most prominent actor in this has been China. China also has a long-established polar research programme and scientific installations established on Svalbard. Submissions noted the increasing commercial presence of China in the region, including substantial Chinese investment in mining operations in Greenland and in gas projects on Russia’s northern Arctic coast.³¹ China’s first free trade agreement with a European nation was concluded with Iceland in 2013.³² The Ambassadors of Denmark, Iceland and Sweden all welcomed the interest of China in the Arctic.³³ The general consensus of our evidence also supports the view that China’s interests are currently primarily scientific and economic, rather than in pursuit of a ‘hard power presence’.³⁴ This has been reinforced by the publication of China’s most recent Arctic policy document in January 2018, which identifies the Northern Sea Route as a maritime highway of the ‘Polar Silk Road’, part of the wider Belt and Road development initiative. Ms Rumble said she was “not particularly surprised by the content of that White Paper”.³⁵ Nick Gurr, Director of International Security Policy at the Ministry of Defence, agreed with this analysis, saying “Most of the activity appears to be economically motivated.”³⁶

15. Some witnesses, however, argued that one should not look at China’s conduct in the Arctic in isolation from its conduct elsewhere. Despite China’s ostensible commitment to multilateralism in the Arctic, Professor Kennedy-Pipe noted that China had declared its general preference for pursuing its economic agenda on a bilateral basis.³⁷ Professor Dodds speculated how China’s policy on the status of territorial waters and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea might be received by the Arctic States if it began to be implemented in the High North.³⁸ Written evidence has also raised the potential linkage between Chinese interest in the Arctic and its increasing international presence as a naval power. The People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) sent a small naval flotilla into the

28 [Arctic Policy of the Republic of Korea](#), December 2013

29 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Qq27–29

30 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Qq24 [Professor Dodds]

31 [Scott Polar Research Institute \(DIA0009\)](#); [Dr Pavel Baev \(DIA0014\)](#)

32 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q22 [Mr Óskarsson]; [Scottish Global Forum \(DIA0012\)](#)

33 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q22

34 [Arctic Advisory Group \(DIA0003\)](#); [Scottish Global Forum \(DIA0012\)](#)

35 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q64

36 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q65

37 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q37 [Professor Kennedy-Pipe]

38 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q37 [Professor Dodds]; [Scott Polar Research Institute \(DIA0009\)](#)

Bering Sea between Russia and Alaska for the first time in 2015.³⁹ The PLAN made its first visits to Denmark, Finland and Sweden around the same time.⁴⁰ Having possessed a single icebreaker since the early 1990s, a second, larger nuclear-powered icebreaker is due to be commissioned by China in 2019.⁴¹ A recent report has suggested that the PLAN may be considering future submarine operations in the Arctic.⁴²

16. Since the end of the Cold War the Arctic States have been successful in maintaining the Arctic and High North as an area of low tension, and the region has been generally characterised by continuing close international co-operation amongst states which may have taken divergent positions on crises occurring elsewhere in the world. However, it is clear that the natural environment in the Arctic is going through a period of fundamental change, giving rise to issues which are bringing about a similar change in the security environment.

17. There is a risk that the perception of the Arctic as an area of exceptionalism where unique considerations of governance apply and where the application of general norms of international law are disputed could be exploited by nations who have shown an increasing disregard for the rules-based international order elsewhere. The Svalbard archipelago is an example of this, where the possibility of further adventurism by a resurgent and revisionist Russia cannot be discounted.

18. As the ‘globalisation’ of the region continues, an increasing number of states which are more geographically distant from the Arctic are declaring that they have an interest in Arctic affairs and wish to share in the benefits which might come from a more accessible Arctic. This is to be welcomed, as long as these interests continue to coincide. We should nonetheless be aware, in this new age of ‘great power competition’, that this state of affairs may not last indefinitely. *The Government should work closely with allies to establish a common position on all aspects of international law in the Arctic to ensure that disputes active amongst states in the region are not aggravated or exploited.*

39 Scott Polar Research Institute ([DIA0009](#))

40 Dr Rob Huebert ([DIA0013](#))

41 ‘China’s first home-built icebreaker in production’, *Daily Telegraph*, 13 April 2018

42 ‘China planning for Arctic operations’, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 4 July 2018

3 The UK, the High North and the North Atlantic

Beginnings

19. The United Kingdom has played a leading role in the exploration of the Arctic, and the Royal Navy has been at the forefront of this effort.⁴³ The Second World War provided a clear demonstration of strategic importance of the region to the UK. The Allied attempts to resist the occupation of Scandinavia gave an indication of the difficulties of fighting in cold weather conditions, and the importance of having highly trained units to do so.⁴⁴ The occupation of Norway by a hostile power brought the prospect of invasion from across the North Sea and, for the first time, laid Scotland and Eastern England open to air attack from Scandinavia. It also provided a perfect staging base for enemy ships and submarines to project power far into the Atlantic. The danger from the icy seas and freezing temperatures endured by the men serving on the Arctic Convoys was compounded by the enemy naval and air patrols operating from Northern Norway. The heroism and unique hardship associated with this service was rightly recognised by the Government with announcement of the institution of the Arctic Star campaign medal in 2012.⁴⁵

The Arctic and the High North in the Cold War

20. The admission of Norway as a founding member of NATO in 1949 created the only direct Northern European border between a NATO state and the Soviet Union, establishing NATO's 'Northern Flank'. Although the focus of the confrontation in Europe was on the Central Front on the Inner German Border, the Northern Flank became an area of leading strategic importance to NATO from the outset of the Cold War. NATO's defence of the region would have been directed by Allied Forces Northern Europe (AFNORTH), a major subordinate command of Allied Command Europe entrusted with the defence of Norway, Denmark and areas of northern Germany adjacent to the Baltic approaches.⁴⁶ The territorial defence of Norway was essential to the security of Western Europe and would only be possible by swift reinforcement from other NATO allies.⁴⁷ Early in the Cold War, Norway would also serve as an important forward base for strategic bombers directed against targets in the USSR in the event of a nuclear exchange. Long-range strategic bombers and intercontinental ballistic missiles would have passed over the Arctic in the event of a nuclear exchange between the United States and the USSR, leading to the establishment of ballistic missile early warning stations in Greenland, Canada and Alaska.⁴⁸

43 Coleman, E C, *The Royal Navy in Polar Exploration: Volume 1: From Frobisher to Ross*, Tempus, 2006; Sugden, J, *Nelson: A Dream of Glory*, Jonathan Cape, London 2004, pp. 73–76

44 Erskine, D, *The Scots Guards 1919–1955*, William Clowes and Sons Ltd, London 1956, pp 21–26; Kiszely, J, *Anatomy of a Campaign: The British Fiasco in Norway, 1940*, CUP, Cambridge 2017

45 '[Recognition for veterans of Arctic Convoys and Bomber Command](#)', Ministry of Defence, 19 December 2012

46 The position of Commander in Chief Allied Forces Northern Europe (CINCNORTH) was held by a senior Royal Marine or British Army General throughout AFNORTH's existence.

47 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q35 [Colonel Olsen]

48 Tamnes, R, 'The Strategic Importance of the High North during the Cold War' from Schmidt, G (ed.), *A History of NATO - The First 50 Years*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001



A 1983 map of the GIUK Gap. Source: Wikimedia Commons

21. The maritime aspect of the defence of the Northern Flank was particularly significant. The Soviet Navy's Northern Fleet, which was its largest and contained the highest numbers of ballistic missile and attack submarines, had its main bases on the Kola Peninsula, within the Arctic Circle.⁴⁹ In the early Cold War, Soviet strategic submarines had to enter the North Atlantic from the Arctic through the maritime chokepoints of the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) Gap to reach their patrol areas. Sustaining an active anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capability in the GIUK Gap and surrounding seas thus became a priority task for NATO's naval forces, led by the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (SACLANT).



The bastion strategy. Darker shaded area: ambition of control. Lighter shaded area: ambition of denial. Courtesy of the Norwegian Ministry of Defence

22. In the later Cold War, as the range of Soviet submarine launched ballistic missiles increased, it became unnecessary for strategic submarines to enter the North Atlantic to be within range of targets in North America. With this enhanced missile range and in the face of effective ASW operations by NATO, which was greatly assisted by the SOSUS system in the GIUK Gap and elsewhere in the North Atlantic, Soviet strategic submarines increasingly restricted their operations to the sea areas close to their bases on the Kola Peninsula under the polar ice cap.⁵⁰ This became known as the ‘bastion’ strategy, with Russian strategic submarines seeking sanctuary under the ice to protect their nuclear second strike capability.

23. A second main responsibility of SACLANT was to maintain the transatlantic lines of communication. In the event of an attack on NATO in Europe, the numerical superiority of Warsaw Pact forces could only have been balanced by rapid reinforcements reaching Europe from the United States. The Soviet Navy, sending surface and submarine units through the GIUK Gap, would have sought to disrupt these lines of communication and prevent these reinforcements arriving. NATO used to run annual exercises to practice these reinforcement operations, involving up to 100,000 US and other Allied personnel.⁵¹ Preventing the Soviet Navy entering the North Atlantic from the High North thus became a matter of existential importance for NATO’s position in Europe.

24. In the last phase of the Cold War, NATO’s response to the maritime challenge evolved into one of forward defence, advancing the defensive line eastwards from the GIUK Gap into the Norwegian Sea to contain Soviet naval forces in the Arctic and prevent them

50 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q31. SOSUS (the Sound Surveillance System) was a system of fixed seabed passive sonar arrays deployed in strategic points around the North Atlantic. It formed a vital part of NATO’s layered anti-submarine warfare system, See Hennessy, P and Jinks, J, *The Silent Deep: The Royal Navy Submarine Service since 1945*, Penguin Books, London 2016, p 324–332.

51 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Qq34–35; Heather A. Conley and Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen ([DIA0011](#)). See also Hamre J J and Conley H A, *The Centrality of the North Atlantic to NATO and US strategic interests* in Olsen, J A (ed.) *NATO and the North Atlantic: Revitalising Collective Defence*, RUSI Whitehall Paper 87, March 2017

getting near the entrances to the North Atlantic.⁵² At the core of the Forward Maritime Strategy as it became established in the 1980s was the fast dispatch of a powerful NATO striking fleet built around US and UK aircraft carriers into the Norwegian Sea at the outset of the conflict, to prevent the Soviet Navy reaching the entrances to the Atlantic and to provide air power to assist in the defence of Norway.⁵³ Alongside the carrier groups and other ASW units, US and UK attack submarines would have played a key role in seeking out Soviet strategic submarines operating under the Arctic ice. As the historian Dr James Jinks told us:

Part of the Maritime Strategy—the aggressive Maritime Strategy that we heard about in the ’80s—was that if you started pushing forward to go after these Russian submarines that were staying in waters that were familiar to them, you would then force the Russians to use a lot of their assets—their other submarines, their surface ships and aircraft—to protect those submarines.⁵⁴

25. In the history of the Royal Navy Submarine Service which he co-authored with Lord Hennessy, Dr Jinks summarised how the importance of the Arctic grew as the Cold War reached its conclusion:

The Maritime Strategy and the Soviet response to it conceptually transformed the Arctic from a natural scientific laboratory and region of occasional and exceptional activity into a possible battle-space on a par with the Northern Pacific or the GIUK Gap. Had World War III come it would have seen combat of great ferocity.⁵⁵

26. A second important strategic role which the UK would have played in the High North was in the territorial defence of Norway. The Royal Marines of 3 Commando Brigade, whose involvement in Arctic operations goes back to operations in Northern Russia in 1919, began sending detachments on regular exercises in Norway in the 1960s to develop and sustain cold weather warfare capability. By the end of the Cold War, brigade-sized formations were being sent on these annual exercises.⁵⁶ In the event of conflict, 3 Commando Brigade would have been deployed to Norway alongside amphibious formations from the United States Marine Corps and the Dutch Korps Mariniers to deter or counter a Soviet invasion.⁵⁷ The UK also provided a contribution centred on a British Army battalion to the Allied Command Europe Mobile Force (Land), a separate multinational NATO force tasked with rapid deployment to areas of likely confrontation, including NATO’s northern or southern flanks.⁵⁸ The AMF(L) was disbanded in 2002, reportedly because it could no longer be sustained after the British contribution was withdrawn during the build up to the Iraq War.⁵⁹

52 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q25 [Professor Grove]

53 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q25

54 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q31

55 Hennessy and Jinks, p 561

56 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q79; Royal Norwegian Embassy, London ([DIA0047](#)). See also Thompson, J, *The Royal Marines: From Sea Soldiers to a Special Force*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London 2000, pp 529–532

57 Oxford Research Group ([DTA0001](#))

58 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Qq104, 106. See also Maloney, S, ‘Fire Brigade or Tocsin? NATO’s ACE Mobile Force, Flexible Response and the Cold War’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27:4 (2004), 585–613

59 [‘Crack Nato unit disbanded as Britain pulls out’](#), *Daily Telegraph*, 14 August 2002

27. **The strategic importance of the High North and the North Atlantic to the security of the UK and Europe cannot be overstated. During the Cold War a huge amount of effort was invested in the development of plans and capability to counter the threat that existed to NATO's Northern Flank and the wider North Atlantic. Although we are not facing challenges on the same scale today, the prospect of Russian power being projected from the High North into the North Atlantic has returned and a comprehensive strategy is needed to meet this threat.**

Current UK Arctic policy

28. The FCO's Polar Regions Department (PRD) has responsibilities in respect of both of the polar regions. Ms Rumble told us that the Antarctic occupies the greater part of the Department's time, because of the UK's obligations under the Antarctic Treaty, and the need to maintain the territorial claim to British Antarctic Territory and other territories in the South Atlantic. While the PRD is responsible for all matters relating to the Antarctic, it only co-ordinates policy relating to the Arctic, and policy leads are dispersed across different Government departments.⁶⁰ The House of Lords Arctic Committee questioned the effectiveness of this arrangement and the adequacy of the resources that the PRD has to give Arctic matters the priority that they require.⁶¹ The Lords Committee recommended that the Government should appoint an Arctic Ambassador or Envoy to ensure greater cross-government focus and co-ordination of Arctic policy.⁶² The Government, as indicated in our evidence session⁶³ and a recent Westminster Hall debate on the subject,⁶⁴ is yet to be convinced on this matter.

29. The UK's first Arctic White Paper, the 2013 Arctic Policy Framework, laid out the UK's overall approach to the changing Arctic and the human, environmental and commercial aspects of UK policy which relate to the region.⁶⁵ In oral evidence the Minister for the Armed Forces, Rt Hon Mark Lancaster TD VR MP summed up the approach from the 2013 Framework:

We will seek to support the continued peace and stability of the region while maintaining fair and equitable access to UK business and citizens and promoting the correct balance between environmental challenges and sustainable development... I am pleased to say that, from a military point of view, the Arctic maintains a position where we have good co-operation. There is low tension. That co-operation really has meant that we have not seen some of the issues that perhaps we face elsewhere in the world.⁶⁶

30. The Arctic has not featured in recent UK defence and security policy documents. There was no mention of the region in the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR),⁶⁷ an oblique reference without elaboration to the Arctic warfare capability of the

60 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Qq49, 54

61 See also [Oral evidence taken on 15 November 2017](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q10 [James Gray MP]

62 House of Lords Select Committee on the Arctic, [Responding to a changing Arctic](#), Report of Session 2014–15, HL Paper 118, paras 386–394

63 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q59

64 HC Deb, 29 November 2017, [c 141WH](#)

65 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [Adapting To Change: UK policy towards the Arctic](#), October 2013

66 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q46

67 HM Government, [Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review](#), Cm 7948, 19 October 2010

Royal Marines in the 2015 SDSR,⁶⁸ and no mention again in 2018's National Security Capability Review.⁶⁹ In oral evidence the Minister addressed the Government's current view of the military security position:

From a military point of view, the Arctic maintains a position where we have good co-operation. There is low tension. That co-operation really has meant that we have not seen some of the issues that perhaps we face elsewhere in the world.⁷⁰

On Russian activity in the Arctic, the Minister said:

We are seeing a build-up along [the Russian Arctic] coastline, but we assess that it is nothing more than what would be deemed a reasonable defensive posture by Russia. Equally, while, as the Committee knows, we will not go into detail on underwater activities, it is fair to say that we are seeing a level of activity by the Russians that we probably have not seen since the end of the Cold War. They are building up their capabilities. That has been well documented recently in speeches by both the Chief of the General Staff and the Chief of the Defence Staff.

