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## On the New US Military Strategy in the Arctic

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**Abstract.** The article discusses the new US military strategy in the Arctic, announced by the administration of J. Biden in July 2024. It replaced a similar document issued under D. Trump in 2019. The authors raise the question of what has changed in the approaches to Arctic security, given the sharp nature of the contradictions between Republicans and Democrats. The article demonstrates that, in general, the US Arctic military policy has maintained continuity; the only difference is the attempt of the Democrat administration to formulate more specific areas of activity to protect US security interests. In the text of the strategy, when assessing threats, China, not Russia, is placed in the first place in terms of importance. At the same time, the formulation of threats to US security in the region is too general and seems far-fetched. The main areas of implementation of the current US military strategy include measures to develop communication, command, control and intelligence systems; to improve military infrastructure; to strengthen the US and NATO military presence in the Nordic countries and to develop defense cooperation. In general, the strategy is confrontational in nature, especially since the US, having obtained geopolitical benefits after Finland and Sweden joined NATO, clearly intends to use them to gain unilateral advantages. However, there are limiting conditions that will prevent the US from fully realizing the plans of this strategy. The main threat to Russia's security in the region is the constant military presence and build-up of US/NATO military infrastructure in close proximity to its Arctic borders, as well as Washington's intention to implement the principle of "freedom of navigation" in the Arctic Ocean, including the Northern Sea Route.

**Keywords:** *Arctic, military strategy, United States, Russia, China, security threats*

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### Introduction

The new Arctic strategy of the US Department of Defense was published in July 2024<sup>1</sup>. On the one hand, it replaced the previous document, developed under the administration of Republican D. Trump in 2019, and on the other hand, it was intended to clarify the military aspects of the national Arctic strategy of the J. Biden administration, approved in October 2022. Taking into ac-

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<sup>1</sup> 2024 Arctic Strategy. Washington: The Department of Defense, 2024. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Jul/22/2003507411/-1/-1/0/DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY-2024.PDF> (accessed 1 September 2024).

count the dynamic changes in world politics and the tough inter-party confrontation within the American ruling circles, the release of the new strategy was significantly delayed: the term of the J. Biden administration was coming to an end.

The publication of this document raises a number of questions. Who is it addressed to? Will the administration that comes to power in January 2025 seek to implement a new military strategy in the Arctic, even if the Democrats remain in power? Will the Republicans agree to revise it if they win the elections in November 2024? It is also unclear how realistic this strategy is in terms of its budgetary support and organizational measures. Is it a strategy in the strict sense of the word?

As is known, unlike other regions, Washington cannot boast of its power in the Arctic. Even the US military complains about the fact that, having two outdated and constantly breaking ice-breakers in the Coast Guard, not having a single deep-water port in Alaska capable of receiving military and commercial vessels of large displacement, the US Navy has a very “pale appearance” in the region<sup>2</sup>. The famous NORAD (the joint aerospace defense system of the United States and Canada, designed to protect North America from a missile attack through the North Pole) has also become quite dilapidated in recent times. The emergence of hypersonic weapons in Russia and China has raised doubts about its effectiveness. In this regard, the question is relevant: to what extent is Washington’s new military strategy in the Arctic capable of solving these accumulated problems?

Due to the uncertainty of the domestic political situation in the United States, which will exist at any election outcome, as well as the rapidly changing international situation, it is very difficult to answer these questions. However, it is important to understand what is fundamentally new that the new strategy offers, how it differs from the previous document, and most importantly, what challenges will its implementation create for the security of the Russian Federation in the northern strategic direction?

### ***“The Arctic legacy” of D. Trump and the administration of J. Biden***

It should be noted that under D. Trump, no national Arctic strategy was developed; only “departmental” documents were adopted that did not offer a general vision of the US course in this region. The Arctic strategy of the Department of Defense of 2019 was one of these documents<sup>3</sup>. It marked a radical turn in Washington’s policy in the Far North, clearly indicating the US transition from cooperation to competition in the region [1, Konyshchev V.N., Sergunin A.A.]. This turn was caused not by a reassessment of the Arctic policy itself, but by a general trend towards neo-

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<sup>2</sup> Mongilio H. Coast Guard Commandant Fagan Highlights Polar Security Cutters, Indo-Pacom Expansion. US Naval Institute News, 20 March 2024. URL: <https://news.usni.org/2024/03/20/coast-guard-commandant-fagan-highlights-polar-security-cutters-indo-pacom-expansion> (accessed 29 March 2024).

