

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## NATO Summit 2014: Time to Make Up for Lost Ground in the Arctic

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The 2014 NATO summit will be held in September 2014 in Wales. As NATO's combat mission comes to an end and Russia's behavior becomes more aggressive this will be an important summit to define the future mission of the alliance.

One area that has been largely ignored by the alliance is the Arctic. The U.S. should use the next summit to get the Arctic firmly on NATO's agenda and ensure that the alliance agrees on a common policy toward the region's security.

### Strategically Important

The Arctic region, commonly referred to as the High North, is increasingly becoming strategically important. The possibility of decreasing ice coverage during the summer months and advances in technology mean that shipping, natural resource exploration, and tourism will bring an increase of economic activity.

Although the Arctic region has been an area of low conflict among the Arctic powers, NATO should consider the implications of Russia's recent aggressive military behavior. NATO is a collective security organization designed to defend the territorial integrity of its members. Five NATO members (Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and the United States) are Arctic countries. In addition, two closely

allied nations (Finland and Sweden) also have Arctic territory.

NATO has no agreed common position on its role in the Arctic region. Although NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept was praised for acknowledging new security challenges for the alliance, such as cyber and energy security, Arctic security was not included. In fact, the word *Arctic* does not appear in the 2010 Strategic Concept, the 2010 Lisbon NATO summit declaration, or the 2012 Chicago NATO summit declaration.

NATO has been internally divided on the role the alliance should play in the High North. Norway is the leading voice inside the alliance for promoting NATO's role in the Arctic. It is the only country in the world that has its permanent military headquarters above the Arctic Circle, and it has invested extensively in Arctic defense capabilities.

Canada has likewise invested heavily in Arctic defense capabilities. However, unlike Norway, Canada has stymied past efforts to have NATO take a larger role in the region. Generally speaking, there is a concern inside Canada that an alliance role in the Arctic would afford non-Arctic NATO countries influence in an area where they otherwise would have none.

As a sovereign nation-state, Canada has a prerogative to determine what role, if any, NATO should have in Canada's Arctic region. However, as a collective security alliance, NATO cannot ignore the Arctic altogether, and the alliance should not appear divided on the issue.

### Russia: Militarizing the Arctic

While the Arctic region remains peaceful, Russia's recent steps to militarize the Arctic, coupled with its bellicose behavior toward its neighbors,

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makes the Arctic a security concern in a way not thought of only a few years ago.

Russia's Northern Fleet, which is based in the Arctic, now counts for two-thirds of the Russian Navy. A new Arctic command will be established by 2015 to coordinate all Russian military activities in the Arctic region.<sup>1</sup> Over the next few years, two new so-called Arctic brigades will be permanently based in the Arctic region, and Russian special forces have been training in the region. Old Soviet-era facilities have been re-opened, for example, putting the airfield on the Kotelny Island into use for the first time in almost 30 years.<sup>2</sup> Russia's ultimate goal is to deploy a combined arms force in the Arctic by 2020, and this plan appears to be on track.<sup>3</sup>

As an Arctic power, a Russian military presence in the region is to be expected. However, it should be viewed with some caution in light of recent Russian aggression in its neighborhood.

### The Wales Summit and the Arctic

In May, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen acknowledged that the changing dynamic of the Arctic region will require the alliance to develop a strategy. "No doubt the Russians will focus more on the Arctic," he said. "NATO allies will have to address this issue."<sup>4</sup> The upcoming NATO summit is the time to address the alliance's role in the Arctic. To become better focused on Arctic security, the U.S. and NATO should:

- **Officially acknowledge NATO's role in the Arctic for the first time.** The 2014 summit declaration should include a section devoted to the Arctic. This does not need to be a strategy, but it should acknowledge that the Arctic matters to the security of the alliance.

- **Work with allies to develop a NATO Arctic strategy.** It is time for NATO to develop a comprehensive Arctic policy to address security challenges in the region. This should be done in cooperation with non-NATO members Finland and Sweden.
- **Work with NATO's non-Arctic members, such as the U.K. and the Baltic states, to promote an Arctic agenda.** The U.K. takes an active interest in the Arctic. Geographically, the U.K. is the world's closest country to the Arctic Circle without actually being an Arctic country. The Baltic states work closely with the Nordic countries, which are Arctic powers. The U.S. should leverage its relationships with these countries to advance an Arctic agenda inside NATO.
- **Continue participating in training exercises in the region.** Exercises above the Arctic Circle, such as Cold Response 2014, are vital to ensuring that the alliance is prepared to meet potential threats to Arctic security. The U.S. should also consider hosting NATO exercises in Alaska.
- **Call for the next NATO summit to be held above the Arctic Circle.** This would bring immediate awareness of Arctic issues to the alliance. Perhaps the Norwegian city of Tromsø would be most appropriate.

### Stop Dithering: Make the Arctic a Priority

In the Arctic, sovereignty equals security. Respecting national sovereignty in the Arctic would ensure that the chances of armed conflict in the region remain low. Since NATO is an intergovernmental alliance of sovereign nation-states built

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1. Dave Majumdar, "Russia to Standup New Arctic Command," *USNI News*, February 18, 2014, <http://news.usni.org/2014/02/18/russia-standup-new-arctic-command> (accessed July 16, 2014).

2. Trude Pettersen, "Russia Re-Opens Arctic Cold War Era Air Base," *Barents Observer*, October 30, 2013, <http://barentsobserver.com/en/security/2013/10/russia-re-opens-arctic-cold-war-era-air-base-30-10> (accessed July 16, 2014).

3. RIA Novosti, "Russian Commandos Train for Arctic Combat," October 14, 2013, [http://en.ria.ru/military\\_news/20131014/184143129/Russian-Commandos-Train-for-Arctic-Combat.html](http://en.ria.ru/military_news/20131014/184143129/Russian-Commandos-Train-for-Arctic-Combat.html) (accessed July 16, 2014).

4. John D. Stoll, "NATO Chief Concerned About Russia's Future Arctic Plans," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 30, 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/nato-chief-concerned-about-russias-future-arctic-plans-1401463131> (accessed August 19, 2014).

on the consensus of all of its members, it has a role to play in Arctic security if it so chooses. The military coordination and resources that NATO could contribute to the Arctic region would offer benefits beyond the alliance.

NATO has waited too long to take the Arctic region seriously. At the Wales summit, the alliance should finally lay out a strategy for the High North.

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