Asked if the view was that the Arctic was being militarised, the Minister said:

There is certainly military activity in the Arctic. All the Arctic nations, with the exception of Iceland, which has a treaty with the US, maintain a military capability. We perceive that at the moment to be defensive in nature compared with other areas, but we are monitoring it very carefully.⁷¹

31. A few weeks after this evidence session the Government's 2018 refresh of the Arctic Framework was published. Unlike its 2013 predecessor, it includes a specific section on defence. This recognised that although the Arctic continues to be peaceful, stable and well-governed, the increased interest and commercial activity in the region provides the potential for heightened tension. It also recognised the right of the Arctic States to protect their interests by enhancing their security presence. It continued:

However, the build-up of Arctic military capabilities by several Arctic States makes the future less certain. The UK remains committed to preserving the stability and security of the Arctic region. We will work with our international partners and allies through defence engagement, bilateral and multilateral security cooperation. This will include essential cold weather training exercises and participation in the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable. NATO also remains a central plank for cooperation among its Arctic State members.⁷²

32. We repeat the concerns voiced by the House of Lords Arctic Committee about the way in which UK Arctic policy is prioritised and co-ordinated. The Polar Regions Department's considerable responsibilities in respect of the Antarctic place Arctic

68 HM Government, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*, Cm 9161, 23 November 2015, para 4.47

69 HM Government, *National Security Capability Review*, 28 March 2018

70 *Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018*, HC 388 [2017–19], Q46

71 *Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018*, HC 388 [2017–19], Q48

72 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Beyond the Ice: UK policy towards the Arctic*, April 2018

affairs at risk of being made a lower priority, and the dispersal of policy responsibility for Arctic affairs across Whitehall has the potential to frustrate co-ordination. We ask the Government to reconsider its decision not to appoint an Arctic Ambassador to improve co-ordination of policy in Whitehall and bolster UK representation in Arctic affairs.

4 The new security environment

33. The weight of evidence the Committee has received supports the view that the Arctic has seen an increase in military activity in recent years, and that this continues to be reflected in the defence policies of the Arctic States. In this chapter we examine these trends in relation to the Arctic States and NATO.

Russia

34. The Arctic is a place of great significance to Russia, for a broad range of historical, cultural and economic reasons, as well as for its security.⁷³ Dr Dimitriy Tulupov, Senior Lecturer at the School of International Relations, St Petersburg State University, told us in oral evidence that:

Since 1930s the Arctic has been the area of strategic significance both in the system of domestic and foreign policy of Russia. For Moscow, it has always been vitally important to provide sufficient military presence in the Arctic as a necessary condition and a guarantee of its regional interests' implementation.⁷⁴

Dr Igor Sutyagin, Senior Research Fellow in Russia Studies at RUSI, argued:

The Arctic is terribly important for Russia, because it is responsible for ... between 12% to 15% of Russian GDP and 80% of Russian gas. If there were a serious sabotage act there, it would be a very serious blow to the Russian economy and so Russian national security in general, not only defence and military security. That is why they want the ability to react to that and to defend it if necessary.⁷⁵

35. Protecting national interests in the Arctic region appeared as a core task in the 2015 revision of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation.⁷⁶ The 2015 revision of the Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation placed a greater emphasis on reducing the level of threats and increasing military capability compared to the previous 2001 edition.⁷⁷ In presenting the 2015 Maritime Doctrine to President Putin, the Russian Deputy Prime Minister said that the two areas of main focus were the Arctic and the Atlantic, due, amongst other reasons, to the growing proximity of NATO to Russia's borders.⁷⁸ A 2017 document laying out the Russian policy on naval operations to 2030 identifies first on its list of existing and emerging threats:

the aspiration of a range of states, primarily the United States of America and its allies, to dominate on the World Ocean, including the Arctic, and to achieve overwhelming superiority of their naval forces.⁷⁹

73 University of Hull ([DIA0010](#))

74 Dr Dimitriy Tulupov ([DIA0018](#))

75 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q43

76 [The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation](#), 29 June 2015, para 32(s)

77 [Maritime Doctrine of Russian Federation](#), July 2001, p 11; [Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation](#), July 2015, p 22. See Dr Andrew Foxall ([DIA0005](#)); Human Security Centre ([DIA0006](#)); Heather A. Conley and Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen ([DIA0011](#)); Dr Dimitriy Tulupov ([DIA0018](#))

78 'Russian Federation Marine Doctrine', Website of the President of Russia, 26 July 2015

79 [Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Operations for the Period Until 2030](#), July 2017, p 5

36. In 2014 Russia reorganised its regional military command structure, creating a dedicated Joint Strategic Command (North) for the Arctic region. As well as the Northern Fleet, this headquarters is responsible for all military assets in a large area of Northern Russia adjacent to the Barents and Kara Seas, as well as the Russian islands in the Arctic Ocean.⁸⁰ The Northern Fleet itself, although a shadow of its former strength as part of the Soviet Navy, has benefitted from a major period of Russian naval recapitalisation through successive State Armament Programmes. Despite lengthy delays which have stretched programmes over decades, Russia's newest classes of nuclear submarines are entering service to replace late-Cold War era platforms.⁸¹ Russia's latest generation of strategic ballistic missile submarines, the *Borei* class variants, are being deployed in the Northern and Pacific fleets.⁸² The newest class of multi-role nuclear powered submarines, the *Yasen* class, combines the capabilities of an attack submarine with powerful guided missile systems. Crucially, these new platforms use the latest quieting technology to make them as undetectable as possible.⁸³ The Northern Fleet also possesses a number of major surface combatants, although the numbers of these units available for front line service is disputed. The surface order of battle nonetheless appears to be growing, with the Russian Navy's newest amphibious assault ship reportedly joining the Northern Fleet.⁸⁴

37. The level of Russian naval activity has grown significantly. The Secretary of State for Defence told us in February that there has been a tenfold increase in Russian submarine activity in the North Atlantic.⁸⁵ Russian submarine activity up to the GIUK Gap has been reported as being "currently equalling or surpassing Cold War levels".⁸⁶ A former deputy commander of NATO Maritime Forces Europe has described the situation as the 'Fourth Battle of the Atlantic'.⁸⁷ A paper published by RUSI in March 2017 says:

Russia has re-established the bastion strategy, reaching a stable level of activity from 2008 ... The bastion defence concept remains essentially the same as during the Cold War. Defensive and offensive operations are intertwined and indistinguishable. In a conflict, Russia will seek to protect its strategic forces, which would involve establishing sea-control in its immediate vicinity and sea-denial further west and south, down to the

80 A map of Russian military districts is available from the US Defence Intelligence Agency publication *Russia Military Power 2017*, 28 June 2017, p 14. See Human Security Centre ([DIA0006](#)); Bruce Jones ([DIA0026](#)); Dr Igor Sutyagin ([DIA0028](#)); Dr Sascha Dov Bachmann and Mr Andres B. Munoz Mosquera ([DIA0029](#)); Oxford Research Group ([DTA0001](#)); 'Russia's Defense Ministry establishes Arctic Strategic Command', *TASS*, 1 December 2014

81 Dr Pavel Baev ([DIA0014](#)); Professor Alexander Sergunin ([DIA0021](#)); Dr Adam Lajeunesse ([DIA0024](#)); *Russia's Rearmament Programme*, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper CBP-7877, 24 January 2017; 'Russia modernises its Northern Fleet', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 4 July 2016

82 Professor Alexander Sergunin ([DIA0021](#))

83 *Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017*, HC 879 [2016–17], Q76; Professor James Kraska and Professor Sean Fahey ([DIA0015](#)); Professor Alexander Sergunin ([DIA0021](#)). For a detailed analysis of the growing problems of submarine detection as quieting technology improves and the ambient noise of the ocean grows louder, see NATO Joint Air Power Competence Centre, *Alliance Airborne Anti-Submarine Warfare: A Forecast for Maritime Air ASW in the Future Operational Environment*, June 2016, Appendix B.

84 'Russian Navy accepts cutting-edge amphibious assault ship for service', *TASS*, 20 June 2018

85 *Oral evidence taken on 21 February 2018*, HC 814, Qq7, 41

86 'NATO looks to Poseidon to plug GIUK gap against Russian submarines', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 10 February 2016

87 Foggo, J G (Vice Admiral USN), 'The Fourth Battle of the Atlantic', *US Naval Institute Proceedings* – June 2016, Vol 142/6/1360,

GIUK Gap. Some attack submarines will most likely also operate further west in the Atlantic. Such operations would weaken NATO's ability to project forces in Europe.⁸⁸

The tempo of exercises and training events has also remained high. In 2017 the Northern Fleet conducted 4,700 training events and 213 missile firing drills. In May 2018, the *Borei* class submarine *Yuri Dolgoruky* conducted a test firing of a 'volley' of four ballistic missiles in the White Sea. A few weeks later in June 2018 the Northern Fleet conducted an unannounced exercise that was its largest in ten years.⁸⁹

38. The first military icebreaker built for the Russian Navy in 40 years entered service with the Northern Fleet in 2017.⁹⁰ A further class of military icebreakers is planned, with reports suggesting that these ships may be armed with cruise missiles.⁹¹ The first of a new *Arktika* class of nuclear powered icebreakers, the largest yet constructed, was launched in 2016 and is due to be commissioned in 2019.⁹² A second in class was launched in 2017 and a third is planned.⁹³

39. The presence of Russian land forces has also grown substantially, with particular attention being drawn to the re-activation or new establishment of permanent bases in the Arctic. James Gray MP described how several bases have been established along the length of Russia's Arctic coastline.⁹⁴ The 'trefoil' bases that have been built on the Russian Arctic islands to act as permanent garrisons for troops, are some of the largest manmade structures that have been built in the higher Arctic.⁹⁵ These garrisons have been accompanied by a series of airfields, deepwater ports and other infrastructure.⁹⁶ In January 2017 the Russian Defence Ministry announced its intention to build over 100 facilities in the Arctic by the end of that year.⁹⁷

40. Dr Sutyagin described the build-up of ground forces in the region. Under the Russian Joint Strategic Command (North), two motorised infantry brigades headquartered near the Norwegian and Finnish borders respectively have been receiving special training for Arctic warfare. Unlike many of the light infantry forces deployed by the nations bordering Russia, these are fully equipped combined arms formations equipped with main battle tanks, armoured vehicles, self-propelled artillery, air defence systems and air assault capability.⁹⁸ There is the possibility that they may be reinforced to division-level formations in the future. A number of other formations in neighbouring military districts have been given responsibility for the defence of the Arctic coastline.⁹⁹

88 Tamnes, R, 'The Significance of the North Atlantic and the Norwegian Contribution' from Olsen, J A (ed.) *NATO and the North Atlantic: Revitalising Collective Defence*, RUSI Whitehall Paper 87, March 2017, pp 21–22

89 '[Alarm-drill: 36 Russian warships sail out to Barents Sea](#)', *The Barents Observer*, 13 June 2018; 'Northern Fleet stages largest naval exercise in a decade', *Jane's Navy International*, 15 June 2018

90 '[Russia's advanced icebreaker leads nuclear sub through Arctic ice for first time](#)', *TASS*, 28 April 2018

91 '[Will Russia Arm Its Icebreaker Fleet With Supersonic Cruise Missiles?](#)', *The Diplomat*, 23 May 2017

92 '[Russia to Commission World's Largest Nuclear Icebreaker in 2019](#)', *The Diplomat*, 28 February 2017

93 '[Russia launches "world's biggest and most powerful" nuclear icebreaker ship](#)', *Independent*, 25 September 2017

94 [Oral evidence taken on 15 November 2017](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q7; Dr Igor Sutyagin ([DIA0028](#))

95 '[Russia unveils its giant new Arctic base](#)' *The Times*, 18 April 2017; 'Fire and ice: Russia arms itself for the Arctic', *Jane's International Defence Review*, 27 June 2018

96 Professor James Kraska and Professor Sean Fahey ([DIA0015](#))

97 '[Russian Defense Ministry to build over 100 facilities in Arctic region](#)', *TASS*, 25 January 2017

98 'Fire and ice: Russia arms itself for the Arctic', *Jane's International Defence Review*, 27 June 2018

99 Human Security Centre ([DIA0006](#)); Dr Igor Sutyagin ([DIA0028](#)); Royal Norwegian Embassy, London ([DIA0047](#)); '[Russia ramps up its military in the Arctic](#)', *BBC News*, 27 April 2017

41. In 2007 Russia resumed long range strategic bomber patrols over the Arctic up to the airspaces of a number of neighbouring states.¹⁰⁰ Shortly before the formation of Joint Strategic Command (North), it was announced that Russia intended to build 13 airfields and 10 radar guidance stations in the Arctic region.¹⁰¹ In December 2015 the Command was given its own dedicated air force and air defence formation in the shape of the 45th Air Force and Air Defence Army.¹⁰² In 2018 it was announced that Arctic air patrols would be substantially expanded in number and geographical scope.¹⁰³ This has been accompanied by the progressive installation of sophisticated radar and air defence capabilities.¹⁰⁴

42. There is considerable disagreement in the evidence we have received on the reasons behind Russia's military build-up. Witnesses such as Dr Tulupov argued that there was no aggressive intent behind this activity, that the primary aim was maintenance of Russian sovereignty and that the Russian military needed to regenerate its capability to take account of the increased human activity in the region.¹⁰⁵ Others, such as Professor Kennedy-Pipe, have taken a different view:

I think there is a tendency to wish away some of the tensions that I think we have seen beginning—not least the disquiet over what is seen as the remilitarisation of some of the historic Soviet bases. I think that that has to be put against—if you look at the reaction of some Russian spokespeople after, for example, manoeuvres in Norway, there have been threats, openly uttered, about what will happen should Norway behave in an increasingly militaristic manner ... The official line in the Russian press is it is about surveillance, it is about search and rescue, it is about preparing for sea passages, but one can also read it a very different way, and I'm afraid I take a much bleaker view that the kind of investment that is being made has or portends great power ambitions in the Arctic.¹⁰⁶

Professor Dodds argued that Russia's continuing willingness to be a co-operative partner through the Arctic Council, UNCLOS and other multilateral fora should not be taken for granted:

I would also say some of that co-operation that has been talked about could be quickly retracted. I think when [other states] talk fairly positively about Russia as this largely benevolent or constructive player working through the Arctic Council, I do not share that confidence.¹⁰⁷

Similarly, it has been argued that the sense of exceptionalism which is discussed above at paragraph 9 has led to miscalculation of Russia's objectives; as Dr Andrew Foxall argues:

100 Dr Brooke Smith-Windsor ([DIA0008](#)); Dr Rob Huebert ([DIA0013](#)); '[Russia restarts Cold War patrols](#)', *BBC News*, 17 August 2007

101 '[Russia's Defense Ministry establishes Arctic Strategic Command](#)', *TASS*, 1 December 2014

102 Human Security Centre ([DIA0006](#)); Dr Igor Sutyagin ([DIA0028](#))

103 '[Russian Navy announces it will significantly expand Arctic air patrols](#)', *The Barents Observer*, 2 January 2018

104 Dr Andrew Foxall ([DIA0005](#)); Human Security Centre ([DIA0006](#)); Dr Dimitriy Tulupov ([DIA0018](#)); Professor Alexander Sergunin ([DIA0021](#)); Bruce Jones ([DIA0026](#)); Oxford Research Group ([DTA0001](#)); '[Russia to flood the Arctic with state-of-the-art radar systems to guard against sneak nuclear attack from the West](#)', *The Sun*, 10 February 2017.

