



On thin ice

United Kingdom Arctic Defence

House of Commons Defence Committee

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Relations internationales

The changing natural environment of the Arctic and the far North is leading to a change in the security environment. As the ice retreats and the Arctic becomes more accessible for navigation and exploitation of its vast natural resources, a region characterized by low tension and multilateral cooperation has begun in recent years to see an increase in military activity.

Suggested translation :

The Russian Federation is at the forefront of this activity. Although there are differing views on Russia's motivations, it is difficult to conclude that this strengthening of military power is proportionate to an exclusively defensive perspective. Russia has demonstrated a willingness to use military force to gain political advantage and the contested functioning 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 pose a considerable risk to the security of the wider North Atlantic Ocean. The UK's previous leadership in the defence of the region should be restored, and NATO's new focus on the North Atlantic should be accompanied by a refocusing on the source of the threat in the High North.

While the United Kingdom continues to maintain capabilities and expertise that can play a leading role in the Arctic and the High North, the focus on operations in this challenging environment has been reduced during long years of engagement in expeditionary operations in warm climates. The multi-purpose nature of these specialized capabilities also means that they are in high demand elsewhere, reflecting broader pressures on Defence resources that make it difficult for the Forces to meet commitments and maintain training levels.

If the definition of a great defence nation is one that is capable of deploying a range of capabilities anywhere in the world, this includes the unique operating environment of the Arctic and the far north. The ability to do so is ultimately a matter of resources and a matter of ambition; the Committee calls on the government to show leadership in providing both.

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