<sup>3</sup> The Department of Defense Arctic Strategy: Report to Congress. June 2019. Washington: The Department of Defense, 2019. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jun/06/2002141657/-1/-1/1/2019-DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY.PDF> (accessed 21 September 2024).

isolationism and a rejection of equal international cooperation on a fairly wide range of issues, which affected many states.

There were two key ideas in D. Trump's military strategy for the Arctic. Firstly, despite the relatively low level of threats of military escalation, the Arctic was nevertheless labelled as a potential region of strategic rivalry between the United States and Russia and China. Secondly, the text of the strategy noted that the United States considers it possible to use NATO forces in the Arctic to deter a potential aggressor<sup>4</sup>.

Additionally, several related documents were published, reflecting the vision of regional security issues by other US security agencies: the Coast Guard, Navy, Air Force and Ground Forces. Thus, the Arctic military strategy of the D. Trump administration was reduced mainly to declarative provisions on potential threats in the future, increasing military readiness, updating the ice-breaker fleet and expanding operations. In general, the role of the Arctic in the system of foreign policy priorities of the D. Trump administration was relatively low [1, Konyshchev V.N., Sergunin A.A.; 2, Konyshchev V.N., Sergunin A.A.].

It should be noted that although the text of the strategy did not mention Ukraine as a factor influencing the aggravation of rivalry in Arctic politics, the ideas to extrapolate Russia's policy in Syria and Ukraine to the Arctic region were introduced at the expert level. This was done through the concept of hybrid warfare [3, Konyshchev V.N., Parfenov R.V.], which Russia allegedly successfully used in Ukraine in 2014, having annexed Crimea, and will continue to extrapolate this experience to the Baltics and the Arctic [4, Konyshchev V.N.].

Despite the tough inter-party struggle and the rejection of most of D. Trump's foreign policy initiatives, the Biden administration continued to develop the trend of confrontation in the Arctic. The Arctic problems were directly linked to Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, a course was taken on the forced accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, the protection of the interests of NATO countries in the region and the hostility of Russia and China's activities in the Arctic to the West were announced [5, Konyshchev V.N., Sergunin A.A.].

On the one hand, J. Biden's Arctic military strategy was intended to present a more specific, practical vision of military policy in the Far North, overcoming the shortcomings of the previous strategy. There is an opinion that the delay in developing a military strategy for almost two years after J. Biden's national Arctic strategy was due to the fact that it took a long time to reach an agreement between the US military departments and representatives of the expert and analytical community who wanted to make the document more specific and realistic. On the other hand, the new document responds to the actually changed geostrategic situation in the Arctic, which has finally lost its status as a "zone of peace and cooperation".

The document is divided into three parts: analysis of American interests in Arctic security, description of the strategic environment, and measures to respond to new security challenges.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Pp. 2, 4, 5, 7.

### ***US interests in Arctic security***

As for the interests of the United States and its NATO allies in the security sphere, the Department of Defense' strategy develops the documents previously adopted by the Biden administration (National Security Strategy 2022, National Defense Strategy 2022, National Strategy for the Arctic Region 2022, and Defense Policy Guidance on Homeland Security 2023). They outline the national interests of the United States in maintaining stability in the Arctic, which should be ensured by a policy based on cooperation with NATO allies, environmental protection, sustainable economic development of Alaska (the only Arctic region of the United States) and the entire Arctic as a whole, and adaptation to climate change<sup>5</sup>. The new military strategy sees the basis for stability in the development of infrastructure and the US/NATO military presence in the region.

New emphases have emerged in Biden's Arctic military strategy. Firstly, the United States is introducing the Arctic into NATO's area of responsibility. In particular, it is noted that strengthening the NATO bloc in the Arctic will facilitate the implementation of the US military strategy in the region. This confirms the assumption that the alliance will continue to serve primarily the interests of the United States. It is noteworthy that each time the mention of the Arctic states in the text of the strategy is accompanied by an indication of their membership in NATO, emphasizing that the sovereign member states of the alliance will be ensured their collective security.

Secondly, the inclusion of Sweden and Finland in the NATO bloc significantly expands the strategic capabilities of the United States:

- military potential concentrated in the North American part of the Arctic will serve as the northern flank for operations in the Indo-Pacific region;
- strengthening control in the European part of the Arctic significantly facilitates the task of projecting forces into Europe and protecting sea lanes between North America and Europe<sup>6</sup>.