105 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q25.

106 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q30

107 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q30

There is a prevailing belief in Western capitals that the Arctic is somewhat exempt from rising geopolitical tensions between Russia and the West. Such a belief is dangerous and misleading. While the fact that Russia outmanoeuvred the West in Ukraine and Syria does not necessarily mean that Russia poses a threat to its neighbours in the Arctic, the Kremlin's actions and rhetoric over the recent years suggest that it is both capable and willing to take its standoff with the West to the Arctic.¹⁰⁸

Norway

43. Norway's centrality to the defence of the Northern Flank has been discussed in the previous chapter. In its London Embassy's written evidence it was underlined that the Arctic continues to be a region characterised by peace, stability and international co-operation, and it was the strategic goal of Norway's to make sure this general positive state of affairs continues in the future.¹⁰⁹ The evidence also emphasised that:

The most significant change in Norway's security environment over the last decade is Russia's growing military capability, more assertive foreign policy and its use of force. Russia has modernised its weapons, strengthened the Northern Fleet and revitalized the bastion concept to protect its nuclear submarines located at the Kola Peninsula. NATO, and Norway as the guardian of the Alliance's northern flank, must address Russia's new strategic capabilities and increased military activity in the maritime domain. Norway is especially concerned about the freedom of manoeuvre in the Norwegian Sea, North Sea and the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap in the event of a crisis.¹¹⁰

44. In oral evidence Colonel John Andreas Olsen, the Norwegian Defence Attaché to London, briefly outlined the history of his country's relations with its Russian neighbour, explaining that Norway's policy has been to take a dual approach, continuing bilateral co-operation while at the same time maintaining a policy of strong defence¹¹¹ Although Norway does not consider Russia to be a direct threat, it has observed what it sees as the 'new normal' in the Arctic and the High North.¹¹² In its annual assessment of current security threats the Norwegian Intelligence Service has said that growing Russian presence in the Arctic and High North has been an important part of its modernisation programme and it expects this presence to grow. Norway can expect an increased level of military presence on and around its borders and a heightened level of activity including snap exercises.¹¹³

45. Norway has reacted to this situation by steadily increasing its defence capability. Since 2015 Norway has increased its defence spending by 25% in real terms. Norway will be acquiring 52 F-35 Joint Strike Fighters, five P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, a new class of conventional submarines, modern long-range air defence systems and enhanced strategic intelligence capabilities.¹¹⁴ In 2017 a further lift in the defence budget

108 Dr Andrew Foxall (DIA0005)

109 Royal Norwegian Embassy, London (DIA0047)

110 Royal Norwegian Embassy, London (DIA0047)

111 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q23

112 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q29

113 Norwegian Intelligence Service, [Focus 2018](#), March 2018

114 [Speech by H.E. Mrs Erna Solberg, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Norway](#), RUSI, 6 June 2018; [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q29

was announced, along with a major reorganisation of forces in the far north of the country to increase numbers of personnel, response times and exercise activity.¹¹⁵ It has also long been the site of regional training and exercising for NATO allies. Alongside the annual training it hosts for UK and Dutch personnel, Norway began hosting rotational detachments from the United States Marine Corps in January 2017. In June 2018 it was announced that this arrangement is being extended and increased to up to double the number of current personnel for a period of up to five years.¹¹⁶ This decision provoked a strong reaction from the Russian Government which said it “will not remain free of consequence”.¹¹⁷ Norway will host Exercise TRIDENT JUNCTURE in the autumn of 2018, which is due to involve 35,000 personnel from 30 NATO members and partners.¹¹⁸

Denmark

46. The Danish Ambassador to London, H.E. Mr Claus Grube explained that the priority of Denmark’s defence and security policy in the region has been to maintain its status as an area of low tension and international co-operation.¹¹⁹ The executive summary of a Danish Ministry of Defence analysis of Arctic policy in 2016 says:

Developments in the Arctic do not occur in isolation. The full report details a number of risks that may entail greater political and military tension in the Arctic security environment. However, the overall conclusion of the report is that in general in all likelihood the future of the Arctic will be shaped by cooperation and competition in the Arctic rather than confrontation and conflict.¹²⁰

Mr Grube indicated that although Denmark recognised an increased level of military activity in the Arctic, it was not seen as a leading security priority, particularly in light of more pressing threats in other theatres such as the Baltic.¹²¹

47. In December 2016, a political agreement was reached which stipulated that “emphasis should be put on optimizing and streamlining existing Arctic capabilities rather than acquiring new major capability enlargements, such as additional ships and aircraft”.¹²² The most recent Danish defence policy review for the period 2018–23 recognises both the increasing geopolitical importance of the region and the increased military activity in the area, while reaffirming the priority of maintaining the Arctic as a low-tension region.¹²³ However, a recent report from Danish defence intelligence which identifies Russian military expansion in as “primarily defensive in nature” goes on to say:

115 ‘Norway increases defence spending, reinforces northern forces’, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 18 October 2017

116 ‘[Norway opens for continued USMC rotational training and exercises](#)’, Norwegian Government press release, 13 June 2018

117 ‘[Russia vows consequences after Norway invites more U.S. Marines](#)’, *Reuters*, 14 June 2018

118 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q29; ‘[Plans for Massive NATO exercise in Norway underway](#)’, SHAPE press release, 1 March 2018

119 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Qq2–3

120 Danish Ministry of Defence, [Forsvarsministeriets fremtidige opgaveløsning i Arktis](#), June 2016. The English executive summary is found at pp. 15–20

121 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q12

122 Kingdom of Denmark ([DIA0027](#))

123 [Danish Defence Agreement 2018–23](#), January 2018

it involves elements that could be used for offensive purposes, not least the ongoing preparations for deploying tactical combat aircraft to the forward bases. At the same time, the initiatives contain elements that are politically aggressive, as Russia is using them to flag its strategic intentions.¹²⁴

Iceland

48. Iceland has no standing military forces, but its geographic location in relation to the North Atlantic gives it a great strategic significance. The United States operated a major base, Naval Air Station Keflavik, throughout the Cold War. In March 2006, the US unilaterally announced that it would be withdrawing standing forces and closing the Naval Air Station.¹²⁵ From 2016, however, a US presence has been re-established at Keflavik with the US Navy operating P-8 maritime patrol aircraft on a rotational basis.¹²⁶

49. Where there had previously been a degree of political resistance in Iceland to the development of defence and security policy, the combination of the American withdrawal and the new risks and opportunities arising from the changing environment of the Arctic led to a re-evaluation of national security policy.¹²⁷ The Icelandic Ambassador H.E. Mr Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson identified “certain developments in the Russian military that might be of concern to us in the future. For a long period, there has been quite a big residual capability there on the Russian side.” He added subsequently:

Although we hope for peaceful co-operation and no militarisation of the region, there is always the risk that events outside the area will affect the co-operation and stability that we want to see there.¹²⁸

50. An additional development following the American withdrawal in 2006 was the institution of Icelandic Air Policing by NATO in 2008 to provide Iceland with an air defence capability in the absence of its own air force. In June 2018 it was announced that the Royal Air Force would be participating in Icelandic Air Policing for the first time in the 2019 rotation.¹²⁹

Sweden and Finland

51. The Swedish Ambassador, H.E. Mr Torbjörn Sohlström, told us:

The Swedish Arctic is a limited part of the Swedish territory. We are more a Baltic Sea nation than an Arctic nation, I think it is fair to say. The Arctic

124 Danish Defence Intelligence Service, *Intelligence Risk Assessment 2017*, p 44

125 ‘US to withdraw military presence from Iceland’, *Jane’s Intelligence Watch Report*, 17 March 2006

126 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q5; ‘US and Iceland reaffirm defence cooperation with new agreement’, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 30 June 2016; ‘US Navy deploys Poseidon to plug GIUK Gap’, *Jane’s Navy International*, 1 November 2016; [In Return to Cold War Posture, U.S. Sending Sub-Hunting Planes to Iceland](#), *Foreign Policy*, 4 December 2017

127 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q13 [H.E. Mr Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson]. See also Bailes, A J K and Ólafsson, K, [Nordic And Arctic Affairs: Iceland’s National Security Policy: Latest Progress](#), December 2014

128 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q4

129 Ministry of Defence, [‘Defence Secretary announces new UK deployments’](#), 8 June 2018

has always been a significant part of our national defence because of the way that it relates to the bigger picture. We have changed the trend; we have started again, from a moderate level, to upgrade our national defence.¹³⁰

52. Sweden's Arctic policy is based on its Arctic strategy of 2011, which stated that "The current security policy challenges in the Arctic are not of a military nature", although it was recognised that as security co-operation between the Nordic nations deepened, new responsibilities and a higher expectation for action might arise.¹³¹ The Ambassador observed that there were two perspectives to current security developments in the Arctic. The first is to see Russia in the broader perspective as modernising and building up its military forces, and to consider that it has shown to have used military forces to further political objectives. This should be a matter of concern that is rightly taken into account in defence policy. The second is to look at the Arctic in a regional perspective and see an area of stability characterised by international co-operation, which includes Russia:

So there are two perspectives. One is a source of concern and has to do with general Russian behaviour and military posture, and the other is perhaps a source of some encouragement, which is the fact that if you see it in a strict regional way, the Arctic is a region of relative stability.¹³²

Asked whether the Arctic was being militarised, Mr Sohlström said:

Clearly, there is a general Russian focus on building up, modernising and upgrading its military forces in all directions, and the Arctic is part of that for a number of reasons, because that is what they do all over their territory. Because they want to secure the north-east passage, a new transport route is the reason why they are deploying some new forces up there. Obviously, the whole area around the Arctic, in particular the Kola Peninsula, is of strategic importance to Russia and they have a serious military presence there. We see all of that: is that reason to call it militarisation of the Arctic? I am not sure.¹³³

53. Sweden has nonetheless responded to the more general threat from Russia, especially, as the Ambassador mentions above, in relation to the Baltic. In September 2016, the Swedish Armed Forces announced a permanent and immediate deployment of troops to the island of Gotland in the Baltic. At the height of the Cold War around 25,000 troops had been stationed on the strategically important island, but the last forces were withdrawn in 2004. The sudden 2016 deployment came about as a result of what was reported as "a new and highly classified intelligence assessment pointing to an increased threat from Russia".¹³⁴ In 2017 Gotland was the focus of Exercise AURORA 17, Sweden's largest military exercise in decades involving 19,000 personnel from eight nations.¹³⁵ Also in 2017 the decision was taken to re-introduce military conscription because of growing concerns about Russian military activity.¹³⁶

130 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q12

131 Government Offices of Sweden, [Sweden's strategy for the Arctic region](#), 2011, pp 14–15

132 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q4

133 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q11

134 Grandholm, N, [Did a Top Secret Threat Assessment Prompt Sweden to Deploy Troops to the Baltic Island of Gotland?](#), RUSI Commentary, 28 September 2016

135 ['Fearing Russia, Sweden holds biggest war games in 20 years'](#), *Reuters*, 13 September 2017

136 ['Sweden brings back military conscription amid Baltic tensions'](#), *BBC News*, 2 March 2017

54. A 2016 report on Finnish foreign and defence policy from the Office of the Prime Minister of Finland stated:

In recent years Russia has also increased its military footprint and activity in the Arctic, where the situation, so far, has remained relatively stable. Russia uses a wide range of military and non-military instruments in advancing its interests. The security policy environment of Finland, a member of the western community, has transformed. A more tense security situation in Europe and the Baltic Sea region will directly impact Finland. The use or threat of military force against Finland cannot be excluded.¹³⁷

The paper goes on to emphasise the importance of co-operation through bilateral and multilateral engagement.¹³⁸ In 2017 a separate report on defence policy was issued which repeats the observations on Russia's increased Arctic footprint and goes into detail about the nature of the Russian military's new and developing capabilities.¹³⁹

55. Although Sweden and Finland are not members of NATO, they are two of NATO's Enhanced Opportunities Partners who play a substantial role in Alliance exercises and information sharing.¹⁴⁰ The Swedish Ambassador indicated that it was not the current policy of the Swedish Government to seek NATO membership "but the evolution is certainly towards an increasingly close relationship with NATO".¹⁴¹ Written evidence has suggested that any decision by Sweden or Finland to seek membership might be interpreted as an aggressive move towards Russia's Arctic border.¹⁴² Russia has deployed some notably aggressive rhetoric in the past warning of consequences if either state took the decision to join.¹⁴³ In 2017 Sweden and Finland joined the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) which, as discussed below in paragraph 67, has a potential role in the region.¹⁴⁴

United States

56. Arctic security has generally played a minor role in US defence policy and Arctic issues have often had little resonance outside of Alaska.¹⁴⁵ The most recent high-level American defence policy documents make little reference to the Arctic. The National Security Strategy of December 2017¹⁴⁶ makes a single mention of the Arctic in a section referring to the USA's role in international institutions, and the 2018 summary of the National Defense Strategy does not mention the Arctic at all.¹⁴⁷ But documents which have

137 Prime Minister's Office, [Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy](#), 2016, p 11

138 Prime Minister's Office, [Government Report on Finnish Foreign and Security Policy](#), 2016, pp 24–25

139 Prime Minister's Office, [Government's Defence Report 2017](#), February 2017, pp 8–10

140 See '[NATO's Enhanced Opportunities Partners](#)', German Marshall Fund of the United States, 29 June 2016

141 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q7

142 Arctic Advisory Group (DIA0003); Oxford Research Group (DTA0001)

143 '[Sweden summons Russia ambassador after Nato threat](#)', *BBC News*, 11 September 2015; '[Russia Issues Fresh Threats Against Unaligned Nordic States](#)', *DefenseNews*, 5 May 2016; '[Putin hints Russia will react if Finland joins NATO](#)', *Reuters*, 1 July 2016

144 Ministry of Defence, '[Sweden and Finland join UK-led response force](#)', 30 June 2017; 'Northern composure', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 13 April 2017

145 Congressional Research Service, [Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress](#), 21 May 2018, p 4; Wezeman, S T, 'Military Capabilities in the Arctic: A new Cold War in the High North?', SIPRI Background Paper, October 2016

146 Office of the President of the United States, [National Security Strategy of the United States of America](#), December 2017, p 40

147 US Department of Defense, [Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America](#), January 2018

looked into the region in more detail have noted the developing security environment. The Obama Administration's Arctic Strategy of 2013 identified the advancement of US security interests in the region as a priority.¹⁴⁸ The Pentagon released an Arctic Strategy later that year¹⁴⁹ and the US Navy updated its own Arctic Roadmap in 2014.¹⁵⁰ An updated Pentagon strategy of 2016 was more direct about the source of threat, noting Russia's commitment to build capability to defeat the US and its allies. The strategy included a commitment to continue exercises and training in the Arctic as well as in the GIUK gap and its approaches.¹⁵¹ Although, as elsewhere, divergent views exist in the US on whether tension is growing in the Arctic and Russian regeneration represents a genuine threat, a recent Congressional Research Service briefing observes:

US military forces (and US intelligence agencies) are paying renewed attention to the Arctic. This is particularly true in the case of the Navy and Coast Guard, for whom diminishment of Arctic sea ice is opening up potential new operating areas for their surface ships. The U.S. Air Force, Army, and Marine Corps, too, are beginning to focus more on Arctic operations.¹⁵²

57. The majority of US land forces stationed in the Arctic are part of US Army Alaska. Army units have increased their tempo of Arctic exercises in small detachments. In February 2014 troops from the Alaskan-based airborne brigade made the brigade's first landing north of the Arctic Circle¹⁵³ and exercises have continued to increase in size since then.¹⁵⁴ The United States Marine Corps has increased its rotational deployments in Norway in 2018.¹⁵⁵ The Arctic region is important for US and Canadian air and missile defences and surveillance radars part of the North Warning System are positioned in Alaska, Canada and Greenland.¹⁵⁶ The United States Air Force base in Thule, Greenland has recently been upgraded to improve its early warning capabilities.¹⁵⁷

58. As in the Royal Navy, US Navy submarines have a long tradition of Arctic operations. This capability is sustained through the Ice Exercise (ICEX) programme of biennial exercises which stretch back to the early Cold War. These exercises have been gradually growing in scope with ICEX 2018 including units from the Royal Navy, the Royal Canadian Navy and the Royal Canadian Air Force.¹⁵⁸ The Commandant of the United States Coast Guard has indicated that the USCG will seek authorisation to build six heavy icebreakers to increase its presence in the Arctic region.¹⁵⁹ In May 2018 the US Navy announced that it would be reactivating the US Second Fleet, which was previously the

148 Office of the President of the United States, *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*, May 2013

149 US Department of Defense, *Arctic Strategy*, November 2013

150 US Navy, *Arctic Roadmap 2014–2030*, February 2014. A new US Navy Arctic Strategy is due in the summer of 2018: '[Navy to Release Arctic Strategy This Summer, Will Include Blue Water Arctic Operations](#)', *USNI News*, 19 April 2018

151 US Department of Defense, *Report to Congress on Strategy to Protect United States National Security Interests in the Arctic Region*, December 2016

152 Congressional Research Service, *Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress*, 21 May 2018, p 64

153 Wezeman, S T, 'Military Capabilities in the Arctic: A new Cold War in the High North?', SIPRI Background Paper, October 2016

154 '[Army paratroopers train in Alaska's Arctic conditions](#)', *Army Times*, 27 February 2017

155 See paras 45 above and 107 below

156 Wezeman, S T, 'Military Capabilities in the Arctic: A new Cold War in the High North?', SIPRI Background Paper, October 2016

157 '[Arctic air base gets \\$40 million upgrade in face of increasing missile threats](#)', *CBS News*, 30 May 2017

158 US Navy, *ICEX 2018 Visitor Briefing Book*, January 2018

159 CSIS, *US Coast Guard: Priorities for the Future*, 1 August 2017

leading American striking fleet in the North Atlantic, at the core of the Maritime Strategy of the 1980s. The US Navy's Chief of Naval Operations identified the re-emergence of great power competition and the consequent need to reconsider the possibility of "high-end warfighting in the Atlantic" as the motivation for this decision.¹⁶⁰

Canada

59. Canada's approach to military security in the Arctic has been a cautious one, with a strong commitment to multilateralism and environmental security.¹⁶¹ Nonetheless, the changes in the natural environment have brought wider issues of security to the fore and a number of initiatives introduced from the late 2000s sought to strengthen Canadian Arctic sovereignty. Canada's 2008 defence White Paper placed an emphasis on Canadian Forces being able to exercise control over Canada's Arctic territories.¹⁶²

60. Canada's 2017 defence policy paper recognises the heightened international interest in the Arctic and acknowledges that an increasingly accessible Arctic will also bring new security challenges. The strategy also identifies Russia's ability to protect force from the Arctic into the North Atlantic, and the potential challenge that this poses to Canada and its NATO allies.¹⁶³ A particular emphasis has been placed on improved monitoring and surveillance to increase domain awareness in the Arctic, including the acquisition of new unmanned air systems and space-based surveillance assets.¹⁶⁴ Canada now operates 47 radar sites in the Arctic and has extended its Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) to cover the entirety of its Arctic territory.¹⁶⁵ Proposals to replace Canada's icebreaker fleet and to build a new class of offshore patrols for the Arctic have met with budgetary difficulties and other delays, although production of the latter, the *Harry DeWolf* class, is proceeding and the first vessel is due to be delivered in 2018.¹⁶⁶

61. Canada's main land forces in the Arctic are the Canadian Rangers, a lightly armed, self-sufficiently mobile force reserve force comprising First Nations and Inuit soldiers speaking 26 different languages and dialects and based in over 200 communities across northern Canada. In the late 2000s the Canadian Armed Forces formed four Arctic Response Company Groups and a new Arctic Training Centre was opened in 2013.¹⁶⁷ The 2017 White Paper also includes a commitment to "Acquire all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles and larger tracked semi-amphibious utility vehicles optimized for use in the Arctic environment".¹⁶⁸

160 'US revives 2nd Fleet to block Kremlin's Atlantic operations', *The Times*, 8 May 2018

161 Dr Rob Huebert ([DIA0013](#)); Dr Adam Lajeunesse ([DIA0024](#)); 'Eyeing up the new Arctic: competition in the Arctic Circle', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 14 January 2008

162 Government of Canada Department of National Defence, *Canada First Defence Strategy*, May 2008, p 8

163 Government of Canada Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's National Defence Policy*, June 2017

164 'Royal Canadian Air Force studying options for MALE UAV procurement' *Jane's International Defence Review*, 15 November 2017

165 'Canada expands air defence zone to include all national Arctic territory', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 29 May 2018

166 Wezeman, S T, 'Military Capabilities in the Arctic: A new Cold War in the High North?', SIPRI Background Paper, October 2016; 'Canadian Rangers', Canadian Army website, accessed 10 July 2018; 'Canada plans to boost Arctic patrol forces', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 8 May 2009; Government of Canada Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's National Defence Policy*, June 2017, p 80

167 'The Cold Thaw', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 7 May 2014

168 Government of Canada Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's National Defence Policy*, June 2017, p 37

NATO

62. The significance of the Arctic and High North in NATO strategy (see paragraphs 20 to 27 above) was reduced as the threat in Europe receded. Successive NATO command structure reforms led to the abolition of AFNORTH in 1994 and SACLANT in 2003 as NATO moved away from a structure based on regional commands.¹⁶⁹ As military activity in the region has grown, there has been a wide range of views on what NATO's role should be in the region, and indeed whether it should have any role at all. At a seminar in security prospects in the High North in Reykjavik in January 2009, the then NATO Secretary General, Jaap De Hoop Schaffer said:

The changes caused by the progressive melting of the ice cap are of concern to many countries beyond those of the Arctic Council and NATO. Indeed, the whole of the international community stands to be affected by many of the changes that are already taking place. In this situation, NATO needs to identify where the Alliance, with its unique competencies, can add value.¹⁷⁰

Reflecting this renewed interest, work began to include a substantive paragraph on the Arctic in NATO's 2009 Summit declaration, but the paragraph was deleted, reportedly at the behest of the Canadian representative, limiting the 2009 declaration to a brief reference welcoming the initiative of Iceland in hosting the January 2009 seminar. Further proposed references to the Arctic in NATO documents have encountered political difficulties, leading to there being no reference to the Arctic in the 2010 Strategic Concept, or in successive Summit declarations.¹⁷¹

63. This continuing divergence on whether NATO should play a greater role in the Arctic and High North has been borne out in the evidence we have received. Written evidence from the Danish Government says "Presently, Denmark sees no need for an increased military engagement or enhanced operative role for NATO in the Arctic". In contrast, when we asked the Icelandic Ambassador whether the Arctic and High North should be given greater strategic priority by the Alliance he responded:

I can be blunt. My simple answer is yes, we have considered that the High North should be higher on the agenda at NATO. We were disappointed when the last strategy concept was developed that there was no focus on the northern region. As I said at the outset, we think NATO should have a very proper and strong situational awareness of this region. During the years when NATO was occupied with out-of-area missions, we feel that this focus was lost.¹⁷²

The written evidence from the Norwegian Embassy said:

NATO and member states such as the United Kingdom should focus more on deterrence and collective defence in the North Atlantic and the European High North.¹⁷³

169 Pedlow, G W, *The Evolution of NATO's Command Structure, 1951–2009*, January 2010

170 'NATO discusses security prospects in the High North', NATO, 29 January 2009

171 Haftendorn, H, 'NATO and the Arctic: is the Atlantic alliance a cold war relic in a peaceful region now faced with non-military challenges?', *European Security*, Vol. 20, No. 3, September 2011, 340–341. See also [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q27

172 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q16

173 Royal Norwegian Embassy, London ([DIA0047](#))

On this issue Professor Dodds told us:

Iceland and Norway are very much the cheerleaders when it comes to NATO involvement in the Arctic. Canada is very ambivalent and sometimes openly hostile. Countries like Sweden and Finland are somewhere in between, but are usually worried that nothing is done to aggravate their relationship with Russia.¹⁷⁴

64. In 2013, a report from the Political Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly recognised that “there is no consensus among Arctic NATO member states over whether the Alliance should become more engaged in the High North”.¹⁷⁵ More recent reports from the Assembly suggest that this position may change in the future. A 2016 report from the Assembly’s Defence and Security Committee on the future role of naval power said:

Though the Alliance continues to lack a clear policy on the Arctic, which does lie within the treaty area, there is a growing potential role for NATO in the Arctic as it continues to open to year-round use as an area of transit and exploitation, and as Russia continues to militarise the region.¹⁷⁶

A Political Committee report from 2017 on NATO and security in the Arctic said:

As the strategic relevance of the High North increases in the future, the Arctic littoral states of the Alliance, and indeed all Allies, can ill afford to postpone an evaluation of NATO’s approach to the region indefinitely. Russia is already expanding its military footprint in the High North by establishing infrastructure along the Northern Sea Route and non-littoral countries like [China] are becoming more engaged.¹⁷⁷

65. While a common NATO position on the Arctic and the High North is yet to be agreed, the Alliance has been much stronger on increasing the role of NATO in the security of the North Atlantic. Reports emerged in early 2017 that NATO was considering the establishment of a new Atlantic Command to counter the proliferation of Russian submarine activity in the Arctic and to safeguard the lines of communication and reinforcement across the North Atlantic.¹⁷⁸ These plans were agreed in principle in November 2017, and it was agreed at the Defence Ministerial Meeting in June 2018 that the new Joint Force Command for the Atlantic would be established in the United States.¹⁷⁹ We asked Nick Gurr, the Director of International Security Policy at the Ministry of Defence, whether this new structure would resemble SACLANT:

The command would be similar to SACLANT inasmuch as it would be responsible for the north Atlantic area and the provision of reinforcement, but we feel—and NATO allies feel—that the world has changed so much

174 [Oral evidence taken on 1 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q16

175 Zakrzewska, J, *Security in the High North: NATO’s Role*, NATO Parliamentary Assembly Political Committee, 12 October 2013

176 Moon, M, *NATO and the Future Role of Naval Power*, NATO Parliamentary Assembly Defence and Security Committee, 19 November 2016

177 Connolly, G E, *NATO and Security in the Arctic*, NATO Parliamentary Assembly Political Committee, 7 October 2017

178 ‘[NATO Mulls Arctic and Atlantic Command to Counter Russia](#)’, *Wall Street Journal*, 18 May 2017

179 NATO, [Press Conference 8 June 2018](#)

since the days of SACLANT. It is not just not about managing a conventional Russian threat; there are all the other things that we would have to deal with. We should not be pulling SACLANT out of the cupboard and saying, “That’s the answer”. We need an answer that is fit for purpose today.¹⁸⁰

Colonel Olsen has also taken the view that it was unlikely that the new structure would resemble SACLANT as it existed in the Cold War:

It is very different from those days, and we are not necessarily arguing that [SACLANT] is the way to go in terms of scale and scope. What is important for us is that there is the transatlantic link. We have to be strong in Europe and we have to do more and we have to do it together, but we have to have the transatlantic link. NATO cannot do it without the United States and the United States cannot do it without NATO. It is a relationship that we have to strengthen, and that goes for the command structure as well.¹⁸¹

66. A presence has been sustained in the region through NATO and other multinational exercises. Although they are smaller the size and ambition of the exercises which took place in the Cold War,¹⁸² these exercises sustain an increasing tempo of activity in the region and are central to environmental training and enhancing interoperability. The biennial COLD RESPONSE exercises have grown in scope and participation since their initiation in 2006. Major General Charles Stickland OBE RM, the Commandant General Royal Marines, told us the important part that these exercises play in the UK’s cold weather training cycle.¹⁸³ This year Norway will be hosting the larger Exercise TRIDENT JUNCTURE 2018, mentioned in paragraph 45 above. Exercise DYNAMIC MONGOOSE, an anti-submarine warfare exercise, was also hosted by Norway in 2018, although it is disappointing to see that there was no participation from the UK.¹⁸⁴ Both Professor Grove and Colonel Olsen spoke at length about the significance of exercises, with the Colonel highlighting four factors that require further improvement: the importance of exercising command and control, the need to connect national exercises to larger NATO exercises, the need to exercise at the high-end of intensity and mass, and the importance of exercises being closely linked to contingency plans.¹⁸⁵

Other international security partnerships

67. With military security specifically excluded from the agenda of the Arctic Council and the lack of a common position within NATO on its role in the Arctic, there is a potential role for other multilateral defence and security partnerships to act as a platform for military co-operation. Two organisations with particular relevance are the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) and the Northern Group. The JEF is a UK-led expeditionary force of nine nations, created to establish a pool of high readiness, adaptable forces that are designed to enhance the ability of the UK and allies to respond rapidly, anywhere in the world. A Memorandum of Understanding between the original seven partner

180 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q86

181 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q36. See also [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q38 [Professor Grove]

182 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Qq34–35 [Professor Grove]

183 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q109

184 [PQ 160778](#) [2017–19]

185 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q109.

nations was signed in 2015 and the JEF reached full operational capability in 2018¹⁸⁶ The Northern Group, which was an initiative credited to Rt Hon Liam Fox MP during his time as Defence Secretary, centres on regular meetings of Defence Ministers of the eleven participant nations.¹⁸⁷ Mr Gurr told us how Arctic and High North issues are regular subjects of discussion at meetings of the JEF and the Northern Group. The Minister characterised the JEF as being “about like-minded partners that have an interest in the Arctic and potentially could be used in that context, but not exclusively so.”¹⁸⁸ A third body is the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable, an initiative of US European Command in co-operation with the Norwegian Ministry of Defence, consisting of high-ranking military officers from the eight members of the Arctic Council, plus France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK.¹⁸⁹ Mr Gurr described the ASFR as “an opportunity for the defence establishments from a number of countries in the High North and the Arctic to meet to exchange information, de-conflict activities and talk about the challenges we respectively face.”¹⁹⁰

68. There is little doubt that the Arctic and the High North are seeing an increasing level of military activity. There is much greater divergence in the evidence we have taken on what the reasons behind this are, particularly in relation to Russia. One view is that there is no offensive intent behind Russia’s military build-up and that it is simply trying to regenerate military capacity in order to reassert sovereignty. The opposite view is that this is just one more part of Russia’s aggressive reassertion of great power competition. We have received a range of views in between.

