Overcoming the Arctic Security Dilemma


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Abstract:

Drawing on the available literature on “the security dilemma”, this paper seeks to shed light on interstate security relations in the Arctic. In recent years, most, if not all, of the Arctic coastal states (Russia, Canada, the U.S., Denmark, and Norway) have taken steps to protect their economic and national security interests in the Arctic. This has led to a modest but notable increase in the level of military activity in the northern areas – at sea, in the air, and on land. As in other parts of the world, one state’s military efforts to enhance its security may have the unfortunate, and often unintended and unforeseen, effect of making others feel less secure. Under some scenarios, such efforts may even set off military counter-moves by one or more other states. This paper explores the role of fear and security concerns in Arctic interstate relations and discusses possible ways to overcome what may be described as an “Arctic security dilemma”. Central in this regard are the actors’ ability and willingness to understand the motives of other actors and the complexity of the challenges at hand, including the presence of “action-reaction” dynamics in the military field.
1. Security dynamics in the Arctic and the nature of the Arctic security dilemma

Concealing an estimated 30 percent of the world’s undiscovered reserves of natural gas, and 13 percent of the undiscovered reserves of oil, the Arctic has in recent years become an increasingly important arena for economic, foreign, and security policy. The melting of the polar ice cap is opening up previously inaccessible parts of the region to resource exploration and ship traffic, and unresolved issues pertaining to maritime jurisdiction and boundaries in the Arctic Ocean and its adjacent seas are gradually coming to the surface. This has led to a marked increase in the number of books, articles, and research reports discussing the changing dynamics of interstate relations in the Arctic. Many of the contributors to this debate have expressed concern that growing rivalry over access to natural resources (oil, gas, minerals, and living marine resources) and/or strategic shipping lanes (the Northeast and Northwest Passages) may lead to heightened tensions between two or more of the Arctic coastal states (Russia, the U.S., Canada, Denmark, and Norway), or between Arctic and non-Arctic states. ¹

Recognizing the Arctic region’s growing economic and strategic significance, the Arctic coastal states have in the past five years taken various measures to define and protect their economic and national security interests in the region. The “Arctic five” have, along with Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, and the European Union, adopted region-specific strategy documents which draw attention to the “emerging security challenges” in the Arctic. ² Many of the coastal states have also taken steps to strengthen their military capabilities in the region, for instance in the form of ground- or space-based surveillance assets or increased patrolling by air-, naval-, or coast guard forces. Those who have not yet taken such steps have more or less explicitly stated their intention to do so in the near to medium-term future.

Obviously, all of the Arctic Council member states do appreciate the fact that the Arctic is a low-tension region, surrounded by politically and militarily stable countries which can draw on successful regional cooperation arrangements and a long tradition of peaceful coexistence. Arctic as well as non-Arctic nations highlight the potentially crucial role of International Law in the settlement of unresolved delimitation and jurisdiction disputes in the region. No Arctic nation wants to contribute to a “remilitarization” of the region. Neither do any of the outside actors which have expressed a long-term interest in the region, including emerging Asian powers such as China and India and established powers such as Japan and South Korea.

This is not to say there is no potential for conflicts and military tensions in the northernmost part of the globe. Unlike Antarctica, the Arctic is not, and unlikely to become, a demilitarized zone. The region still plays an important role in the nuclear deterrence strategies of Russia and the U.S., and all of the Arctic coastal states attach great importance to their economic and


² The key High North/Arctic/Northern strategy documents were adopted in 2006 (Norway), 2008 (Russia and the EU), 2009 (Canada and the U.S.), 2010 (Finland and Iceland) and 2011 (Sweden and Denmark). For further details, see http://www.geopoliticsnorth.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=159&Itemid=69.
security interests in the region. If challenged by their neighbors or outside actors, they may be willing to go to great lengths to defend their interests, if necessary by the display or use of military force.

As this paper will argue, the Arctic coastal states are facing what may be described as a “security dilemma”: If they do not uphold or strengthen their military (or homeland security) capabilities in the region, other and more powerful actors may try to exploit their weakness and threaten their economic and/or security interests. On the other hand, if they do increase their military (or homeland security) capabilities to protect their national interests in the region, other actors may feel intimidated or threatened by their measures and eventually initiate similar ones. This may in turn necessitate countermeasures against their neighbors’ countermeasures, and so on, potentially setting off a process that none of the involved actors neither wants nor anticipates – an “incremental militarization” of the region.

The underlying problem seems to be a persisting lack of certainty about other actors’ peaceful intentions. Judging from the official political rhetoric, none of the Arctic coastal states expects the region to become a conflict arena, at least not in near future, and most of them – particularly Russia and the U.S. – appear to have more severe security challenges elsewhere. Yet none of the coastal states excludes the possibility of interstate conflict in the Arctic, for instance over access to natural resources located in areas under their jurisdiction or strategic shipping lanes going through their coastal waters. As this paper will attempt to illustrate, based on examples derived from mainstream political discourse in these countries and the content of region-specific strategy documents adopted in recent years, the states that surround the Arctic have a tendency to justify or explain their defense and security policy moves in the region by referring to (not always accurate accounts of) what their neighbors, and sometimes outside actors, do or have done. One’s own measures, which may include the acquisition of new capabilities, increases in the number of sea and air patrols, or changes in the scope or pattern of military operations, are typically presented as being of a defensive/reactive nature. Similar measures undertaken by other actors are frequently perceived as being of an offensive nature, potentially signaling revisionist intentions and justifying adequate countermeasures.

Uncertainty about the intension of others – whom to trust – is an inescapable feature of human and international relations. But uncertainty is not synonymous with insecurity. In the Arctic, as elsewhere, there may be ways to mitigate the negative effects of the dilemma outlined above. Central in this regard are the actors’ willingness and ability to consider how their defense and security policy moves in the region are perceived by others, whether the competitive “zero-sum” approach may be replaced by an alternative approach focusing on common security challenges, and how they may reduce the risk of miscommunication through increased military transparency and proper signaling. Over time, the Arctic coastal states may also build mutual trust through the settlement of unresolved jurisdiction disputes and

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3 The forces operating in the Arctic include regular military forces as well as coast guard and security service forces performing “constabulary” functions. The latter category of forces is organized differently in different countries. For instance, the U.S. Coast Guard sorts under the Department of Homeland Security, and not the Department of Defense. The Russian Coast Guard is part of the Federal Security Service (FSB). The Norwegian Coast Guard is part of the Navy.

4 I owe this term to Rear Admiral Niels Wang, Commandant of the Danish Defense College.
strengthening of regional cooperation arrangements. This may in turn create favorable conditions for the development of a viable and lasting Arctic “security community”.5

The paper is organized as follows: Section two will explore the concept of “the security dilemma”, coined by John Hertz in 1950, and reintroduced by Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler in 2008. Section three discusses potential benefits and pitfalls of applying the concept to analyses of Arctic interstate relations in the present day. Section four seeks to shed light on the role of military power in contemporary Arctic politics and trends in the coastal states’ military activity in the region. Section five offers some thoughts on possible remedies to the challenges caused by the security dilemma in the Arctic. The sixth and final section contains a brief summary of findings and some concluding remarks.