In general, the new strategy continues the long-term US policy of achieving global dominance, outlining a broader strategic perspective. The "turn to the East" in order to control energy supplies to China from the sea along the "Persian Gulf – South China Sea – East China Sea" line began under B. Obama [6, Konyshchev V.N., Sergunin A.A.] and then continued under D. Trump. But if under B. Obama China was considered a rival, then under D. Trump it was transferred to the category of "revisionist" countries that pose a threat to US interests in the Indo-Pacific region [7, Ivanov O.P.]. J. Biden's military strategy links the Arctic and the Indo-Pacific region for a global confrontation with China.

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<sup>5</sup> See, e.g.: The National Strategy for the Arctic Region. October 2022. Washington: The White House, 2022. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/National-Strategy-for-the-Arctic-Region.pdf> (accessed 21 September 2024).

<sup>6</sup> 2024 Arctic Strategy. Washington: The Department of Defense, 2024. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Jul/22/2003507411/-1/-1/0/DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY-2024.PDF> (accessed 1 September 2024).

The projection of power into the European Arctic is supported by a series of bilateral US security treaties with Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland, which were signed on the eve of the publication of the strategy, during 2023–2024. According to these agreements (similar in content), the United States receives access to military bases on the territory of these countries and the right to deploy equipment, technology, weapons and warehouses there at its own discretion, as well as to conduct exercises in various formats<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the US military presence near the Arctic borders of Russia receives a flexible and guaranteed mechanism: either through NATO or through bilateral security agreements with Arctic states.

### ***Strategic environment***

According to the text of the document, the strategic situation in the Arctic is changing dynamically under the influence of the following main factors: the policies of the Russian Federation and China in the region, including their cooperation; NATO expansion at the expense of Finland and Sweden; the consequences of climate change. Possible destabilization can only be compensated for by deepening defense cooperation between Western countries.

The most serious obstacle to the US military strategy is the global challenge from China. China is trying to realize its global ambitions by deepening military and economic cooperation with Russia in the Arctic. This may negatively affect strategic stability in the Arctic, because, according to the American point of view, all China's research and economic activities have a dual purpose, including testing underwater robots, adapting aviation to polar conditions, and implementing the Polar Silk Road transport project. In the same spirit, the strategy evaluates the signed memorandum of understanding on shipping issues between the PRC Coast Guard and the Russian Federal Security Service<sup>8</sup>.

The US Department of Defense strategy also sees a threat in China's economic cooperation with the Arctic states. For Washington, China's 2018 Arctic strategy and the Chinese concept of "global commons" in relation to Arctic resources only cover up Beijing's real intentions to gain

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<sup>7</sup> Defense Cooperation. Agreement between the United States of America and Norway. Treaties and Other International Acts Series 22-617. URL: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/22-617-Norway-Defense-SDCA-Ready-for-Review.pdf> (accessed 1 September 2024); Agreement of Defense Cooperation between the Government of the Kingdom of Sweden and the Government of the United States of America. URL: <https://www.government.se/contentassets/9938ae28ed8544d2b60b229e91fd0513/agreement-on-defense-cooperation-between-the-government-of-the-kingdom-of-sweden-and-the-government-of-the-united-states-of-america-date-and-place.pdf> (accessed 4 September 2024); Agreement of Defense Cooperation Between the Government of the Republic Finland and the Government of the United States of America. URL: <https://finlandabroad.fi/documents/35732/0/Finland%20US%20DCA%20-%20Finland%20Prime%20-%20English%20%281%29.pdf/ff602539-1854-bb30-8a5d-483304b08a59?t=1702559666029> (accessed 4 September 2024); Agreement of Defense Cooperation between the Government of Denmark and the Government of the United States of America. URL: <https://via.ritzau.dk/files/2012662/13765902/57437/da> (accessed 4 September 2024).

<sup>8</sup> 2024 Arctic Strategy. Washington: The Department of Defense, 2024. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Jul/22/2003507411/-1/-1/0/DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY-2024.PDF> (accessed 1 September 2024).

control over the Arctic. The Polar Silk Road project (the Chinese version of the development of the Northern Sea Route) is considered as a part of this long-term plan<sup>9</sup>.

The strategy points out that the US has gained advantages in relation to Russia due to the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO. This is, first of all, the expansion of a permanent military presence in the European part of the Arctic and more reliable cover for the North Atlantic. It is there, through the Faroe Islands–Iceland Gap, that Russian strategic submarines go on patrol to the shores of North America. But, according to the US Department of Defense, Russia is demonstrating the ability to modernize and effectively use conventional forces, the nuclear triad, and special operations forces, thereby creating risks for the US and its allies in the future.

