



The Arctic is becoming the cockpit of the world for three central reasons, writes Tim Reilly:

1. The epicentre of the fastest rate of physical state change in the earth's climate and weather. Interest in the Arctic is now global.
2. A region in which the world's most powerful countries will compete in C21 for strategic dominance, control of the Northern Sea Route (NSR), and access to vast hydrocarbon, fish, and rare-earth mineral reserves.
3. An arena in which two philosophically contrary governance frameworks exist to date in harmony, namely Sovereignty (geopolitical and strategic concerns - held by NATO/Arctic states), and Sovereign Rights (International Law, Human Rights, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), etc), is the governance framework of the Arctic Council (AC). For all these reasons the AC is a highly successful international relations forum in which consideration may be given in due course, to Confidence Building Measures between the U.S. and Russia. In the meantime, it is the essential governance framework for maintaining stability and predictability in the region.

EVOLVING ARCTIC STATUS

The opportunities and challenges in the Arctic are now considered of global importance, with the result that the decision-making process and governance of the region by the 8 Arctic Council nations is increasingly influenced by non-Arctic states - and no longer just AC states. The absolute necessity is for associated regional economic stability and predictability for continued AC-sponsored governance and investment in Arctic globalization .

Crucially for the EU, the outstanding significant regional issues and tensions occur in the European - not the North American Arctic. (Strategic, environmental, Northern Sea Route, governance, hydrocarbon/fish resources, Russia and sanctions, China, the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), globalization, infrastructure/ Information, Communications, and Technology

(ICT), UNCLOS etc). It should consider how any necessary Arctic-oriented mission can coordinate with the AC's founding mandates of Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development, and be mindful of the broader economic development of "Global Arctic Plc" in the 21st century, and cognisant of non-Arctic states' growing economic and political presence – and influence in the region.

Accordingly, the continued absence of the U.S. in the European Arctic (following sanctions) is of emerging strategic concern. Russia is the indispensable and geographically dominant Eurasian Arctic power, and has an increasingly close geo-economic relationship with China in the European Arctic. Whilst the immediate military capability and capacity of Russia in the Arctic is clear to all, the long-term threat is Russian (and perhaps later Sino-Russian), geo-economic developments in the region. This combination of geo-economic and geopolitical/strategic means will be increasingly expressed in an asymmetric framework throughout the region and possibly in conjunction with China, over time. Thus the EU should consider most carefully in its assessments the medium to long-term threats, as they may be radically different in nature and impact, to the challenges we see presently.

For Russia, its strategic outlook and vital national interest for centuries has been its concerns about being hemmed in by ice to the north and land to the south. This is one part of its motivation in Syria – to sustain its naval base on the Mediterranean. Climate change is enhancing its limited access to the high seas through the north.

The Arctic Ocean coastline is its backyard and houses its greatest military capacity and capability, including significant logistical/ICT/support assets as well; all decisive in Arctic warfare. It has profound and deep Arctic operational knowledge, capability, and strategic depth, as well as de facto geographical domination of the European Arctic both on land and sea, and to some extent in the air/space too. This is an arena in which NATO/EU needs to deploy diplomatic and economic measures as assiduously as it approaches military contingency planning.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF SANCTIONS IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC.

1. A deepening and widening of the Sino-Russian relationship in the Arctic. It is arguable that the single biggest beneficiary of western sanctions on Russia in the Arctic will be China.
2. A change in priority by Russia from Securitization to Militarization of the European Arctic including latterly the NSR (soon to be accessible to RF-flagged and/or favoured vessels only – see the EuroDefense 2019 timeline when published for latest developments).
3. Sanctions have failed to restrain Russia's freedom of movement in the European Arctic, and if anything accelerated its plans to unfold its geo-economic strategy for Eurasia ("Greater Eurasia"), whilst concurrently facilitating – and benefiting from, China's "Polar Silk Road" and BRI-backed infrastructure and financing initiatives in the European Arctic.
4. U.S./EU commercial withdrawal following sanctions (especially Big Oil), has left neither power with any kind of strategic geo-economic leverage over Russia in the European Arctic, and

created an economic vacuum in the region that China is steadily filling.

RUSSIA'S ARCTIC STRATEGY

Any emerging Arctic policy formulation must be mindful of Russia's "Greater Eurasia" strategy for the European Arctic. The key instrument to achieve a Greater Eurasia is increasingly geo-economics, not solely military-oriented geopolitics. Russian geo-economic intent in the Arctic arena is served by strategic/geopolitical capability/means, and not vice versa. This strategy in the Arctic is well evidenced by its coordination with China's "Polar Silk Route" Initiative (part of BRI), Beijing's recently announced Arctic Policy, and its latest inclusion of the NSR as part of China's "Blue Economic Corridor" global maritime framework.

In this sense asymmetric warfare as practised extensively elsewhere by Russia does - and increasingly will - employ a significant geo-economic component in the Arctic, not best countered/contained by the present established western military doctrine. This geo-economic asymmetric framework for the Arctic (which includes a military dimension), will be further developed by Russia – and to a lesser extent with China as well - in specific, mutually-beneficial, targeted cases.