2. Exploring the concept: From Hertz and Butterfield to Booth and Wheeler

The fundamental dilemma facing political decision-makers wanting to increase their state’s security without making other states feel less secure is not new. It was observed as far back as in the Antiquity, when the Greek historian Thucydides wrote his famous account of the Peloponnesian War. In the mid 20th century, the phenomenon was described and analyzed, more or less independently, by German-born political scientist John Hertz6 and British historian Herbert Butterfield.7 Like Hertz, Butterfield drew attention to the fundamental role played by uncertainty in international relations. Since no nation could have absolute certainty about the real intentions of others – a phenomenon often referred to as the “other minds” problem – spirals of mistrust and a mutual sense of insecurity could develop between actors even though none of them had malign intentions towards the other to begin with:

It is the peculiar characteristic of the situation that I am describing […] that you yourself may vividly feel the terrible fear that you have of the other party, but you cannot enter into the other man’s counter-fear, or even understand why he should be particularly nervous. For you know that you yourself mean him no harm, and that you want nothing from him save guarantees for your own safety; and it is never possible for you to realise or remember properly that since he cannot see the inside of your mind, he can never have the same assurance of your intentions that you have.8

The concept of the security dilemma has often been embraced by scholars belonging to the Realist camp of International Relations, typically emphasizing the “anarchic” nature of the international system and how states are inclined to make worst-case assumptions about their potential adversaries. The concept is, for instance, one of the core assumptions of defensive

5 This concept, introduced by Karl Deutsch in the 1950s and picked up by Emmanuel Adler and Michael Barnett in the 1990s, describes a community of states between which there is “real assurance that the members of that community will not fight each other physically, but will settle their disputes in some other way”. See Karl Deutsch et al.: Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1957), p. 5. Also see Emmanuel Adler & Michael Barnett: Security Communities (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), p. 57.
7 Herbert Butterfield: History and Human Relations (London: Collins 1951). Whereas Hertz used the term “security dilemma”, Butterfield referred to the phenomenon as “Hobbesian Fear”.
8 Butterfield, op. cit., p. 21.
realism. Defensive realism holds that states are “security seekers”, inherently distrustful of other states’ intentions. As argued by Robert Jervis, the likelihood of violent interstate conflict increases when geography and technology favor expansionist policies. Conversely, when these factors are inductive to status quo policies, states are more likely to cooperate. Thus, the “offense-defense” theory of defensive realism may be a potential theory to explain the level of threat emanating from the security dilemma.

However, while the concept at first sight seems to correspond well with Realist and Neorealist worldviews, it is not necessarily incompatible with other IR theories. It has been used by constructivists as well as by critical security studies theorists, and in reference to not only military, but also economic, environmental and other security concerns. As pointed out by Alan Collins, the concept is “not wedded to Realism”. Hertz himself believed in what he called “liberal realism”, defined as “[…] a realism that recognizes the difficulties but asks whether the security dilemma might be diminished by policies providing for more peaceful relations with others”. Since the end of the Cold War, the concept of the security dilemma has been explored in greater detail by, inter alios, Barry Buzan, Charles Glaser, and Robert Jervis. In People, States and Fear, published in 1991, Barry Buzan defined the security dilemma as:

 […] a structural notion in which the self-help attempts of states to look after their security needs tend, regardless of intention, to lead to rising insecurity for others as each interprets its own measures as defensive and measures of others as potentially threatening.

Based on a 1997 review of the security dilemma literature, Charles Glaser outlined three ways in which a state’s efforts to increase its security could generate “undesirable outcomes”:

(1) by setting in motion a process that reduces the state’s own military capability, that is, its ability to perform military missions; (2) by increasing the value the adversary places on expansion, which makes it harder to deter; and (3) by simply wasting money.

Glaser also took issue with some of the frequently voiced criticisms of the security dilemma and offense-defense theory, including (1) Patrick Glynn’s argument that states’ greed should be a the heart of the analysis, rather than their (sense of) insecurity; (2) Randall Schweller’s argument that the concept may be logically flawed, since it portrays interstate tensions as the result of misunderstandings, rather than genuine conflicts of interest; and (3) John Mearsheimer’s argument that it is hard, if not impossible, to distinguish between offensive and defensive weapons.

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Seen from a theoretical perspective, the third line of criticism seems to be the most appropriate one. Most modern weapon systems can be used for offensive as well as defensive purposes, depending on the context. This makes it notoriously difficult to determine whether a state’s intentions are defensive or offensive, benign or malign. However, as argued by Glaser, states’ subjective perception of the offense-defense balance should be at the core of the analysis, rather than the balance itself. Along the same lines, Jack Snyder has argued that “the addition of perceptual factors makes the security dilemma a more powerful theory of international conflict”. Revisiting the concept in 2011, Robert Jervis, referring to Glaser, argued that a state’s security policy should be guided not only by motives and material factors but also information. The informational variable is about “what the state knows and can know about the other’s motives and power, and involves questions of how states can accurately signal each other, especially when they want to establish cooperative relationships.”

A somewhat similar approach is found in Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler’s 2008 book, The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics, which further details the intricacies of the concept and discusses possible ways for security policy decision-makers to deal with it. Most notably, Booth and Wheeler distinguish between “the dilemma of interpretation” and “the dilemma of response”. The former is facing decision-makers when they are to decide, under conditions of uncertainty, whether perceived military developments are for defensive/self-protection or offensive/expansionist purposes. The latter is facing them when they decide how to react to such developments: If they seek to signal non-acceptance and their reaction turns out to have been based on misplaced suspicion, they risk creating “a significant level of hostility when none was originally intended by either party”. On the other hand, if they seek to signal reassurance and their reaction turns out to have been based on misplaced trust, they risk being “exposed to coercion by those with hostile intentions”.

At the heart of Booth and Wheeler’s criticism of previous definitions of the concept is the fact that none of these seems to have captured the “dilemma” nature of the phenomenon. What others, including Hertz and Jervis, describe as the security dilemma – that states acquire military capabilities to protect themselves from the threat posed by others and in turn achieve less rather than more security, since their actions trigger similar measures in other states – is, according to Booth and Wheeler, more of a “paradox” than a “dilemma”.

Booth and Wheeler also emphasize the need to distinguish between “security dilemmas” and “strategic challenges”. The latter is “a situation in which the dilemma of interpretation has been settled”. Once a government has identified another state as a real threat, the “strategic challenge” is to decide what to do about it. Crucial to the success of efforts to address (perceived) security concerns and build trust among nations in a situation of uncertainty is the

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ability of state actors to understand, and be empathetic towards, other actors’ fears and security concerns, or in the words of John Hertz, “to put oneself into the other fellow’s place”.21 This is the variable that Booth and Wheeler call “security dilemma sensibility”:

*Security dilemma sensibility is an actor’s intention and capacity to perceive the motives behind, and to show responsiveness towards, the potential complexity of the military intentions of others. In particular, it refers to the ability to understand the role that fear might play in their attitudes and behavior, including, crucially, the role that one’s own actions may play in provoking that fear.*22

By defining the security dilemma as a “two-level strategic predicament” (dilemma of interpretation + dilemma of response), and by drawing attention to the influence of “the fear factor” on one’s own and other’s perceptions and actions, Booth and Wheeler have created a framework for analyzing not only why and how security dilemmas arise, but also how they may be addressed. They argue that uncertainty is one of the characteristic features of world politics in the 21st century, and that many of the key issue areas, such as conflicts over access to non-renewable resources, are likely to be subject to security dilemma dynamics.