69. Our view is that the UK and its allies should be extremely wary of Russia’s intentions in the region. It is difficult to credit that the scale and range of military capabilities being deployed by Russia in the Arctic fulfil solely defensive purposes. Russia has shown itself to be ready to exploit regional military advantage for political gain. While the Arctic remains a region of low tension, this could change quickly, particularly given Russia’s increasingly revisionist attitude to the rules-based international order.

70. NATO’s renewed focus on the North Atlantic is welcome and the Government should be congratulated on the leadership the UK has shown on this issue. We encourage the Government to show similar leadership in bringing NATO to a common position on its role in the Arctic and the High North. We further encourage the Government to lay out its strategy on the future role of defence partnerships outside of NATO in the region.

186 Ministry of Defence, ‘[UK-led joint force launched to tackle common threats](#)’, 30 November 2015; ‘Joint Expeditionary Force reaches full operational capability’, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 3 July 2018. Led by the UK, the six other signatories to the 2015 JEF Memorandum of Understanding are Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Norway. Sweden and Finland joined in 2017.

187 Ministry of Defence, ‘[Defence Secretary launches new forum of northern European countries](#)’, 10 November 2010. The Northern Group is made up of the Nordic and Baltic nations alongside Germany, the Netherlands and Poland. See Depledge, D, ‘[Looking North: Britain’s revitalised interest in the northern areas of Europe](#)’, RUSI Commentary, 9 March 2012

188 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Qq69–72

189 Congressional Research Service, [Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress](#), 21 May 2018, p 59

190 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Qq69–73. Royal Norwegian Embassy, London ([DIA0047](#)).

5 UK Defence Capabilities in the High North

71. UK Armed Forces have few dedicated capabilities for Arctic operations, and as noted by the Minister for the Armed Forces in oral evidence, there are few specific capabilities required for the Arctic which could not be used elsewhere.¹⁹¹ The Royal Navy has one dedicated ice patrol ship, HMS *Protector*.¹⁹² However it appears that *Protector* spends the majority of its time in the South Atlantic and Antarctic.¹⁹³ The Minister also mentioned the *Echo* class survey vessels and HMS *Scott* which have a “limited” capability to operate in the High North.¹⁹⁴ A theme which ran through the Minister’s description of the UK’s ambition and role in terms of defence capability and the High North was one of resource. The multi-role nature of many of the platforms and units leads to them being in high demand elsewhere.¹⁹⁵ As the Minister told us:

While we would be happy for the Arctic to occupy a larger proportion of our time... we have to be very careful about where that resource would come from.¹⁹⁶

This chapter will focus on some general capabilities of UK Armed Forces which are particularly relevant to operations in the High North and North Atlantic.

72. The willingness of the UK to play a greater role in the security of the Arctic and the High North is tempered by the concern that Defence does not have sufficient resources to establish a meaningful presence in the region. Platforms and capabilities which might have a role in the High North are heavily committed elsewhere, and, with the Modernising Defence Programme still to be completed, there is no indication of new resources being applied. We ask the Department to explain how the Arctic and High North has featured in the strategic analysis undertaken in the course of the National Security Capability Review and the Modernising Defence Programme and how these will be represented in future policy.

Maritime

73. In two of its recent reports we have underlined our concerns about the UK’s capacity for anti-submarine warfare, especially in relation to the number of surface and sub-surface platforms available to cover such a wide area of ocean.¹⁹⁷ When asked to name the two leading challenges facing the Royal Navy Submarine Service, the historian Dr James Jinks highlighted lack of resources:

Do we have the necessary resources to match the tasks? I was talking about how the Submarine Service has had to find other things to do after the

191 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q68

192 Ministry of Defence ([DIA0020](#))

193 [PQ 359 0](#) [2015–16]

194 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q77

195 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q102 [Group Captain Clive Blount]

196 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q67

197 Defence Committee, *Beyond 2 per cent: A preliminary report on the Modernising Defence Programme*, Seventh Report of Session 2017–19, HC 818, para 57; Defence Committee, *Indispensable allies: US, NATO and UK Defence relations*, Eighth Report of Session 2017–19, HC 387, para 34–38. See also Mr Graham Edmonds ([DTA0004](#))

disappearance of the Russian threat. Those tasks are going to increase yet again, once the carriers enter service. If we deploy a carrier group, either independently or as part of the task group, we are probably going to have to have a submarine out there as part of that task group, so those roles could potentially increase.¹⁹⁸

Dr Jinks also highlighted “the challenge of getting back to where we were in the Cold War, in terms of being a competent ASW force again”.¹⁹⁹ Professor Grove responded to a question about risks to the Submarine Service in similar terms:

Maintaining the operational availability of a very limited number of submarines. There are not enough [nuclear-powered attack submarines]. There should be at least eight. Currently, if we are lucky, there are six. At times in the last couple of years, there has been nothing because of mechanical problems and accidents and that kind of thing. So the first challenge is maintaining the operational ability of what we have, and the second is maintaining enough personnel to man them, which of course feeds in to operational availability ... When they work, the *Astute*-class submarines are magnificent. They have probably the best anti-submarine potential of any submarine in the world. The Americans were flabbergasted at the way one of our *Astutes* was able to hold a contact at long distance. They have enormous potential, and when they are there, when they have enough people and when they are out at sea, they are marvellous, but particularly given the limited number we have, we really need to stress operational availability and manning.²⁰⁰

74. Even where platforms are intended to be multi-role, the pressures that extreme climatic environments place on equipment may not have been adequately anticipated in design or thoroughly tested at developmental stage. An example of this are the engine failures experienced by Type 45 destroyers when operating for prolonged periods in high ambient air and sea temperatures.²⁰¹ Related environmental considerations will apply for surface ships operating for prolonged periods in low sea temperatures. As we have heard in written evidence:

The presence of either floating ice or pack ice potentially affects all aspects of surface ship operations, endangering bow mounted sonar domes and interfering with towed arrays. Propellers, rudders, fin stabilizers, and sea chests can also be adversely affected by operations in ice-infested waters. Additionally, the extreme cold, high atmospheric moisture and icy conditions can weaken steel hulls, change hydraulic system temperatures and crack or shred protective coatings and insulators.²⁰²

As the naval analyst Dr Lee Willett wrote in 2011:

198 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q33

199 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q33

200 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q33

201 Defence Committee, *Restoring the Fleet: Naval Procurement and the National Shipbuilding Strategy*, Third Report of Session 2016–17, HC 221, paras 84–86

202 Professor James Kraska and Professor Sean Fahey ([DIA0015](#)). See also RUSI ([DIA0002](#)).

there is no public evidence that the UK has designed or is designing its six new Type 45 Daring-class destroyers, two new Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers and its next generation ASW frigate (the Type 26 Global Combat Ship) specifically with [Arctic] capability parameters in mind.²⁰³

The Department will not publicly discuss the detail of the extreme weather conditions to which individual Royal Navy units can operate.²⁰⁴

75. As well as platforms there is an issue with the personnel to man and maintain the nuclear-powered submarine fleet. A recent report from the National Audit Office highlighted shortages of personnel in large number of skilled trades across the Armed Forces.²⁰⁵ A separate NAO report highlighted that the Royal Navy has shortage of 337 personnel (over 8%) in skilled nuclear trades and specialisms, including nuclear marine engineers. The report also acknowledges the work that has been by the MoD to try and improve recruitment and retention within these specialisms.²⁰⁶ Oral evidence given to the Public Accounts Committee by the Second Sea Lord, Vice Admiral Tony Radakin, suggests that these efforts are beginning to bear fruit, with net increases in the numbers of engineering technicians and reduced outflow of skilled personnel. Although the numbers are moving in the right direction, Admiral Radakin acknowledged that targets were still being missed:

As a whole, in terms of the Royal Navy, we need to get more people in and we need to do a lot more to satisfy that. In terms of the Submarine Service and whether we are seeing us getting back to what I call normal, at the moment I wouldn't want to gloss over that this is a stressful situation and we need to improve.²⁰⁷

In July 2018 the First Sea Lord announced that a new Joint Area of Operations was being created for the North Atlantic, with a view to more regular deployments by the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force being undertaken.²⁰⁸

76. The historical importance of the maritime space stretching from the Arctic to the North Atlantic is well established, but we can see that many of the strategic considerations which were present in the recent past are now re-emerging. The marked increase in Russian naval activity in the waters around the British Isles and the entrances to the Atlantic is clearly a matter of concern to the Government. We are equally concerned about the United Kingdom's ability to match this threat adequately. The reduction of the UK's anti-submarine warfare capability, which has been a core task of the Royal Navy for decades, has been noted in recent Committee reports and we repeat those concerns here. While the capability of the surface and sub-surface vessels

203 Willett, L, 'Afterword: A United Kingdom perspective on the role of navies in delivering Arctic security' in Kraska, J (ed.), *Arctic Security in an Age of Climate Change*, CUP, Cambridge, 2011, p 290, quoted from Depledge, D, 'Looking North: Britain's revitalised interest in the northern areas of Europe', RUSI Commentary, 9 March 2012. See also 'Britain "woefully unprepared" for Arctic warfare', *Daily Telegraph*, 10 August 2011

204 PQ 1216 1 [2017–19]

205 National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Ensuring Sufficiently Skilled Personnel*, HC 947 [2017–19], 18 April 2018

206 National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: The Defence Nuclear Enterprise: a landscape review*, HC 1003 [2017–19], 22 May 2018

207 Public Accounts Committee, *Oral evidence taken on 2 July 2018*, HC 1028 [2017–19], Q48

208 'UK to expand navy in North Atlantic amid "growing Russian threat"', Sky News, 9 July 2018. The definition of a Joint Area of Operations is found in Ministry of Defence, *Joint Doctrine Publication 01: UK Joint Operations Doctrine*, November 2014, p 123

the Royal Navy operates is world class, there are not enough platforms available for the task in hand, and vessels that are in service are often committed to standing tasks elsewhere.

77. An issue raised to particular prominence by the then Chief of the Defence Staff in December 2017 was the vulnerability of undersea data cables to hostile submarine action.²⁰⁹ As one submission noted:

These connections—which carry almost all global internet communications—can be eavesdropped, thus allowing vital information to be gleaned. Cutting these cables could cause huge damage to economic markets and interrupt social communications.²¹⁰

78. A 2017 report from Policy Exchange highlighted the vulnerability of undersea cables and the level of disruption that could be caused in a short period of time if the key data and communications links that they provide are cut. Russian naval activity along known routes of undersea cables has increased.²¹¹ This, together with Russian naval expansion and widespread utilisation of hybrid warfare techniques, suggested that there was a real risk to cables. The report also noted that the GIUK Gap is home to several key undersea cable routes, the cutting of which would disrupt communication between NATO allies in the region, such as Iceland and Canada. It recommended that that NATO maritime exercises should incorporate the possibility of attacks on undersea cables and that the nature of the international response in the event of such an attack should be more seriously considered.²¹² The MoD said in its written evidence on this matter:

We regard undersea cables as part of the UK’s critical national infrastructure and monitor a variety of threats to them, including from possible hostile maritime activity. For security reasons, we do not comment on specific assessments. Russia has a formidable sub-surface warfare capability. It poses a unique security challenge including in the North Atlantic Ocean ... We continue working with industry to ensure our subsea cable network is secure and have a variety of tools to monitor potentially hostile maritime activity.²¹³

79. The threat to undersea data cables is a real one, and the consequences of such networks being disrupted would be serious. We accept that the Government shares this concern and is aware of the associated risks. But this risk further reinforces the need for effective situational awareness to support maritime security and a credible anti-submarine detection capability to deter hostile activity.

80. The Royal Navy’s ability to patrol and conduct surveillance operations under the Arctic in the Cold War required a highly specialised set of skills amongst its submariners

209 [Speech by Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach](#), 14 December 2017

210 Scottish Global Forum ([DIA0012](#))

211 [‘Russian submarines are prowling around vital undersea cables. It’s making NATO nervous’](#), *Washington Post*, 22 December 2017

212 Sunak, R, *Undersea Cables: Indispensable, Insecure*, Policy Exchange, December 2017. This adds to the growing literature on the wider subject of maritime hybrid warfare. See Royal Norwegian Embassy, London ([DIA0047](#)) and Schaub Jr, G. Murphy, M and Hoffman, F G, *Hybrid Maritime Warfare: Building Baltic Resistance*, RUSI Journal, Vol 162, No 1 (February/March 2017), pp 32–40; Stavridis, J, ‘The United States, the North Atlantic and Maritime Hybrid Warfare’ from Olsen, J A (ed.) *NATO and the North Atlantic: Revitalising Collective Defence*, RUSI Whitehall Paper 87, March 2017, pp. 92–101

213 Ministry of Defence ([DTA0003](#))

and a regular cycle of training to maintain institutional expertise. Dr Jinks outlined the history of the Submarine Service's involvement in Arctic operations, from the experiments of the late 1940s to the start of a regular presence in the 1970s and their peak in the late Cold War. This included the development of the *Swiftsure* class of attack submarines, the first British nuclear submarine designed to be optimised for under ice operations. Dr Jinks also described how after the Cold War under ice patrols had been reduced as the focus of operations had moved away from Europe over the last 30 years, and instead of operating under the Arctic ice, Royal Navy attack submarines were operating in warmer waters to support expeditionary operations:

Once the threat declined, the Submarine Service had to start looking away from its traditional role of anti-submarine [warfare] and try to stay relevant in the world. You can probably recall, if you go back to the '90s, there were significant cuts in the size of the [attack submarine] fleet, coming down to where we are today. The Submarine Service, in order to find a role in the post-Cold War world, started to look for other things to do. You had power projection from the sea, in terms of the Tomahawk [Land Attack Missile] capability, and you had new roles east of Suez with Tomahawk.²¹⁴

81. Written evidence from RUSI also identified how the nature of recent expeditionary operations, and consequent decisions on equipment, have had an impact on under ice capability:

[Arctic naval operations are] an area where the UK has made significant contributions previously, before the nuclear hunter-killer force was equipped with Land attack missiles. Within NATO, only Britain and US have the platforms to undertake nuclear submarine patrols under the ice cap, but both allowed such skills to fade after the end of the Cold War. Given the level of nuclear submarine availability in the Royal Navy, sustaining this skill set and experience now will be challenging. *Astute* class submarine deployments appear to be prioritised for weapon payload (specifically their Tomahawk Land Attack Missile (TLAM) capability), rather than as a platform. Given the lack of strike weapons of similar range elsewhere in the British military (there is space for them in Type 45 Daring class destroyers, but fitting out was never funded), this seems unlikely to change.²¹⁵

Asked whether under ice capability had been adequately sustained, Dr Jinks's said that it had been at "a very low level", and that no Royal Navy submarine had been up under the ice since an accident aboard HMS *Tireless* in in the Arctic in 2007 which killed two crew members. Dr Jinks noted that the Royal Navy had continued to send exchange officers to the US Navy Ice Exercise (ICEX) programmes aboard US Navy submarines.²¹⁶ Nick Childs, Senior Fellow for Naval Forces and Maritime Security at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, also said in an earlier oral evidence session that:

it is the declared policy of the submarine arm of the Royal Navy that it is a top priority to reinvest in under ice capability, as you say, having had a gap in submarine activities ... for essentially a decade. One assumes that that

214 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q28

215 RUSI [DIA0002]

216 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Qq28

means actually exercising with boats. The *Astute*²¹⁷ has not been tested at all, as far as I am aware—at least, there has not been any public announcement on that score—but the legacy *Trafalgar*s have shown their ability to operate in the north.²¹⁸