DEVELOPING EU ARCTIC VISION

A draft vision: "Construct and deploy with AC/NATO/EU allies, a combined strategic/geo-economic Arctic doctrine to maintain the primacy of AC governance and the continuation of regional stability, alongside a visible NATO/EU presence, which together are designed to contain, counter, and confront Russia and /or China in the Circumpolar North diplomatically and economically and if necessary, militarily as well".

ARCTIC OBJECTIVES

Three appropriate and deliberately escalatory short-long term objectives are proposed to

address both the Russian (and potential Chinese) presence and power in the European Arctic region, depending on their political, commercial and military combinations and respective intentions:

- Contain (Institutionally contain Russia within regional governance frameworks such as the AC, UNCLOS, and the Polar Code, etc)
- Counter (Disrupt the deepening Sino-Russian relationship in the Arctic: ((Big Oil, NSR control, ICT/infrastructure and investment)
- Confront (Match Russian military/naval capabilities with asymmetric means ((ICT/Cyber/Geospatial, Intelligence & Regional Alliances) as well as existing EU national and new communitaire assets.

SUGGESTED EU ACTIONS

* Keep Russia in the Arctic Council - at all costs. Being outside of the AC would finish the AC (suing China enormously), and then render Russia politically, if not strategically, uncontainable in the Eurasian Arctic. Keep Russia diplomatically and scientifically engaged, if at all possible).

* Disrupt the Sino-Russian Arctic Relationship.

- The NSR, Arctic Ports, etc (Chinese /Russian infrastructure build-out in Russian/European Arctic partly financed by China)
 - Major Sino-Russian Arctic hydrocarbon deals, (facilitating linkages between the two countries/regions, across Eurasia)
 - China's Polar Silk Road initiative and the Russia's Greater Eurasia strategy (both geo-economically linking & connecting-up Eurasia). This includes disrupting for instance, the Sino-Russian "divide and rule" strategy being deployed in Sweden/Finland
 - The centrality of the NSR: enormous Russian maritime Liquid Natural Gas deliveries to China/ NE Asia, plus Russia's geo-economic policy, (partly shared by China), and which if unchecked, may result in the emergence of both Russia and China as Arctic Sea Powers in the 21st century.
 - Thus, also weakening Russia (as a secondary objective).
- * Bring the U.S. back into the European Arctic For strategic/military, and economic reasons, including a possible joint US/EU funding of an Arctic Economic Infrastructure Fund to counter China's Arctic BRI initiative, and its increasing use of and role in, the NSR, bridging Eurasia from the increasingly referred to "Eurasian Arctic" (China in Scandinavian countries) to the "Pacific Arctic" (Russia & China in NSR at Bering Straits/western Pacific), both terms possible

indicators of Sino-Russian region-building intent across the Eurasian Arctic.

* Review and Augment Arctic Alliances - principally with Norway in the European Arctic but may need additional relations with Greenland/Iceland – extending the EU-supplied Iceland Air Patrols for instance, and possibly Sweden/Finland too (countering China's suspected objective of splitting the major littoral Arctic 5 states from the minor European Arctic 3 states).

* Upgrade and Develop Intelligence and Regional Analyses Capabilities: to be enhanced and relations sought with Government agencies, research and analyses centres and Think Tanks. Overt Russian capability and capacity is obvious in the Arctic, but the relationship between military/naval capabilities and political intent is not yet proven. It is arguable that geo-economic intent is the priority issue for Russia in the Arctic, thus the importance of countering Chinese initiatives such as BRI's Polar Silk Road, which is centred around Arctic infrastructure build-out; an essential prerequisite for Russia's geo-economic Arctic strategy.

* Deploy Geo-spatial, ICT, and Cyber Capabilities: to disrupt, deflect and degrade both geo-economic and geopolitical means deployed by Russia and China in the region, (i.e. a double-hatted role, as well as a considerable "force multiplier" capability in the face of vastly superior numbers of RF military/naval forces and economic advances). The capability is largely deployed to a) counter Russian means that enhance their geo-economic strategy, b) disrupt the Sino-Russian economic relationship – whilst concurrently c) deploying obvious military applications as well.

* Create Arctic Forward Mounting Bases: Small (Infantry Company-sized) rotational detachments by EU nations with Arctic capabilities to areas such as Svalbard, Iceland, Greenland - and optional covert Special Forces (Troop level) deployments in Sweden/Finland too (with agreement of the two respective governments)

* Work with UK : On the assumption of forthcoming Brexit, work closely with the UK so that they bring their expertise, research, training to bear and augment Royal Marine Commando presence in Norway, with a permanent, rotational, quick-reaction, flexible, and easily deployable infantry battalion (operating in the High North region).

Tim Reilly is researching at the Scott Polar Research Institute, (SPRI), University of Cambridge, but the author's views are his own, not of it. He is a former soldier and advisor to UK Parliamentary committees.