Booth and Wheeler’s critics take a somewhat different view of the concept’s relevance to contemporary international relations, claiming that it has lost much of its utility as an analytical tool after the end of the Cold War. Christoph Bluth, for one, goes so far as to claim that the security dilemma is “a concept whose time has passed”, and that Booth and Wheeler overstate the role that misperceptions and misinterpretations can play as causative factors of insecurity and interstate conflict in the post-Cold War era. Bluth argues that the likelihood of armed conflict between states in the present day is low, particularly in the Western hemisphere, and that scholars should pay more attention to “sub-state conflicts that arise from ethnic disputes, or failed states in regions of low development”. Furthermore, he argues that Booth and Wheeler’s definition of the concept deviates radically from John Hertz’ original definition.23

Interestingly, Hertz himself did not react negatively to this or other aspects of Booth and Wheeler’s book, describing it, prior to his death in 2005, as “a very valuable contribution” and “an important addition to our thinking about international relations”.24

3. Applying the concept to the Arctic region: Is it relevant?

How does all of this apply to the Arctic region? To what extent may the concept of the security dilemma help us understand, and deal with, the dynamics of interstate relations in the northernmost part of the globe?

Many would say that the security dilemma was a more prominent feature of Arctic politics in the Cold War period, characterized by superpower antagonism and nuclear arms racing, and that we in today’s security environment should pay more attention to non-military security challenges at the sub-state level. Others, such as Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler, would reject the argument that the end of the Cold War has turned the security dilemma into an obsolete anachronism of little value to our understanding of contemporary regional security dynamics. Still others would say that the concept may help us understand and manage interstate relations in parts of East Asia, the Middle East, or the Third World, but maybe less so in low-tension regions such as the circumpolar Arctic.

Indeed, the Arctic is, as noted in the introduction, a politically and militarily stable region. It is difficult to find anything resembling the dynamics of Iran–Israel relations in the Middle East, the conflict between the two Koreas, or the Sino-U.S. rivalry in the Asia-Pacific region. Few, if any, would say that the 21st century Arctic is a region characterized by anarchy and brute power relations. The military activity level in the region is higher today than it was in the 1990s but considerably lower than it was in the 1970s and 80s. Since the end of the Cold War, regional cooperation arrangements have been developed, most notably the Arctic Council (1996), and common understandings of the region’s non-military and non-state security problems (including the environmental impacts of climate change) have grown among the Arctic countries. The same has their willingness to cooperate in dealing with them.

Nonetheless, it may be argued that the security dilemma is present also in the post-Cold War Arctic. As observed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, “most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones”, particularly within the military and political sectors.25 Within these sectors, states have historically been far more concerned with the capabilities and intentions of their neighbors than those of far-away countries.26 In other words: geography does matter, and so does the regional level, even in a globalized world. Some would even say that regional-level security dynamics, for instance in the Arctic, are more prominent now than they were in the Cold War period, when they were “overlaid” by the global pattern of superpower relations. To the extent that there were intra-NATO tensions in or related to the Arctic during the Cold War, they were to a significant extent suppressed and rarely allowed to surface, due to the apparent presence of the Soviet/Warsaw Pact threat.

Today, when Russia is perceived to constitute less of an existential threat to the western hemisphere, NATO’s four Arctic coastal states seem to pay more attention to their respective economic interests in the region. As far as the unresolved jurisdiction issues are concerned, none of the four countries can be expected to make radical concessions to their neighbors in the name of alliance cohesion. The Russians, on their part, are concerned that their Arctic Ocean neighbors, who also happen to be NATO allies, intend to take control of natural resources and/or shipping lanes rightfully belonging to them. According to a recent statement

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by Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Russian Security Council, “the United States, Norway, Denmark, and Canada are pursuing a common and coordinated policy aimed at denying Russia access to the riches of the Arctic continental shelf”.27 In a somewhat similar fashion, Canada’s Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, has stated on several occasions that his country faces “increasingly aggressive Russian actions”,28 and that his government intends to put “more boots on the Arctic tundra, more ships in the icy waters and a better eye-in-the-sky”.29

Statements such as the ones above clearly indicate that the Arctic coastal states’ policy moves in the Arctic to a significant degree are motivated by fear – fear that their neighbors at some point will attempt to infringe on their rights and interests in the region, including the access to natural resources or shipping lanes of considerable significance to their national economies. Thus, even though the Arctic may not be conceptualized in terms of “anarchy”, there is certainly a “self-help” dimension to contemporary interstate relations in the region. Despite the establishment of cooperative regimes and institutions, states are still the main actors in this part of the world. All of the Arctic coastal states have significant economic interests in the northern waters and shelf areas, including areas currently outside national jurisdiction. None of them exclude the possibility of resource-related interstate conflicts in the region, and none of them are willing to rely on anyone but themselves and their allies to protect their northern maritime borders, sovereignty, and sovereign rights. States seek their own interest and cannot be expected to subordinate their interest to the interest of their neighbors or outside actors.

When developing long-term strategies and assessing potential threats to their economic and other interests in the region, the Arctic coastal states are often inclined to “assume the worst”,30 that is, scenarios that do not necessarily reflect the current state of affairs. Based on their (mis)perceptions of other actors’ (“aggressive”) behavior in the region, they initiate what they perceive to be adequate (“defensive”) measures. One’s own measures are presented to domestic and foreign audiences as “legitimate” and “justified”, whereas similar measures taken by the other actors are often depicted as “illegitimate” and “unjustified”. The coastal states rarely take into consideration how their own policies or actions might be perceived by others as intimidating or threatening. Thus, by “putting oneself in the other fellow’s place” and paying greater attention to “dilemmas of interpretation” and “dilemmas of response”, both of which are present in contemporary Arctic politics, policy-makers may reduce the likelihood of an incremental militarization driven by “action–reaction” dynamics.

The Arctic coastal states’ security concerns on the northern frontier are determined not only by the region’s emerging role as an arena for economic and industrial activity, but also by the region’s place in the nuclear deterrence strategies of Russia, the United States, and NATO. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States developed long-range nuclear

weapons that could be launched across the Arctic Ocean, either from locations on land (intercontinental ballistic missiles based in silos or on road-mobile launchers), from the sea (ballistic missiles carried by nuclear-powered submarines), or from the air (bombs or cruise missiles carried by long-range bombers). The number of deployed nuclear warheads has been reduced significantly since then, but all corners of the “triads” are still in operation and thus relevant to the security situation in the region. The weapons have also become more sophisticated, most notably with the development of anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems, particularly after the collapse of the ABM Treaty regime in the early 2000s.