82. There is however evidence that the *Astute* class submarines are not optimised for Arctic operations to the extent of the predecessor *Trafalgar* class. A brochure produced for visitors for the ICEX 2018 indicated that while the hardened sail and exterior components of the *Trafalgar* class allow it to surface through ice of at least 0.6 metres, *Astute* class submarines are unable to surface through ice more than two feet thick without risking damage to their superstructure.²¹⁹

83. Asked whether, from a strategic standpoint, under ice capability was an area that the Government should be encouraged to invest in, Mr Childs said “There should be a refocusing on that area and the ability to do that as part of a deterrent capability, yes”.²²⁰ Dr Igor Sutyagin, Senior Research Fellow at RUSI said that from a Russian point of view “The worst-case scenario is the United Kingdom restarting its deployment of under ice patrols of its subs.”²²¹ Written evidence from Professor Peter Roberts, also of RUSI, described under ice capability as:

the one British asset capable of persistent and meaningful contribution to applying asymmetric military pressure against Russia, in an area that they consider vital.²²²

84. In March 2018 it was announced that, for the first time since 2007, the *Trafalgar* class HMS *Trenchant* had surfaced through the ice in the Arctic Ocean north off Alaska as part of ICEX 18.²²³ The boat repeated breaking through the ice on several occasions over the next few weeks, including at the North Pole. The Minister for the Armed Forces said:

This exercise shows that our Royal Navy is primed and ready to operate in the harshest conditions imaginable, to protect our nation from any potential threats.²²⁴

85. **The Royal Navy’s under ice missions in the Arctic are one of the less well-known aspects of UK operations in the Cold War, largely due to the level of secrecy which surrounded them. This contribution was crucial to NATO’s defensive strategy, and the Submarine Service developed a world-leading capability in these operations. As the strategic focus moved elsewhere after the Cold War, under ice exercises ceased altogether. We are very encouraged to see that with the mission of HMS *Trenchant* that this presence has been re-established, and hope that this is part of a permanent cycle of activity in the Arctic. *Understanding that the Government does not comment in detail on submarine operations, we ask the Department to lay out its policy on the future of under ice exercises. We also ask the Department to outline the comparative under ice capabilities of Royal Navy submarines currently in service.***

217 The *Astute* class is the Royal Navy’s newest type of nuclear-powered attack submarine (SSN).

218 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q94

219 US Navy, *ICEX 2018 Visitor Briefing Book*, January 2018, p 14

220 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q96

221 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q64

222 RUSI (DIA0002)

223 ‘[Royal Navy submarine breaks through Arctic ice for major exercise](#)’, *Royal Navy*, 15 March 2018

224 ‘[Submarine HMS Trenchant breaks through the ice of the North Pole](#)’ *Royal Navy*, 19 April 2018

86. A further aspect discussed in evidence is the impact of the *Queen Elizabeth* class aircraft carriers now coming into service. Although the primary function of carriers is usually characterised as expeditionary, operating outside the Euro-Atlantic area, they have played an important strategic role in the North Atlantic. As noted in paragraph 24, the presence of a large striking fleet centred on several aircraft carriers and strong amphibious forces in the Norwegian Sea was at the core of the Maritime Strategy in the 1980s.²²⁵ Dr Sutyagin noted that carriers positioned off the Norwegian coast in the High North would be able to pose a direct threat to Russian territory.²²⁶ Witnesses dwelt further upon the utility of carrier operations in the High North. Professor Grove said:

One would hope that an area of deployment for the future carrier—or carriers—could well be in this area. In the good old days of the late '60s, the idea was that you would send four American aircraft carriers and two British ones in two carrier groups. By the '80s, that had come down to three American and one or two British anti-submarine warfare cruisers. Particularly as the Americans are finding difficulty with the operational availability of their force, I think that we Europeans—in a non-political sense—need to start thinking about using our carrier assets, as well as our submarines, to as it were reconstruct the old forward strategy, albeit in a new form and perhaps at a lower level in terms of numbers.²²⁷

Mr Childs also told us:

Clearly, the concept behind the [*Queen Elizabeth* class carriers] was that they were not copies of the *Invincible* class that did north-east Atlantic operations—ASW sea control, essentially—and they were for power projection. However, in the current context, I hope that there are concepts being looked at for how you would potentially employ these aircraft carriers in the context of northern waters going north, whether it is for some kind of air defence or power projection capability into the polar peninsula, or as major ASW platforms with Merlin helicopters aboard, for example. There is also the potential context of the Americans returning to northern waters with an aircraft carrier. That would be a huge signal both to northern NATO members and to Russia about potential intent in terms of signalling and deterrence.²²⁸

87. In an oral evidence session in May 2018, we asked the Secretary of State directly whether it was intended for the carriers to operate in the North Atlantic. He responded:

We always look at every single option to deal with the changing threat environment that this country deals with. In terms of where the carriers are deployed, I have no doubt that the carriers will be deployed in the north Atlantic, south Atlantic, the Indian Ocean, the Gulf, and the Pacific: they are a global strike capability and they would be used on a global scale. Will they spend time operating in the north Atlantic? Almost certainly, yes.²²⁹

225 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q25

226 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q65

227 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q35

228 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q117

229 [Oral evidence taken on 22 May 2018](#), HC 387 [2017–19], Q184

88. *The Department should fully explain the concept of operations for carriers operating in North Atlantic and High North, including training and exercise arrangements, and the opportunities for working with allies.*

Air

89. In addition to maritime surface and sub-surface assets being committed to anti-submarine warfare, the ability to locate and track a heightened level of submarine activity over such a wide area places great importance on airborne anti-submarine warfare capability. Before 2011 the UK's long range fixed-wing airborne ASW capability was sustained by the fleet of Nimrod MR2 maritime patrol aircraft (MPA). The Nimrod MR2s were due to have their service lives extended by being upgraded to the Nimrod MRA4 variant, but after lengthy and costly delays this project was cancelled in the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). All Nimrods were withdrawn from service in 2011, leaving the UK with a capability gap in MPA. Our predecessor Committee strongly criticised this decision in its 2010 report following the SDSR.²³⁰ The Lords Arctic Committee, anticipating the 2015 SDSR, singled out the capability gap in MPA as a particularly serious deficiency in terms of maintaining both military and search and rescue capability:

The 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review must give urgent consideration to reintroducing a maritime patrol capability for the UK. This is needed for both defence and search and rescue operations.²³¹

Professor Grove told us “The loss of the maritime patrol aircraft cannot be overestimated as a blow to our anti-submarine warfare capabilities.”²³²

90. As well as lowering awareness of potentially hostile submarines entering the North Atlantic, reduced maritime surveillance presents a particular risk to the security of the UK's nuclear deterrent based at HM Naval Base Clyde in Faslane, Scotland. From 2010 several media reports suggested that the Russian submarines were making repeated attempts to record the distinctive acoustic signatures of the UK's *Vanguard* class ballistic missile submarines as they entered and exited Faslane. Successfully recording these signatures could allow the *Vanguard* class submarines to be more easily detected, identified and tracked at sea. These reports also suggested that the UK was having to place heavy reliance on other NATO allies to conduct maritime surveillance.²³³

91. In the 2015 SDSR it was announced that the UK's MPA capability would be regenerated with the purchase of nine Boeing P-8A Poseidon aircraft from the United States, due to come into service in 2019. These aircraft would be based at RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland and manned by crews who had sustained their skills in airborne ASW by being embedded

230 Defence Committee, *The Strategic Defence and Security Review and the National Security Strategy*, Sixth Report of Session 2010–12, HC 761, para 137. The point was repeated in the subsequent report *Future Maritime Surveillance*, Fifth Report of Session 2012–13, HC 110

231 House of Lords Select Committee on the Arctic, *Responding to a changing Arctic*, Report of Session 2014–15, HL Paper 118, para 428

232 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q35

233 [‘Russian subs stalk Trident in echo of Cold War’](#), *Daily Telegraph*, 27 August 2010; [‘Britain forced to ask Nato to track ‘Russian submarine’ in Scottish waters’](#), *Daily Telegraph*, 9 December 2014; [‘Nimrod cuts ‘have allowed Russian submarines to spy on Trident’](#), *Daily Telegraph*, 29 May 2015; [‘Russians ‘are spying on Trident subs’](#), *Daily Mail*, 8 October 2015. See also Scottish Global Forum ([DIA0012](#)).

with the US Navy.²³⁴ In 2017 the UK signed a Statement of Intent with the US and Norway to enhance co-operation in maritime security in the North Atlantic, based on their common operation of the P-8A platform.²³⁵

92. While this move to address part of the capability gap that had been created is welcome, James Gray MP questioned whether the numbers of P-8A aircraft the UK is buying were sufficient.²³⁶ In the course of our recent inquiry ahead of the Modernising Defence Programme, we received detailed written evidence from former RAF officers with extensive experience of ASW operations who argued that the intended aircraft and crew provision for the MPA force was too low to fulfil the range of tasks under its responsibility, particularly in light of the fact that the RAF had over 40 Nimrod MPA in the 1970s. They believed that unrealistic assumptions had been made about the ability of NATO allies to contribute to MPA provision and that at least 16 aircraft and a higher crewing requirement was needed to attain the necessary coverage.²³⁷ Written submissions to this inquiry have also noted the P-8As being purchased configured to the US Navy's requirements in terms of manned-unmanned teaming and air-to-air refuelling. The latter issue is a particular problem as the P-8A aircraft are not compatible with the air-to-air refuelling system used by the RAF's Voyager tankers and will significantly limit their operational range if it is not addressed.²³⁸ When the Minister for the Armed Forces was asked whether he thought that nine P-8As would be sufficient, he said:

I think our contribution of nine to the wider NATO force is a very reasonable one, yes. We are working closely with both our Norwegian and US allies, and I think collectively the NATO force is sufficient.²³⁹

93. A 2016 report from the NATO Joint Air Competence Centre on airborne ASW noted a dramatic decline since the end of the Cold War in airborne ASW capability across the Alliance. This report notes a range of deficiencies in the numbers and availability of MPA platforms, the levels of training and exercising, interoperability, doctrine, command and control structures, and ground infrastructure. The report also makes recommendations on how several of these issues might be addressed to bring NATO's ASW capability back towards its former level of effectiveness.²⁴⁰

94. We have received substantial evidence that nine Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft are not enough for the UK to provide sufficient anti-submarine warfare coverage in the North Atlantic. The extent of the current threat is openly acknowledged by Ministers and airborne anti-submarine warfare capability is a crucial part of the response. The Department should provide the Committee with a detailed justification of the planned maritime patrol aircraft establishment.

234 Ministry of Defence, '[MOD seals the deal on nine new Maritime Patrol Aircraft to keep UK safe](#)', 11 July 2016

235 '[Cold War Allies UK, US and Norway Team Up for a New Generation of Russian Sub Hunts](#)', *USNI News*, 30 June 2017

236 [Oral evidence taken on 15 November 2017](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Qq10, 17. See also Human Security Centre ([DIA0006](#))

237 Defence Committee, *Beyond 2 per cent: A preliminary report on the Modernising Defence Programme*, Seventh Report of Session 2017–19, HC 818, para 69. The particular written evidence submissions were from Air Vice-Marshal (Retd) Andrew L Roberts ([MDP0011](#)) and Group Captain (Retd) Derek K Empson ([MDP0018](#))

238 Scottish Global Forum ([DIA0012](#)); Mr Graham Edmonds ([DTA0004](#))

239 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q132

240 NATO Joint Air Power Competence Centre, *Alliance Airborne Anti-Submarine Warfare: A Forecast for Maritime Air ASW in the Future Operational Environment*, June 2016

95. In 2017 work began to restore the Remote Radar Head facility at RAF Saxa Vord in the Shetland Islands which had been closed in 2006.²⁴¹ According to the Government the station has been re-established “to provide early warning of Russian military activity on NATO’s northern flank”.²⁴² Reports accompanying the announcement that the facility reaching its Initial Operational Capacity indicated that the RAF has been required to launch 69 Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) operations over the previous five years in response to military aircraft nearing UK airspace.²⁴³ Saxa Vord is due to reach full operating capacity by the end of 2018.²⁴⁴

96. Group Captain Clive Blount RAF (Rtd), an officer with extensive experience of the High North, gave us some indication of the practical difficulties of air operations in the region:

The issue with air is that it is about range. In the High North, we are talking massively long distances to have any sort of effect. We have gradually become an increasingly short-range Air Force in my view. The F-35 variant we are selecting is not the longest range by a long means. The Norwegians have realised that in their selection of the F-35, which is a longer-range version, they are going to need tankers. I have a feeling that we have had a push towards a far more tactical range Air Force than we used to have, and that causes issues when we are operating in the High North, primarily because there is a paucity of basing and areas to operate.²⁴⁵

97. Group Captain Blount went on to discuss the challenges of operating in low temperatures and the need to have regard to environmental operating boundaries of equipment. As well as temperature, there are additional environmental considerations which have to be taken into account in the higher latitudes. Due to many satellites holding equatorial geostationary orbits, communication or navigation equipment reliant on satellites such as GPS will be adversely affected. Space weather also has a greater impact when operating in proximity to the magnetic pole.²⁴⁶

98. *The Department should provide reassurance that air platforms have the range and resilience to sustain operations in the High North, and give evidence that proper testing has taken place of the capability of equipment in cold temperatures and at high latitudes.*

Land and littoral

99. The commitment to the reinforcement of the Northern Flank in Norway discussed in paragraph 26 above has continued, the cold weather specialism within UK Armed Forces residing in the Royal Marines. The centre of expertise within the Corps is the Mountain Leader cadre, a group of highly trained Royal Marines instructors and specialists with expertise in mountain and cold weather warfare. Every year units from 3 Commando

241 HC Deb, 21 Jul 2005, [c115WS](#)

242 HL Deb, 26 June 2018, [c 110](#)

243 ‘[New Shetland radar to better protect UK Northern airspace](#)’, Ministry of Defence, 26 January 2018

244 [PQ 1290 7](#) [2017–19]

245 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q92

246 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q116

Brigade lead a series of exercises in Northern Norway to maintain the cold weather specialism.²⁴⁷ General Stickland described in oral evidence that these exercises have four main objectives:

- To train personnel to survive, move and fight in extreme weather conditions.
- To hone the capability of the commando force, building agility and resilience to operate in environments that other forces cannot;
- To co-operate more closely with allies, training with the Norwegians, Dutch and Americans in Norway;
- To be part of a wider conventional deterrent, providing reassurance for allies and acting within the wider framework of NATO's Graduated Response Plans.²⁴⁸

100. In both the oral evidence we have taken and the visit we undertook to observe the exercises in Norway, a number of matters arose which pose challenges for the current and future sustainment of cold weather training. The first relates to the issue of resources identified at the beginning of the chapter. Both the scale of cold weather training and the planning cycle of the exercises are affected by uncertainty over whether resources will be made available within each financial year. We were told on our visit that in the 1980s brigade-sized formations comprising of thousands of personnel went to Norway. Today, the numbers of personnel involved are usually in the low hundreds the 'company plus' level. In 2018, exercises were conducted at an even lower level than usual, in what was described by the Minister for the Armed Forces as a one-off reduction at a saving of £2.5 million. The Minister said that it was anticipated that training would return to normal levels next year.²⁴⁹ He added subsequently:

The challenges of defence finance in particular are there for us all to see ... The impact of currency fluctuations and everything else can at times put greater pressure on the uncommitted spend, which training unfortunately falls into. One of the challenges of my role is trying to automatically prevent pressures on uncommitted spending such as training, as we saw this year. I have to fight very hard to try to prevent that, but there are some things within that blend of committed and uncommitted spending that mean you are constrained in your actions.²⁵⁰

General Stickland had earlier said on the need for regular deployments:

The key thing for me is the drumbeat of training. There is huge skill fade because of the complexity and harshness of the environment, so the drumbeat is important to me.²⁵¹

On our visit, we were told that these reductions were the result of the wider cost pressures across the Naval Service, as the Royal Navy seeks to regenerate carrier strike and sustain the nuclear deterrent. As we noted in our preliminary report ahead of the Modernising Defence Programme, this is not confined to the Naval Service as reductions in training

247 Ministry of Defence ([DIA0020](#))

248 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q132

249 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Qq91–93

250 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q98

251 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q98

have been implemented across the Services as a way of staying within annual budgets.²⁵² In oral evidence General Stickland recognised that there were tactical consequences to exercising at lower levels of mass, but said that the Royal Marines were focused on building up strength to operate at Commando (roughly battalion size) level at the next large NATO cold weather exercise in 2020.²⁵³

101. Lieutenant Colonel Matt Skuse RM (Rtd), a former Royal Marine Mountain leader who had also served as Defence Attaché to Norway and Iceland made a wider point about the bureaucratic obstacles that exist to placing cold weather training on a more long-term basis:

I think in this particular year it is the military capability team [at the Ministry of Defence] who have continued to put the funding for our winter deployments on the table for an in-year saving each round. As a consequence, we have been coming to Norway since the '60s, every year, at 12-months' notice. As a result, the Norwegians have not been able to help us out with any infrastructure.²⁵⁴

Colonel Skuse argued that taking a more long-term view would allow for both better co-operation with Norway and the development of a more strategic focus:

[The nature of the funding cycle] is the reason we have not really sat down to have proper conversations about medium or long-term plans. We have almost surprised [the Norwegians] by our presence each year, and it is costing us a lot more staff work than it should do, and that staff work is not going to useful things such as working out how our world-class light infantry meets their world-class cold-weather heavy forces. That synergy is presently not being exploited. ... So if you could ring-fence that budget for winter training, it is a relatively small act, but it would grow through to become a very large consequence on the sort of five to 10-year timeline.²⁵⁵

The Colonel also argued that the reduced size of the deployment contributed to a more short-term outlook:

There is also an important detail that is hidden in the fact that we are going out in smaller levels. When a brigade went out, a brigade commander and his staff went out. They generated staff work, made comment on the strategy and so on. When we go out at company commander level, the senior guy on the ground for the duration may be an OF-3 Major. He is more likely to try to push efficiency into the package rather than long-term thinking. That is an ugly by-product of the fact that we have downscaled, because we are putting less thought into it. Arguably, the whole thing is now intellectually underinvested.²⁵⁶

102. Colonel Skuse also raised an issue that we discussed with the Royal Marines on our visit—whether the deployment in Norway was limited to environmental training, or

252 Defence Committee, *Beyond 2 per cent: A preliminary report on the Modernising Defence Programme*, Seventh Report of Session 2017–19, HC 818, para 98

253 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q109

254 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q104

255 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q104

256 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q105

whether it was part of a more joined up strategic ‘package’ that was integrated with the defence of NATO’s Northern Flank and acted as a credible conventional deterrent. He responded that the nature of the funding settlement did have a wider effect on how the training is conducted, and its strategic impact:

At the moment, it is pretty much all about the environment, because of that 12-month timeline. A Royal Marine commander will turn up. He has not got links into any clever documents about how we work in synergy with the Norwegian forces. He simply tries to do what he expects to do in other places in the world in a cold-weather environment to overcome those frictions—the effect of snow and increased logistic challenges—that are a fact of life out there. If we had a more coherent plan he would actually be able to do some of that exercise and “train where you fight”, which was a key phrase during the Cold War. At the moment, it is simply the way we fund that package that stops him doing that.²⁵⁷

He added later:

I would gamble that we are not actually reading the NATO plan for the reinforcement of Norway when we do our exercise planning. We are not actually exercising that plan at all. We are not sending in refinements about the logistics. If we find an airport had changed its runway length, no one would report that to the international staff. We are simply not doing what we should be doing. We are not doing the basics. That is because we are going back at 12 months’ notice each time at a very tactical level. Change the funding strategy.²⁵⁸

General Stickland, however said, that there was a wider strategic purpose:

All our activity sits within the ability to deter and reassure as part of the NATO Graduated Response Plans ... Our ability to deploy and operate is a fundamental part of the UK’s components of those deployment plans... quite a lot of the time the training bridges into a NATO exercise. NATO does not exercise in things it is not interested in. It is interested in this, and it is a way of rehearsing and particularly of integrating our forces. At the command level, people will be very aware that they are a component of a capability that reinforces under a NATO [concept of operations plan].²⁵⁹

On the issue of budget programming, the General said:

The nature of how the short-term budget runs is how Defence does its business. It is my job to make sure that people understand that there is a requirement. The crucial thing to say is that we have had a progressive build-up of this capability since 2013. We have been working to build back our core skills as we go through. As the Minister says, there has been a shortfall

257 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q105

258 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q105

259 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Qq95–96

this year, but my target is to make sure that I justify the requirement for 2019, building to the large-scale exercise that we are targeting in 2020 with our coalition and NATO partners.²⁶⁰

103. **The winter training exercises in Northern Norway each year led by the Royal Marines are crucial to maintenance of the cold weather warfare specialism. The level of training required to survive, move and fight in this environment is high and these skills fade if they are not maintained by regular training cycles. As these exercises are already taking place at low levels of mass, reducing them further will do more damage to their tactical utility and reduce the numbers of personnel completing cold weather training. The fact that this has been done on financial grounds is particularly unacceptable. The Government should ensure that cold weather training exercises return to normal levels in 2019.**

104. *The Government should explain how cold weather training exercises are integrated with NATO's Graduated Response Plan for the reinforcement of Norway.*

105. **The pressure on the defence budget combined with the annual process of allocating uncommitted spending on training restricts the ability to plan training over the long term, limiting its strategic effect and reducing the ability to integrate more closely with allies. The Department should explore how it can be more flexible in programming multi-year cold weather training arrangements, instead of conducting the process on an annual basis.**

106. General Stickland highlighted how the annual exercises in Norway were a focus for defence co-operation with NATO allies. Cold weather training has been more closely integrated with the Norwegian Army²⁶¹ and the Dutch marine combat group also undertakes training in Norway.²⁶² The close relationship that the UK has with Norway on a wide range of matters including defence was dwelt upon by Colonel Olsen, and the Royal Marines are an important part of this:

We have found that in the last decade or two, more and more countries have lost that Arctic skill set because they gave priority to other areas. It is an art in itself to operate up there. One thing is to do the basics: to keep yourself warm with the right clothing, to get a good night's sleep under tough conditions, to eat properly, and to handle the snow, the wet and the waters up there... We find that the Royal Marines are so good at it; their motivation and their willingness to take on new challenges is really important for us.²⁶³

107. The growth of the relationship with the United States Marine Corps has been particularly valuable. The winter warfare capability of the USMC lapsed over the years the Corps was heavily engaged in Iraq, Afghanistan and other generally hot weather climates. Recognising the growing importance of regenerating this capability, the USMC began sending units to Norway to be trained by the Royal Marines in 2015. We were able to

260 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q97

261 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q94

262 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q95

263 [Oral evidence taken on 24 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q41. See also Royal Norwegian Embassy, London ([DIA0047](#)).

observe this training on our visit and were struck by the positive feedback from American personnel about the quality of the training being provided. General Stickland said on this subject:

It's a key part of our business. It also comes to the issue of the US Marine Corps providing significant mass and significant capability. But where our commando force can act alongside them and enable them, that is a key contribution to some of these response plans. The key thing for us is that this is a very strong relationship with the US Marine Corps. We are, in many other areas, seeking to look at where we can interoperate with them, so that our skills can enhance theirs.²⁶⁴

108. Colonel Skuse also dwelt upon the importance of this training relationship:

This is a wonderful—arguably, once in a generation—opportunity for the Royal Marines to give back to the US Marine Corps. We have begged and borrowed off them as long as I have been serving, and now we are giving back in terms of capacity and capability. That is wonderful for the relationship between the US Marine Corps and the Royal Marines, and is probably good for the relationship between the UK and the US. It is wonderful to see it happening. We have a skill set that they now feel they need, and we are generously giving it over. It is genuinely heart-warming.

The Colonel also noted that the renewed American presence in Norway was a piece of strategic messaging in itself based on a decision debated and ratified by the Norwegian Parliament.²⁶⁵

109. The Royal Marines play an increasingly important role in inter-service training. With the establishment of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in Eastern Europe, the Royal Marines have been working with the British Army personnel leading this deployment to provide expertise on cold weather warfare. While the conditions in Estonia and Poland where these units are deployed are not necessarily the same as those found in Northern Norway, deployment in the Baltic during the winter months still requires the transfer of expertise on survival, movement and combat in cold weather conditions. General Stickland explained what this involves for the Royal Marines:

We provided members of the Mountain Leaders to the 3rd (UK) Division to make sure the troops that were deployed to Poland and Estonia under the operation there were sufficiently aware of the resilience required for cold weather soldiering. I was providing, essentially, a cadre of expertise to ensure people can soldier safely in those difficult conditions.²⁶⁶

110. As the owners of the cold weather warfare specialism within UK Armed Forces, the Royal Marines have been able to transfer expertise to the British Army to support the deployments in Estonia and Poland. The high quality of the cold weather training that the UK provides also makes it a sought-after commodity amongst our allies. The training that has been provided to the United States Marine Corps since 2015 is a particularly valuable example of defence co-operation and we were struck by the

264 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q116

265 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q111

266 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q101

positive feedback we received from the Americans. Co-operation of this nature is at the core of the UK/US defence relationship and is a reminder of what the UK stands to lose if the capability which supports it is run down.

111. The need for proper clothing and equipment to operate in the freezing temperatures in the High North is of obvious importance. Although the equipment provided is generally of a high standard, our observation from our visit in 2017 was that the arrangements and budget for the supply of replacement equipment were uncertain, and that new and undamaged equipment was starting to fall into short supply. We also encountered experiences that we have heard elsewhere from serving personnel that the process of setting requirements for particular sets of specialist equipment is lengthy and administratively cumbersome. Too often specifications that are requested by the specialists on the ground are not delivered by the bureaucratic process further up the chain. We asked Colonel Skuse to comment on whether procurement processes could be improved:

Yes. It should not be as hard as it is. Equipment is not bad at the moment, but the processes should not be as difficult as they are. It requires a little bit more intellectual investment—no revolution there, but a bit of refinement and polish of our processes for working out what we need and what works and then buying it in. There is no one thing—it is a lot of polish in small areas.²⁶⁷

112. General Stickland recognised that there had been difficulties with the supply and maintenance of cold weather equipment and told us funding had been put in place to deliver an operational stock by 2021. When asked about the sufficiency of pipeline and supply he responded:

I think if I had been sitting here two years ago, I would have given you a different answer to this question, but we have money in the line, and a profile that focuses on getting that equipment to where it should be, which is an op stock, by 2021.²⁶⁸

113. We are pleased to see that further work has been done to improve the supply and maintenance of equipment which is vital to sustaining cold weather warfare capability. We ask for further details on the funding that has been provided for cold weather equipment, and the contractual arrangements which will flow from this to deliver an operational stock by 2021. We also ask that the Department provides details on the role of the Royal Marines Mountain Leader cadre in setting the requirement and specification for this equipment.

114. In February 2018 the Committee reported on the current status and future of the UK's amphibious capability, following reports that substantial reductions in the strength of the Royal Marines and the possible disposal of the *Albion* class Landing Platform Dock (LPD) amphibious assault ships were being considered as part of the National Security Capability Review.²⁶⁹ We asked General Stickland how the amphibious warfare specialism sustained by the Royal Marines interacts with the cold weather warfare specialism:

267 [Oral evidence taken on 15 March 2017](#), HC 879 [2016–17], Q113

268 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q112

269 Defence Committee, *Sunset for the Royal Marines? The Royal Marines and UK amphibious capability*, Third Report of Session 2017–19, HC 622

The nature of how we do our business is essentially that we come from the sea ... There is a very strong linkage between the amphibious side and the cold weather warfare part of the jigsaw. From my perspective, as part of the response plans, the ability to project power, command and manoeuvre from the sea are all part of our contribution to those response plans.²⁷⁰

115. When asked whether the absence of the LPDs would make it more difficult for Royal Marines to reinforce Norway in pursuit of those response plans, General Stickland replied “Absolutely”.²⁷¹ In its written evidence the Department has described how UK amphibious assets contribute to NATO reinforcement plans (which would include the plan applying to Norway) as part of the Alliance’s Amphibious Task Group Framework Nation construct:

The expectation from NATO is that Framework Nations provide, as a minimum, the core of an Amphibious Task Group at High Readiness: Landing Platform Dock, Littoral Manoeuvre Command and Control staff, and Lead Commando Group.²⁷²

116. Our report of February 2018 underlined the current and future importance of amphibious capability to UK Defence. One aspect of this is the role this capability plays in the defence of NATO’s Northern Flank. Reducing this capability by disposing of the Royal Navy’s amphibious assault ships would make it more difficult, if not impossible to reinforce Norway swiftly in the event of a crisis. The wider challenges being faced by the Royal Marines which we highlighted in the February 2018 report also have the potential to compromise the amphibious and cold weather warfare specialisms that are sustained by the Corps. *The interaction between the UK’s amphibious and cold weather warfare specialisms should be a central factor in the Department’s consideration of the future of amphibious capability, as should the risk to the UK’s NATO commitments if the capability which supports this commitment is reduced.*

270 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q118

271 [Oral evidence taken on 31 January 2018](#), HC 388 [2017–19], Q121

272 Ministry of Defence ([DTA0003](#))

6 Conclusion

117. It is clear from our inquiry that the changes in the natural environment in the Arctic and High North are having a significant effect on the security environment. Although the region is characterised by low tension, it cannot be taken for granted that it will remain this way and the renewed presence of a revisionist state in the region gives rise to the risk that the situation could change swiftly.

118. Military activity is rising in the region in response to this new uncertainty and its strategic importance to the UK requires the Government to react. The UK sustains a range of capabilities which could play decisive roles. The recent focus on expeditionary operations in hot weather climates has however reduced the focus on the importance of sustaining specialist capability needed to operate in the Arctic and High North. New efforts should be made to regenerate this expertise.