The latter development is likely to become a major source of contention between the U.S. and Russia, which sees sea-based AMB systems as a potential threat to its nuclear deterrent. Russia’s highest-ranking military official, General Staff Chief Nikolai Makarov stated in February 2012 that “we will not accept that U.S. vessels equipped with the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System operate in our part of the Arctic”, and that Russia has “matching measures ready” to counter such a turn of events. The U.S., on its part, maintains that its ABM measures, including the efforts to equip a growing number of U.S. Navy cruisers and destroyers with Aegis missile defense systems, are not directed against Russia but rather the missile threat from rogue states such as North Korea. In December 2001, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pointed out that “we have explained through multiple channels that our planned system will not and can not threaten Russia’s strategic deterrent. It does not affect our strategic balance with Russia and is certainly not a cause for military countermeasures”.

The example above illustrates well how the security dilemma plays out in the field of nuclear deterrence, and how the presence of “action-reaction” spirals, if ignored, may contribute to an unforeseen and unintended increase of the level of military presence and tension in the Arctic. Part of the problem is, of course, that Russia and the other Arctic coastal states do not have a proper forum in which to discuss security issues such as the ones mentioned above. Russia is neither a NATO member nor part of the Western security community. The Arctic Council, of which Russia is a prominent member, is not seen as a forum in which (hard) security issues can or should be discussed. Bilateral relations in the region, particularly between the nuclear powers, are still marked by a startling lack of trust, potentially contributing to a political environment in which the security dilemma can take hold and prosper.

4. National strategies and capabilities: Trends and prospects

Let us now take a closer look at how Russia, the U.S., Canada, Denmark, and Norway define their respective national interests in the region and how they pursue these interests. What military/homeland security capabilities do they have in the region, and how do they use them?

Russia adopted an Arctic strategy in 2008, which was published in the spring of 2009. The strategy, developed under the auspices of the Russian Security Council, is aimed at turning the region into “a strategic resource base for the Russian Federation” and at preserving the country’s role as “a leading Arctic power”. In addition to highlighting Russia’s economic interests in the region, the document emphasizes the need to maintain and further develop the military and/or FSB presence in the country’s northern waters, air space, and land areas in order to provide “military security in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation under various military-political situations”. The latter sentence was largely in line with signals that in the preceding months and years had come from hard-liners within the Russian political and military establishment, such as Airborne Forces Lieutenant General Vladimir Shamanov, head of the Defense Ministry’s unit for combat readiness. He stated in June 2008 that:

After several countries contested Russia’s rights [to] the resource-rich continental shelf in the Arctic, we have immediately started the revision of our combat training programs for military units that may be deployed in the Arctic in case of a potential conflict.

Russia’s current military capabilities in the Arctic include, above all, naval units based in the country’s northwestern corner. At the top of the priority list in terms of investments is the country’s fleet of nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines. At present, around two-thirds of Russia’s sea-based nuclear arsenal is located on the Kola Peninsula. The Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean have historically been, and still are, important training and stationing areas for the Russian SSBN force. The Northern Fleet also operates nuclear-powered fast attack subs (SSNs), conventional submarines (SSKs), and a variety of surface vessels of all sizes from coastal corvettes to ocean-going cruisers, plus aviation forces and naval infantry units. In terms of traditional ground forces, the presence is limited to a motorized infantry brigade located in Pechenga, some 10 kilometers from the Norwegian-Russian border. There are plans to establish two or more “Arctic Brigades”, but these have been put on hold until 2015. In addition to Russia’s military forces in the region come the regionally based troops, patrol vessels, and aircraft of the Russian Coast Guard/Border Guard, subordinated to the Federal Security Service (FSB). Russia also possesses the world’s largest fleet of conventional and nuclear-powered icebreakers, for which significant investments and upgrades are underway.

Since 2007, there has been a gradual increase in Russia’s military activity in the Arctic, particularly at sea and in the air. The number of naval exercises and patrols is higher today than it was in the 1990s, and Russia has for the first time since 1992 resumed flights with strategic bombers in the international airspace over the Barents Sea, the Greenland Sea, and

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35 For details, see Kristian Åtland: “Russia’s Armed Forces and the Arctic: All Quiet on the Northern Front?” Contemporary Security Policy, Vo. 32, No. 2 (2011), pp. 277–280.
37 Kristian Åtland, “Russia’s Armed Forces and the Arctic”, op. cit., p. 280.
other waters adjacent to the Arctic Ocean. In Russia, the increase in activity is seen merely as a “response” to measures taken by other Arctic coastal states, particularly the United States and Canada, as indicated by this analysis by Russian defense commentator Alexandr Golts:

> A cold war in the Arctic is unthinkable. We therefore ask why Moscow has pursued a confrontational approach with such persistence, attracting opprobrium in the process. One reason is that other Arctic nations have signaled their willingness to use force. The United States and Canada regularly conduct military exercises in the Arctic region. Denmark has planned to develop special Arctic military units. All sides have exaggerated their readiness for military confrontation.

Along the same lines, the Chairman of Russia’s Marine Board, Rear Admiral (ret.) Aleksandr Balyberdin noted in May 2011 that “Russia opposes a militarization of the Arctic, but the actions of some of our neighbors force us to reconsider our politics in that area”. Russian diplomats have sought to tone down the rhetoric as relates to the Arctic. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who met with his Arctic Council colleagues in Tromsø, Norway, shortly after the publication of the Russian Arctic Strategy, found it necessary to underline that Russia was “not planning to increase [its] military presence in the Arctic and to deploy [general purpose] armed forces there”. Compared to statements made by representatives of the Russian Defense Ministry, the General Staff, and the Armed Forces, statements by Foreign Ministry officials are generally more cautious in tone. Whereas the military tend to highlight the need for an enhanced military presence in the region, the diplomats tend to downplay the conflict potential in the Arctic and warn about the dangers of excessive military muscle-flexing.

Though on a somewhat smaller scale, also the United States has in recent years taken steps to redefine its Arctic interests and strengthen its military and homeland security capabilities in that region. The efforts have been inspired, in part, by measures taken by other Arctic coastal states, particularly Russia and Canada. In 2008, the U.S. State Department and the National Security Council conducted an in-depth review of the 1994 Presidential Decision Directive on Arctic Policy. The process was allegedly prompted by events such as Russia’s controversial flag planting on the seabed at the North Pole in August 2007, and resulted in the adoption of a new policy document called National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD)-66/Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD)-25. NSPD-66/HSPD-25 lists the United States’ key interests in the Arctic, among which security interests (“missile defense and early warning;
deployment of sea and air systems for strategic sealift, strategic deterrence, maritime presence, and maritime security operations; and ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight”) figure at the top of the list. The directive makes it clear that “[t]he United States has broad and fundamental national security interests in the Arctic region and is prepared to operate either independently or in conjunction with other states to safeguard these interests”.  

At the same time, it should be noted that the Arctic is far from the top of Washington’s foreign and security policy agenda. America’s share of the Arctic land territories (Alaska) is relatively small, at least compared to those of Russia and Canada, and the northern marine areas under U.S jurisdiction are limited to parts of the Bering, Beaufort, and Chukchi Seas. Just a few thousand U.S. citizens live in areas north of the Arctic Circle, and the region has traditionally not been used for identity-building purposes to the extent seen in Canada and Russia.  

Still, there seems to be a renewed U.S. interest in Arctic affairs, at least in naval circles. Centrally placed U.S. experts argue that the Arctic region’s economic and strategic significance will not diminish in the years ahead, and that the U.S. should seek to take advantage of the opportunities presenting themselves in the north, including in the shelf areas north of Alaska. The United States’ non-ratification of the UN Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS) does, of course, represent a potential obstacle to U.S. offshore activities in the northern waters, as noted in NSPD-66/HSPD-25. According to a recent report by Committee on National Security Implications of Climate Change, the non-participation in UNCLOS has negative implications also for the U.S. naval and coast guard forces and their operations in the Arctic, in that it “makes it more difficult […] to exercise maximum operating flexibility” and “complicates negotiations with partners for coordinated search and rescue operations”.  

While the U.S. today has few surface vessels capable of operating in the Arctic, it has significant Arctic undersea capabilities. The ability to operate nuclear submarines in the Arctic Ocean and near-Arctic seas such as the Barents, in open water as well as under the Arctic ice cover, is still considered important to the country’s national security. The maintenance of this ability requires significant investments in competence, vessels, and training. The U.S. currently operates three classes of nuclear submarines capable of operating in the Arctic, and ice exercises are held in the waters north of Alaska on biennial basis. Funding for the design and building of a new multi-million-dollar icebreaker for the U.S. Coast Guard is also underway.

Significant investments have also been made in ground-based surveillance, early warning, and ballistic missile defense installations in the Arctic, most notably in Alaska (Fort Greely and Fort Clear) and in Greenland (Thule Air Force Base), in addition to modern missile defense systems based on a rapidly growing number of U.S. Navy cruiser and destroyers. American political and military authorities have on several occasions pointed out that the new measures come as a result of emerging missile threats from rogue states such as Iran and North Korea, and that they are not motivated by military or other developments in the Arctic region. Still, as noted above, Russia is concerned that measures such as the ones mentioned above will undermine the survivability of its nuclear deterrent, and that counter-measures are under consideration, if not implementation. In the U.S., as in Russia, the defense and security establishment’s threat assessments tend to be skewed towards interpretations which may support their respective domestic agendas, including requests for increased funding.

Further to the east, Canada has taken a stance which in some ways resembles that of Russia. The country released its Northern Strategy in July 2009. The strategy emphasizes the need to develop land, sea, air, and space capabilities that can facilitate Canada’s “exercise of sovereignty” in the North. The adopted measures towards this aim include, among other things, acquisition of six to eight ice-enforced Arctic offshore patrol vessels, building of a large icebreaker, expansion of the Arctic Rangers program, creation of a Northern Reserve Unit in the Arctic, establishment of an army Arctic training base in Resolute Bay on the shore of the Northwest Passage, development of a deep-water resupply port in Nanisivik on Baffin Island, and advancement of satellite-based surveillance and monitoring capabilities. A growing role for drones in the surveillance of Canada’s northern coastline is also foreseen.

Canada has also begun to hold military exercises in its northern territories, usually in the summer months. Concentrated in and around the eastern Arctic, these exercises have involved all three branches of the Canadian Forces and included “submarines, frigates, coastal patrol vessels, icebreakers, F-18s and CP-140s, as well as land units”. Winter exercises are also being considered. Canada also routinely conducts NORAD Arctic air defense exercises, usually involving fighter jet sorties. The latter exercises are presumably aimed at enhancing Canada’s ability to handle what is perceived to be a growing Russian LRA threat. Recent Canadian policy documents and official statements relating to the Arctic leave little doubt that many of the efforts taken to protect Canada’s northern frontier are aimed at Russia. Some would even say “exclusively” at Russia. In February 2009, Prime Minister Harper accused Russia of pursuing an “increasingly aggressive” agenda, and claimed that Russian long-range

54 Gilles Labonté: Canadian Arctic sovereignty: Local intervention by flocking UAVs (Ottawa: DRDC 2010), http://pubs.drdc.gc.ca/PDFS/unc93/p532991.pdf.
55 Rob Huebert: “The Newly Emerging Arctic Security Environment”, op. cit., p. 9 (F-18 is a fighter jet, CP-140 is a maritime patrol aircraft).
56 John Patch: “Cold Horizons”, op. cit., p. 52. NORAD denotes the North American Aerospace Command, which is the Canadian-U.S. organization charged with aerospace warning and control for North America.
57 Long-Range Aviation.
bombers had “intruded” into Canadian airspace. The latter assertion was later rejected by the commander of NORAD, U.S. general Gene Renuart, who noted that “the Russians have conducted themselves professionally; they have maintained compliance with the international rules of airspace sovereignty and have not entered the internal airspace of either of the countries [Canada and the U.S.]”.

In a somewhat similar manner, Russia often exaggerates the scope and potential danger of Canada’s military activity in the Arctic. In April 2009, shortly after the incident mentioned above, Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev expressed concern about Canada’s “5000-man group of forces in the Arctic”, presumably referring to the Canadian Rangers force. Rather than being a potentially threatening military combat unit, the Rangers are a volunteer reservist force made up of Inuit, First Nations, Métis, and non-Aboriginals, established in 1947. They regularly patrol some of Canada’s remotest regions, armed with 60 year old Lee Enfield rifles, and report “suspicious activity” to the authorities. Even with rapidly melting sea ice in the Arctic, the territorial threat to Canada’s northern coastline can hardly be described as severe or pressing. As observed by the U.S. Navy’s Arctic Action Officer, Commander Blake McBride, “if anyone invaded Canada from the north, [the Canadians’] first job would be to save him.” The same goes, of course, for Russia.

The Kingdom of Denmark, which includes Greenland and the Faroe Islands, adopted its Arctic Strategy only in August 2011. Denmark’s military presence in the Arctic is at present fairly modest, but the scope and frequency of exercises and patrols may increase in the years ahead, as climate change makes the region more accessible than it has been in the past. In the Danish Defense Agreement for the period up to 2014, adopted in 2009, it is noted that “the rising activity [in the Arctic] will change the region’s geostrategic dynamic and significance and will therefore in the long term present the Danish Armed Forces with several challenges”. The 2011 Arctic Strategy lists number of measures aimed at strengthening the Kingdom’s military capabilities in the Arctic, such as the establishment of a joint-service Arctic Command based in Nuuk, and establishment of an Arctic Reaction Force which may be deployed to the region if and when need arises. It is also to be examined “whether the Thule Air Base may play a larger role in regard to the tasks performed in and around Greenland by the Danish Armed Forces in cooperation with other partner countries”.