119. If the definition of a leading defence nation is one which has the ability to deploy a range of capabilities anywhere in the world, then this includes the unique operating environment of the Arctic and the High North. Being able to do so is ultimately a question of resource and a question of ambition, and we call upon the Government to show leadership in providing both.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Arctic and the High North

1. Since the end of the Cold War the Arctic States have been successful in maintaining the Arctic and High North as an area of low tension, and the region has been generally characterised by continuing close international co-operation amongst states which may have taken divergent positions on crises occurring elsewhere in the world. However, it is clear that the natural environment in the Arctic is going through a period of fundamental change, giving rise to issues which are bringing about a similar change in the security environment. (Paragraph 16)
2. There is a risk that the perception of the Arctic as an area of exceptionalism where unique considerations of governance apply and where the application of general norms of international law are disputed, could be exploited by nations who have shown an increasing disregard for the rules-based international order elsewhere. The Svalbard archipelago is an example of this, where the possibility of further adventurism by a resurgent and revisionist Russia cannot be discounted. (Paragraph 17)
3. As the ‘globalisation’ of the region continues, an increasing number of states which are more geographically distant from the Arctic are declaring that they have an interest in Arctic affairs and wish to share in the benefits which might come from a more accessible Arctic. This is to be welcomed, as long as these interests continue to coincide. We should nonetheless be aware, in this new age of ‘great power competition’, that this state of affairs may not last indefinitely. *The Government should work closely with allies to establish a common position on all aspects of international law in the Arctic to ensure that disputes active amongst states in the region are not aggravated or exploited.* (Paragraph 18)

The UK, the High North and the North Atlantic

4. The strategic importance of the High North and the North Atlantic to the security of the UK and Europe cannot be overstated. During the Cold War a huge amount of effort was invested in the development of plans and capability to counter the threat that existed to NATO’s Northern Flank and the wider North Atlantic. Although we are not facing challenges on the same scale today, the prospect of Russian power being projected from the High North into the North Atlantic has returned and a comprehensive strategy is needed to meet this threat. (Paragraph 27)
5. We repeat the concerns voiced by the House of Lords Arctic Committee about the way in which UK Arctic policy is prioritised and co-ordinated. The Polar Regions Department’s considerable responsibilities in respect of the Antarctic place Arctic affairs at risk of being made a lower priority, and the dispersal of policy responsibility for Arctic affairs across Whitehall has the potential to frustrate co-ordination. We ask the Government to reconsider its decision not to appoint an Arctic Ambassador to improve co-ordination of policy in Whitehall and bolster UK representation in Arctic affairs. (Paragraph 32)

The new security environment

6. There is little doubt that the Arctic and the High North are seeing an increasing level of military activity. There is much greater divergence in the evidence we have taken on what the reasons behind this are, particularly in relation to Russia. One view is that there is no offensive intent behind Russia's military build-up and that it is simply trying to regenerate military capacity in order to reassert sovereignty. The opposite view is that this is just one more part of Russia's aggressive reassertion of great power competition. We have received a range of views in between. (Paragraph 68)
7. Our view is that the UK and its allies should be extremely wary of Russia's intentions in the region. It is difficult to credit that the scale and range of military capabilities being deployed by Russia in the Arctic fulfil solely defensive purposes. Russia has shown itself to be ready to exploit regional military advantage for political gain. While the Arctic remains a region of low tension, this could change quickly, particularly given Russia's increasingly revisionist attitude to the rules-based international order. (Paragraph 69)
8. *NATO's renewed focus on the North Atlantic is welcome and the Government should be congratulated on the leadership the UK has shown on this issue. We encourage the Government to show similar leadership in bringing NATO to a common position on its role in the Arctic and the High North. We further encourage the Government to lay out its strategy on the future role of defence partnerships outside of NATO in the region.* (Paragraph 70)

UK Defence Capabilities in the High North

9. The willingness of the UK to play a greater role in the security of the Arctic and the High North is tempered by the concern that Defence does not have sufficient resources to establish a meaningful presence in the region. Platforms and capabilities which might have a role in the High North are heavily committed elsewhere, and, with the Modernising Defence Programme still to be completed, there is no indication of new resources being applied. *We ask the Department to explain how the Arctic and High North has featured in the strategic analysis undertaken in the course of the National Security Capability Review and the Modernising Defence Programme and how these will be represented in future policy.* (Paragraph 72)
10. The historical importance of the maritime space stretching from the Arctic to the North Atlantic is well established, but we can see that many of the strategic considerations which were present in the recent past are now re-emerging. The marked increase in Russian naval activity in the waters around the British Isles and the entrances to the Atlantic is clearly a matter of concern to the Government. We are equally concerned about the United Kingdom's ability to match this threat adequately. The reduction of the UK's anti-submarine warfare capability, which has been a core task of the Royal Navy for decades, has been noted in recent Committee reports and we repeat those concerns here. While the capability of the surface and sub-surface vessels the Royal Navy operates is world class, there are not enough platforms available for the task in hand, and vessels that are in service are often committed to standing tasks elsewhere. (Paragraph 76)

11. The threat to undersea data cables is a real one, and the consequences of such networks being disrupted would be serious. We accept that the Government shares this concern and is aware of the associated risks. But this risk further reinforces the need for effective situational awareness to support maritime security and a credible anti-submarine detection capability to deter hostile activity. (Paragraph 79)
12. The Royal Navy's under ice missions in the Arctic are one of the less well-known aspects of UK operations in the Cold War, largely due to the level of secrecy which surrounded them. This contribution was crucial to NATO's defensive strategy, and the Submarine Service developed a world-leading capability in these operations. As the strategic focus moved elsewhere after the Cold War, under ice exercises ceased altogether. We are very encouraged to see that with the mission of HMS *Trenchant* that this presence has been re-established, and hope that this is part of a permanent cycle of activity in the Arctic. *Understanding that the Government does not comment in detail on submarine operations, we ask the Department to lay out its policy on the future of under ice exercises. We also ask the Department to outline the comparative under ice capabilities of Royal Navy submarines currently in service.* (Paragraph 85)
13. *The Department should fully explain the concept of operations for carriers operating in North Atlantic and High North, including training and exercise arrangements, and the opportunities for working with allies.* (Paragraph 88)
14. We have received substantial evidence that nine Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft are not enough for the UK to provide sufficient anti-submarine warfare coverage in the North Atlantic. The extent of the current threat is openly acknowledged by Ministers and airborne anti-submarine warfare capability is a crucial part of the response. *The Department should provide the Committee with a detailed justification of the planned maritime patrol aircraft establishment.* (Paragraph 94)
15. *The Department should provide reassurance that air platforms have the range and resilience to sustain operations in the High North, and give evidence that proper testing has taken place of the capability of equipment in cold temperatures and at high latitudes.* (Paragraph 98)
16. The winter training exercises in Northern Norway each year led by the Royal Marines are crucial to maintenance of the cold weather warfare specialism. The level of training required to survive, move and fight in this environment is high and these skills fade if they are not maintained by regular training cycles. As these exercises are already taking place at low levels of mass, reducing them further will do more damage to their tactical utility and reduce the numbers of personnel completing cold weather training. The fact that this has been done on financial grounds is particularly unacceptable. *The Government should ensure that cold weather training exercises return to normal levels in 2019.* (Paragraph 103)
17. *The Government should explain how cold weather training exercises are integrated with NATO's Graduated Response Plan for the reinforcement of Norway.* (Paragraph 104)
18. The pressure on the defence budget combined with the annual process of allocating uncommitted spending on training restricts the ability to plan training over the long term, limiting its strategic effect and reducing the ability to integrate more

closely with allies. *The Department should explore how it can be more flexible in programming multi-year cold weather training arrangements, instead of conducting the process on an annual basis.* (Paragraph 105)

19. As the owners of the cold weather warfare specialism within UK Armed Forces, the Royal Marines have been able to transfer expertise to the British Army to support the deployments in Estonia and Poland. The high quality of the cold weather training that the UK provides also makes it a sought-after commodity amongst our allies. The training that has been provided to the United States Marine Corps since 2015 is a particularly valuable example of defence co-operation and we were struck by the positive feedback we received from the Americans. Co-operation of this nature is at the core of the UK/US defence relationship and is a reminder of what the UK stands to lose if the capability which supports it is run down. (Paragraph 110)
20. We are pleased to see that further work has been done to improve the supply and maintenance of equipment which is vital to sustaining cold weather warfare capability. *We ask for further details on the funding that has been provided for cold weather equipment, and the contractual arrangements which will flow from this to deliver an operational stock by 2021. We also ask that the Department provides details on the role of the Royal Marines Mountain Leader cadre in setting the requirement and specification for this equipment.* (Paragraph 113)
21. Our report of February 2018 underlined the current and future importance of amphibious capability to UK Defence. One aspect of this is the role this capability plays in the defence of NATO's Northern Flank. Reducing this capability by disposing of the Royal Navy's amphibious assault ships would make it more difficult, if not impossible to reinforce Norway swiftly in the event of a crisis. The wider challenges being faced by the Royal Marines which we highlighted in the February 2018 report also have the potential to compromise the amphibious and cold weather warfare specialisms that are sustained by the Corps. *The interaction between the UK's amphibious and cold weather warfare specialisms should be a central factor in the Department's consideration of the future of amphibious capability, as should the risk to the UK's NATO commitments if the capability which supports this commitment is reduced.* (Paragraph 116)
22. It is clear from our inquiry that the changes in the natural environment in the Arctic and High North are having a significant effect on the security environment. Although the region is characterised by low tension, it cannot be taken for granted that it will remain this way and the renewed presence of a revisionist state in the region gives rise to the risk that the situation could change swiftly. (Paragraph 117)
23. Military activity is rising in the region in response to this new uncertainty and its strategic importance to the UK requires the Government to react. The UK sustains a range of capabilities which could play decisive roles. The recent focus on expeditionary operations in hot weather climates has however reduced the focus on the importance of sustaining specialist capability needed to operate in the Arctic and High North. New efforts should be made to regenerate this expertise. (Paragraph 118)

24. If the definition of a leading defence nation is one which has the ability to deploy a range of capabilities anywhere in the world, then this includes the unique operating environment of the Arctic and the High North. Being able to do so is ultimately a question of resource and a question of ambition, and we call upon the Government to show leadership in providing both. (Paragraph 119)

Sub-Committee Formal Minutes

Thursday 19 July 2018

Members present:

Mrs Madeleine Moon, in the Chair

Rt Hon Mr Mark Francois Phil Wilson

Gavin Robinson

Draft Report (*On Thin Ice: UK Defence in the Arctic*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 119 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report of the Sub-Committee to the Committee in this session.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the Committee.

[The Sub-Committee adjourned.]

Committee Formal Minutes

Thursday 19 July 2018

Members present:

Rt Hon Dr Julian Lewis, in the Chair

Rt Hon Mr Mark Francois Rt Hon John Spellar

Mrs Madeleine Moon Phil Wilson

Draft Report from the Sub-Committee (*On Thin Ice: UK Defence in the Arctic*), brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 119 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Twelfth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 4 September at 2pm

Witnesses

Session 2016–17

The following witnesses gave evidence in the 2016–17 session. Transcripts can be viewed on the [2016–17 inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee’s website.

Wednesday 1 March 2017

Question number

His Excellency Mr Claus Grube, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Denmark, **His Excellency Mr Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson**, Ambassador of Iceland, and **His Excellency Mr Torbjörn Sohlström**, Ambassador of Sweden [Q1–23](#)

Professor Klaus Dodds, Professor of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London, **Professor Caroline Kennedy-Pipe**, Professor of War Studies, University of Hull, and **Dr Dimitriy Tulupov**, Senior Lecturer, School of International Relations, St. Petersburg State University [Q24–38](#)

Wednesday 15 March 2017

Question number

Lieutenant Commander Dr John Ash RN (Rtd), Institute Associate, Scott Polar Research Institute, and **Dr Igor Sutyagin**, Senior Research Fellow, Royal United Services Institute [Q39–77](#)

Group Captain Clive Blount RAF (Rtd), **Nick Childs**, Senior Fellow for Naval Forces and Maritime Security, International Institute for Strategic Studies, and **Lieutenant Colonel Matt Skuse RM (Rtd)** [Q78–117](#)

Session 2017–19

The following witnesses gave evidence in the 2017–19 session. Transcripts can be viewed on the [2017–19 inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee’s website.

Wednesday 15 November 2017

Question number

James Gray MP [Q1–19](#)

Wednesday 24 January 2018

Professor Eric Grove, former professor of naval history and senior fellow, Centre for Applied Research in Security Innovation, Liverpool Hope University, **Dr James Jinks**, historian and author, and **Colonel Professor John Andreas Olsen**, Defence Attaché, Royal Norwegian Embassy, London [Q20–44](#)

Wednesday 31 January 2018

Rt Hon Mark Lancaster TD VR MP, Minister of State for the Armed Forces, **Nick Gurr**, Director of International Security Policy, Ministry of Defence, **Major General Charles Stickland OBE RM**, Commandant General Royal Marines, and **Jane Rumble**, Head of the Polar Regions Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office [Q45–141](#)

Published written evidence

Session 2016–17

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [2016–17 inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee’s website.

DIA numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Adam Lajeunesse ([DIA0024](#))
- 2 Arctic Advisory Group Ltd ([DIA0003](#))
- 3 Bruce Jones ([DIA0026](#))
- 4 Dr Andrew Foxall ([DIA0005](#))
- 5 Dr Brooke Smith-Windsor ([DIA0008](#))
- 6 Dr Dmitriy Tulupov ([DIA0018](#))
- 7 Dr Igor Sutyagin ([DIA0028](#))
- 8 Dr Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen ([DIA0011](#))
- 9 Dr Pavel Baev ([DIA0014](#))
- 10 Dr Peter Hough ([DIA0004](#))
- 11 Dr Rob Huebert ([DIA0013](#))
- 12 Dr Sascha Dov Bachmann and Mr Andres B Munoz Mosquera ([DIA0029](#))
- 13 Hull University ([DIA0010](#))
- 14 Human Security Centre ([DIA0006](#))
- 15 John Andreas Olsen ([DIA0046](#))
- 16 Kingdom of Denmark ([DIA0027](#))
- 17 Ministry of Defence ([DIA0020](#))
- 18 Morgane Fert-Malka ([DIA0023](#))
- 19 Mr Ryan Kristiansen ([DIA0001](#))
- 20 Professor Alexander Sergunin ([DIA0021](#))
- 21 Professor James Kraska and Professor Sean Fahey ([DIA0015](#))
- 22 Royal Norwegian Embassy, London ([DIA0047](#))
- 23 Royal United Services Institute ([DIA0002](#))
- 24 Scott Polar Research Institute ([DIA0009](#))
- 25 Scottish Global Forum ([DIA0012](#))

Session 2017–19

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [2017–19 inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee’s website.

DTA numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Ministry of Defence ([DTA0003](#))
- 2 Mr Graham Edmonds ([DTA0004](#))
- 3 Oxford Research Group ([DTA0001](#))
- 4 The Scottish Government ([DTA0002](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2017–19

First Report	Gambling on 'Efficiency': Defence Acquisition and Procurement	HC 431
Second Report	Unclear for take-off? F-35 Procurement	HC 326
Third Report	Sunset for the Royal Marines? The Royal Marines and UK amphibious capability	HC 622
Fourth Report	Rash or Rational? North Korea and the threat it poses	HC 327
Fifth Report	Lost in Translation? Afghan Interpreters and Other Locally Employed Civilians	HC 572
Sixth Report	The Government's proposals for a future security partnership with the European Union	HC 594
Seventh Report	Beyond 2 per cent: A preliminary report on the Modernising Defence Programme	HC 818
Eighth Report	Indispensable allies: US, NATO and UK Defence relations	HC 387
Ninth Report	Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2017	HC 707
Tenth Report	UK arms exports during 2016	HC 666
Eleventh Report	Armed Forces and veterans mental health	
First Special Report	SDSR 2015 and the Army	HC 311
Second Special Report	Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2016	HC 310
Third Special Report	Investigations into fatalities in Northern Ireland involving British military personnel: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2016–17	HC 549
Fourth Special Report	Gambling on 'Efficiency': Defence Acquisition and Procurement: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 846
Fifth Special Report	Unclear for take-off? F-35 Procurement: Responses to the Committee's Second Report	HC 845
Sixth Special Report	Sunset for the Royal Marines? The Royal Marines and UK amphibious capability: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 1044
Seventh Special Report	Rash or Rational? North Korea and the threat it poses: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report	HC 1155