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59 Ibid.
61 “Budut sformirovany Arktichiekie voyska FSB” [Arctic FSB unites will be formed], Nezavisimoe voyennoe obozrenie, 3 April 2009, p. 2.
Denmark’s 2009 Defense Agreement was interpreted by some, particularly in Canada and Russia, as a sign that Denmark was preparing to join what might become an “Arctic arms race”. Similar reactions have come after the publication of the Danish-Greenlandic-Faroese Arctic Strategy in 2011. However, if subjected to a sober assessment, none of the measures outlined in the Strategy stand out as particularly “militaristic”. The new Arctic Command in Nuuk is essentially the result of a merger between the former Greenland and Faroe Islands Commands, and the Arctic Reaction Force will mostly exist on paper. It is also worth noting that the idea of stationing fighter planes in Greenland, mentioned in the 2009 Defense Agreement, is not mentioned the 2011 Arctic Strategy. Denmark’s ice-enforced offshore patrol vessels will probably remain the country’s main military asset in the region.

Norway possesses one of Europe’s most modern navies, in which five high-tech frigates of the Fridtjof Nansen class, all built in the 2000s, constitute the main surface combatant units. The Norwegian Government sees the northern areas as its number one foreign policy priority and is committed to safeguarding the country’s economic and security interests in the region. This is stated in several policy and strategy documents, most recently the Government’s 2011 White Paper on the High North. Norway has also tried to draw NATO’s attention and resources in the direction of Northern Europe, for instance in the process leading up to the adoption of a new Strategic Concept for the Atlantic Alliance in 2010. The problem is, of course, that the country’s big neighbor to the east – Russia – has a tendency to “respond negatively to almost any aspect of an increased Alliance presence in the region”. For instance, the Cold Response exercise in Northern Norway in March 2012, involving 16,000 troops from 15 (mainly NATO) countries, was perceived in Russia as “a provocation”.

Historically, Norway has sought to pursue a policy of “reassurance” vis-à-vis Russia in the north, emphasizing the non-offensive nature of its defense posture and the need for bilateral cooperation. Yet Norway’s modernization of its armed forces, including the 2011 decision to acquire forty-eight F-35 fighter aircraft from the U.S., remains a source of concern for Russia, in the same way that Russia’s military modernization remains a source of concern for Norway. Furthermore, the Norwegian Coast Guard’s enforcement of national regulations in the Svalbard Fisheries Protection Zone, the legal status of which is disputed by, among others, Russia, occasionally leads to incidents with Russian trawlers and subsequent threats about Russian countermeasures. Despite these factors, Norwegian-Russian relations in the Barents Sea region are generally pragmatic and cooperative, including at the military-to-military level.

To sum up, all of the five Arctic coastal states have in recent years adopted Arctic/Northern/High North strategies as well as a series of foreign and defense policy statements addressing

the issue of Arctic security. In addition, they have initiated what Rob Huebert describes as “a redevelopment of northern military capabilities”. The latter trend, which may be more troublesome than hitherto anticipated, warrants a discussion about alternative approaches.

5. Building trust among Arctic nations: Possible remedies

Twenty five years ago, in October 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev launched a series of initiatives aimed at turning the then heavily militarized Arctic into a low-tension “zone of peace”. This objective was to be achieved through the establishment of a nuclear weapons-free zone in Northern Europe, restrictions on naval activities in Arctic seas, and the development of trans-border cooperation in areas such as resource development, scientific exploration, indigenous people’s affairs, environmental protection, and marine transportation. Many of the latter proposals, relating to the civilian sphere, started to materialize in the 1990s, most notably in the form of regional cooperation arrangements such as the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (1993) and the Arctic Council (1996). When it comes to the former proposals, relating to the sphere of military security, little or no progress has been made, at least along the lines envisioned by Gorbachev. No region-specific arms control measures have been adopted.

Still, following the end of the Cold War, the military presence and activity in the Arctic fell to its lowest level in decades. But, as pointed out above, it started to grow again in the 2000s, when the coastal states began to realize the region’s potential significance to their national economies and started to take unilateral measures to protect their economic interests in the region. The latter development has created a new security dilemma, different from that of the Cold War period. The same goes for the nuclear weapons dimension. Security dynamics in the Arctic are increasingly affected by developments in other parts of the world, such as the emergence of new nuclear weapons states with a potential long-distance strike capability.

Western measures against the missile threat from rogue states such as Iran and North Korea, in the form of sophisticated land- and sea-based defense systems against ballistic missiles, are perceived in Russia as a threat to the global strategic balance and the survivability Russia’s sea-based second strike capability, a significant part of which is located in the Arctic. Similarly, Russia’s resumption of bomber flights and SSBN patrols in Arctic is perceived by some of its Arctic neighbors as constituting a potential threat to their national security.

In this situation, it may be a good idea for scholars and political decision-makers dealing with the Arctic, particularly in the coastal states, to reflect on the following question: What – if anything – can we do to prevent the Arctic security dilemma from becoming more severe, heighten the level of trust in Arctic interstate relations, and prevent an unintended (re)militarization of the region?

Obviously, one’s answer to this question will depend on one’s outlook on the nature of international relations. Some see the security dilemma as an inescapable feature of world

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72 For details, see Kristian Åtland: “Mikhail Gorbachev, the Murmansk Initiative, and the Desecuritization of Interstate Relations in the Arctic”, Cooperation and Conflict, Vol. 43, No. 3 (2008), pp. 289–311.
politics and reject the notion that it can be ameliorated. Others are open to a more normative approach and do not shy away from discussing various ways for political leaders to mitigate the dilemma.

Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler outline three different “logics” of dealing with the security dilemma: (1) The fatalist logic (accepting the idea that “security competition can never be escaped”); (2) the mitigator logic (believing that “security competition can be ameliorated or dampened down for a time, but never eliminated”); and (3) the transcender logic (believing that “human society is self-constitutive, not determined” and that “a global community of peace and trust is possible”).73 Relating these logics to the major debates in International Relations theory, they argue that the “fatalist logic” largely corresponds with the logic of offensive realism, central to which is the idea that states are “power maximizers”, rather than “security maximizers”. “Mitigator logic”, on the other hand, does not reject the essentially anarchic nature of the international system, but focuses on the potential of diplomacy (cf. The English School), International Law, and security regimes. “Transcender logic” goes even further, suggesting that the security dilemma may be “transcended”, for instance through the building of Deutschian security communities or global centralization of power.74 Booth and Wheeler conclude that “the most important and interesting work relating to international and world security lies in the borderlands between on the one hand certain strands of mitigator thinking […] and on the other hand, the reformist strand of transcender thinking”.75

The task of turning the security dilemma into an appealing concept for political and military decision-makers is a difficult one. In order to be successful, efforts to mitigate or transcend the security dilemma require knowledge and commitment. The efforts must be based on sober assessments of the security situation, capabilities, and long-term strategic objectives of one’s potential adversaries. Careful consideration should be given to “how the adversary is likely to react to alternative policies that [one] could follow”.76 Second, states must be willing to accept a certain degree of vulnerability when making the “leap of trust”.77 State A must signal its trustworthiness to state B in practice, and vice versa. By demonstrating that they are not fearful of each other’s intentions, they can bring their mutual relationship to a whole new level and devote greater attention to the pursuit of common, rather than competing, goals.

If it were possible to distinguish unambiguously between offensive and defensive military capabilities, the security dilemma would have been a lot easier to manage. This is particularly difficult in a (mainly) maritime theater such as the Arctic, where the coastal states’ naval and air forces have great operational range and flexibility and can be used in a variety of roles. Most, if not all, of their weapon systems can be used for offensive as well as defensive purposes, depending on the situation. In the 21st century, there is no such thing as a “defensive

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weapon”. Under the right circumstances, even weapons commonly seen as defensive, such as naval mines or air and missile defense systems, can be used for offensive purposes, particularly if used in combination with other assets. And since the maritime interests of most coastal states extend well beyond their Exclusive Economic Zones, asking them to settle for short-range “coastal defense” navies does not seem like a viable option. Nonetheless, as argued by proponents of the principles of non-offensive defense (NOD), a more pragmatic approach focusing on the nature of overall defense postures might be considered:

Is [a navy’s] posture perceived as “provocative” by others, that is, does it send ambiguous or negative signals about its intentions? Does its behavior undermine mutual confidence in coexistence? Are its weapons and posture likely to promote crisis stability? Does it undermine the prospect for arms restraint? And what would have to be done in order to achieve a more “defensive” form of naval posture (in terms of strategy, tactics and equipment)?

The purpose of “non-offensive”, “non-provocative”, “defensive”, or “non-aggressive” defense postures is to weaken – or ideally eliminate – the driving force of competitive arms build-ups, namely reciprocal fears. The Arctic arms control initiatives launched by Mikhail Gorbachev in his 1987 Murmansk speech were largely based on NOD and “common security” thinking. Whether, and to what extent, NOD may be a viable security instrument in the post-Cold War setting is a matter of dispute. For instance, Jef Huysmans argues that the heyday of the NOD debate is over, despite efforts by Bjorn Moller, Hakon Wiberg, and others to invigorate it. Huysmans also questions the notion that common security is compatible with (neo)realism.

Measures to keep the presence of conventional naval surface forces in the Arctic at a low or moderate level may still be considered. In the Cold War period, the frequent presence of NATO’s anti-submarine warfare (ASW) assets (vessels, aircraft, and helicopters) in the Arctic, particularly in areas adjacent to the Kola Peninsula, was a major source of concern for the Russians. In recent years, Russia’s attention seems to have shifted towards U.S. or other NATO vessels equipped with the Aegis combat system. Russian defense planners fear that such vessels, if operating in waters close to the Russian shore or the Northern Fleet’s SSBN bastions, may be able to intercept ballistic missiles launched from Russian strategic submarines and thus undermine the country’s ability to respond to a nuclear attack. A natural Russian response to such as development could be a renewed emphasis on the development of anti-surface warfare (ASuW) capabilities, for instance in the form of weapons carried by heavy surface vessels, cruise missile submarines (SSGNs), or naval strike aircraft. Such measures could in turn cause new security concerns among Russia’s neighbors.

When it comes to the nuclear weapons dimension, the Gorbachevian idea of “denuclearizing” parts of the Arctic, or even the whole region, has been put forth on a number of occasions,

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most recently by the Canadian Pugwash Group. 81 Along the same lines, Russia’s Senior Arctic Official, Ambassador Anton Vasilyev, stated in September 2011 that Russia “in principle” supports the idea of a zone free of nuclear weapons. He added that “if our partners showed any interest, then, probably, it could be considered”. 82 Whether Ambassador Vasilyev’s position reflects that of the Russian Navy is, of course, another question. For the foreseeable future, the Kola Peninsula is likely to remain one of two major basing areas for Russia’s nuclear-powered ballistic missile and hunter-killer submarines.

Even with an increase in commercial ship traffic and petroleum activities, the Barents Sea will retain its role as the Northern Fleet’s main stationing and transit area. The frequency of combat patrols by Russian SSBNs is set to increase, rather than decrease. 83 The Arctic is also likely to remain a patrol and exercise area for Russian, U.S., British, and French nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs). Thus, an Arctic Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (NWFZ) is utterly difficult to negotiate, since neither Russia nor other naval nuclear weapon states consider regional restrictions on their forces’ freedom of maneuver to be in their interest. There is also the risk that the establishment of an Arctic NWFZ could lead to an increase in nuclear weapon-related tensions in other parts of the world, if nuclear submarines or, for that matter, strategic bombers were to be banned from the Arctic and started operating elsewhere.

Well aware of these and other potential obstacles to achieving a denuclearization of the Arctic, the Canadian Pugwash Group points out that it is a long-term goal, and that zonal arrangements pertaining to nuclear weapons in the Arctic do not necessarily have to take the form of “a single, all-encompassing legal instrument”. Agreements can be put together “piecemeal, step by step”, taking into consideration the United Nations’ principal guidelines for the establishment of NWFZ and experiences from other parts of the world, including Latin America (denuclearized through the 1967 Treaty of Tlateloco) and Antarctica (demilitarized, and hence denuclearized, through the 1959 Antarctic Treaty). 84 Still, many would argue that nuclear disarmament should be pursued mainly at the global, rather than regional, level.

Perhaps a more successful way of mitigating the security dilemma at the regional level could be to devote more attention to confidence-building measures (CBMs), particularly within the maritime domain. Some measures have already been taken, in the form of military-to-military dialogues on Arctic security, mutual fleet visits, joint exercises, and so on, but the frequency and scope of such activities can probably be increased. Confidence-building measures in the Arctic can take a variety of forms, ranging from advance notification and information-sharing measures to joint military or homeland defense activities. The measures can be initiated on a unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral basis, depending on the context. They can be applied to parts of the region as well as to the entire circumpolar Arctic, and to conventional as well as

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82 “Senior Diplomat Explains Russia’s Stance on the Arctic”, Interfax, 20 September 2011.

83 The Russian Navy’s Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Vladimir Vysotskiy, recently announced that Russia in the summer of 2012 will resume, for the first time in 26 years, the practice of regular SSBN patrolling, that is, to keep at least one strategic submarine at sea at any given time. See “Rossiya v iyune 2012 goda vozobnovit nepryrynnoepatrulirovanie APL” [Russia resumes regular SSBN patrolling in June 2012], Itar-Tass, 3 February 2012, http://www.itar-tass.com/c1/334042.html.

84 Michael Wallace and Steven Staples: *Ridding the Arctic of Nuclear Weapons*, op. cit., p. 12.
Arctic coastal states can enhance an atmosphere of transparency and develop confidence in each other’s non-hostile intentions. Confidence-building is, at its core, “a heavily psychological process intended to reduce unwarranted misperceptions and suspicions about the nature and possible use of military force”.  

Arctic CBMs, in combination with other stability-enhancing measures, may potentially contribute to a gradual shift of attention from “hard” to “soft” security challenges, a reduction in the presence of heavily armed naval vessels in the Arctic theater, and a growing role for potentially less “threatening” coast guard vessels undertaking constabulary operations in the littoral zone. The “soft” security challenges facing the Arctic coastal states are bound to increase in the years ahead, due to the expected increase in ship traffic, fisheries, and offshore petroleum activities. This necessitates an intensification of cooperative efforts in areas such as oil spill preparedness, search and rescue operations, and enforcement of fishery regulations. A recent CSIS report draws attention to apparent mismatch between the emerging new (“soft”) security challenges and the coastal states’ current capabilities and organizational frameworks for interstate cooperation. Specifically, the report recommends the establishment of an Arctic Coast Guard Forum, which could be formed on the basis of already existing structures in the Northeast Atlantic and North Pacific. Given the circumpolar nature of many of the challenges listed above, this might be a good idea and an important means to promote cooperation and a sense of solidarity at the regional level, not only between the Arctic coastal states, but also in relation to near-Arctic states in the Northeast Atlantic and North Pacific.

A higher level of trust in the relationship between Arctic stakeholders, and increased “security dilemma sensibility”, can also be achieved through a strengthening of the Arctic governance system, including, but not limited to, intergovernmental bodies such as the Arctic Council. The increase in human activity in the Arctic, largely driven by climate change and the region’s growing role in the global economy, is likely to create new governance challenges for the Arctic coastal states, the Arctic Council member states, and non-state stakeholders. The scale of these challenges will require the strengthening of regulatory frameworks pertaining to the management of natural resources and ecological systems, and a gradual shift of attention from state security challenges to environmental and human security challenges.

Rather than aiming for a comprehensive and legally binding agreement resembling the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, the stakeholders, including the Arctic coastal states, should work to develop a multilevel system of governance. In the process, they can draw on existing regional and sub-regional cooperation arrangements as well as international legal frameworks such as the Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS) and International Maritime Organization (IMO)

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87 Ibid., p. 37.
agreements.\textsuperscript{89} If consolidated and matured, such a “mosaic” of issue-specific cooperation arrangements may bring interstate relations in the Arctic to a qualitatively new level, and help “protecting regional actors from the side effects of global processes”\textsuperscript{90}.

It may be argued that the role of the Arctic Council has changed in recent years, and that the Council has taken on tasks that may be seen as belonging to the sphere of “soft security”. The conclusion of a legally binding Arctic Search and Rescue Treaty in May 2011, implying the coordinated use of military and/or homeland security assets such as vessels, helicopters, and personnel, may be an indication of this.\textsuperscript{91} However, the Arctic Council is unlikely to become a forum for discussions of “hard security” issues. The 1996 Ottawa Declaration, signed by Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States, makes it explicitly clear that “The Arctic Council should not deal with matters related to military security”\textsuperscript{92}.

There is, in other words, no regional forum in which Russia and the Arctic NATO members can discuss matters of military security in the Arctic. A solution to this problem, suggested by Professor Paul Berkman at a recent seminar organized under the auspices of NATO’s Parliamentary Assembly, could be to make use of the NATO-Russia Council. In Berkman’s view, this could potentially be “a unique forum to explore common interests among those states with central responsibilities in the Arctic Ocean, namely all Arctic coastal states including Russia, to effectively address the risks of political, economic and cultural instabilities associated with the environmental state-change in the Arctic Ocean”.\textsuperscript{93}

Finally, it should be noted that many of the coastal states’ security concerns in the Arctic are related to the presence of unresolved boundary issues in the region, such as the Russia–U.S. delimitation in the Bering Sea, the U.S.–Canada delimitation in the Beaufort Sea, the Canada–Denmark/Greenland delimitation in the Nares Strait (the Hans Island dispute), the legal status of the straits along the Northeast and Northwest Passages (whether they are international or part of the internal waters of Russia and Canada), and the outer limits of the coastal states’ continental shelves beyond 200 nautical miles. Other sources of concern, particularly in Russia and Norway, are the recurring disagreements concerning the legal status of the continental shelf and Fisheries Protection Zone around the archipelago of Svalbard. If issues such as these could be resolved, through diplomatic channels and in accordance with UNCLOS principles, this would certainly have a positive effect on the nature of interstate relationships in the Arctic.

\textsuperscript{91} Cf. the speech delivered by U.S. Ambassador Barry White at the Norwegian Atlantic Committee, 13 September 2010, \url{http://norway.usembassy.gov/nacspeech_sept2010.html}.
\textsuperscript{93} NATO Parliamentary Assembly: “Changes in the High North: Implications for NATO and Beyond”, Mission Report, Rose Roth Seminar, 21–24 June 2011, \url{http://www.nato-pa.int/default.asp?SHORTCUT=2691}. Paul Berkman is the former head of the Arctic Ocean Geopolitics Programme at Cambridge University and currently affiliated with the University of California.
6. Concluding remarks

The concept and theory of the security dilemma may have something valuable and important to offer to our understanding of contemporary interstate relations in the Arctic. Despite being a low-tension region, located far away from the world’s major conflict hot spots, the Arctic is not devoid of security dilemma dynamics. It is a highly dynamic global frontier region with vast natural resources, where states vigorously pursue their distinct national interests. In order to avoid a new military build-up in the north, it is important to be able to appreciate the potentially harmful effects that fear and uncertainty can have on regional security dynamics. Learning to understand how the security dilemma works, what it does, and how it may be mitigated, can make the Arctic states better equipped to maintain stability in the region throughout the 21st century. As noted by Robert Jervis, “it is very likely that two states which support the status quo but do not understand the security dilemma will end up, if not in a war, then at least in a relationship of higher conflict than is required by the objective situation”.94

Recognizing the Arctic region’s long-term potential as an energy province and a maritime transport corridor, Arctic as well as non-Arctic states have in recent years begun to turn their attention to the economic opportunities presenting themselves in the northern waters and shelf areas. All of the Arctic states have developed region-specific strategy documents, and the coastal states have taken various measures to protect their economic or national security interests in the region. Many of the measures are based on, or motivated by, uncertainty about the intentions of their neighbors or outside actors who might have interests in the region. Rather than being intended to signal offensive or revisionist intentions, the coastal states’ current security and defense policy moves in the Arctic are for the most part intended to consolidate the status quo, and to make other actors think twice about challenging it. The problem is, as noted in the introduction, that the measures sometimes have the unforeseen effect of making others feel less secure, and compelled to reciprocate.

The dilemma facing political and military decision-makers in the Arctic coastal states, at the “interpretation level” as well as at the “response level”, is not unmanageable. It may not be overcome, at least not in the short run, but its negative effects may at least be ameliorated by remedies such as the ones discussed in the previous section – “non-offensive” (or “less offensive”) defense postures, consideration of conventional or nuclear arms control measures, confidence-building measures, NATO-Russia dialogue on Arctic security, strengthening of the Arctic governance system, and settlement of unresolved boundary and jurisdiction issues. Through increased transparency and enhanced cooperation at the regional level, the states that surround the Arctic Ocean can reduce uncertainty and create an atmosphere of mutual trust. They can also strengthen the norms regulating the use of force. If and when there is “real assurance” that none of them will attempt to settle disputes by the use of force, a genuine “security community” has been established, and the security dilemma can no longer operate.