The text of the strategy notes that the current threats to US security interests are posed by Russia's provocative actions in the form of suppression of GPS signals, the allegedly "unprofessional" interception of military aircraft of Western countries near the northern borders of the Russian Federation, and the alleged "illegal ambitions" of the Russian Federation to restrict free navigation along the Northern Sea Route, which contradict the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, but are ensured by the force potential of the Northern Fleet. In terms of content, these arguments of the US look very controversial, and this has been repeatedly shown by Russian experts [8, Todorov A.A.; 9, Vylegzhanin A.N., Nazarov V.P.; 10, Gudev P.A.; 11, Gudev P.A.]. However, their use in the analyzed document speaks in favor of the intention to pursue an offensive policy in the near future to the detriment of Russia's legitimate rights in the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF).

It should be noted that the text of the strategy does not indicate anything specific regarding the threats from China and the Russian Federation. There is no mention of strategies, military construction, potential, operational capabilities, the nature of the exercises, interstate contradictions in the Arctic that would threaten military conflicts with the participation of the Russian Federation. The text of the American strategy does not present anything to Russia other than "low-level destabilizing activity"<sup>10</sup>.

In the same spirit of uncertainty, Iris Ferguson, the US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Arctic Policy, commented shortly before the publication of the military strategy: "... they [the Russians] continue to invest significantly in [military] infrastructure in the Far North. They do this partly for economic reasons. But when we pay attention to this, we see that their potentially defensive investments can turn into offensive capabilities"<sup>11</sup>.

As a threat to US security, J. Biden's military strategy accuses China of intending to increase its influence on Arctic policy decision-making and several military maneuvers in the Arctic with

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> 2024 Arctic Strategy. Washington: The Department of Defense, 2024. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Jul/22/2003507411/-1/-1/0/DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY-2024.PDF> (accessed 1 September 2024).

<sup>11</sup> Pentagon's Upcoming Arctic Strategy: «We Talk to Norway, Finland, and Sweden a Lot». URL: <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/pentagons-upcoming-new-arctic-strategy-we-talk-norway-finland-and-sweden-lot> (accessed 14 September 2024).



Russia's participation<sup>12</sup>. But, for example, the US Department of Defense in its official statements did not see a real threat from joint flights of Russian and Chinese fighters in the Alaska region, since this does not violate international law in any way<sup>13</sup>. Commenting on the text of the strategy, foreign experts point out that nothing in China's actions in the Arctic indicates military preparations, and in this sense, the text of the strategy also appears ideologically biased when it attributes military threats to the US from China<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, both the text of the strategy and the comments of the US military clearly indicate the far-fetched nature of military threats to US security in the Arctic.

Climate change has dual implications for US military strategy in the region. On the one hand, it poses a threat to infrastructure, while on the other, melting ice increases the economic and military importance of the Barents, Chukchi, Bering Seas, and the Bering Strait. By 2030, the Arctic is expected to offer significantly expanded opportunities for maritime transit and seabed resource development, with all the associated risks. At the same time, the European part of the Arctic is more favorable for the US Department of Defense due to its milder climate and developed infrastructure<sup>15</sup>.

### *Directions and ways of implementing the US Arctic strategy*

The most significant part of the analyzed document is devoted to the way in which the US intends to ensure its interests in the Arctic.

The first direction is related to the development of systems for monitoring the operational environment and reconnaissance of enemy actions in the interests of high-tech joint forces, designed to carry out a wide range of military and non-military missions in the Arctic. For this purpose, the plans include further improvement of the integrated military control system C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance). Particular attention will be paid to increasing the satellite constellation to ensure stable communications and improving the early warning system for a missile attack. The US cooperates with Norway in this area<sup>16</sup>. About 250 new aircraft (mainly F-35 fighters) will be deployed in NATO Arctic states. In her comments on the strategy, US Undersecretary of Defense for Political Affairs Kath-

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<sup>12</sup> 2024 Arctic Strategy. Washington: The Department of Defense, 2024. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Jul/22/2003507411/-1/-1/0/DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY-2024.PDF> (accessed 1 September 2024).

<sup>13</sup> McCusker E. The Defense Arctic Strategy — Continuation of Words. URL: <https://www.aei.org/foreign-and-defense-policy/the-defense-arctic-strategy-a-continuation-of-words/> (accessed 13 September 2024).

<sup>14</sup> Martin J. The U.S. DOD's 2024 Arctic Strategy is a Welcome Respite from Fatalistic Views on China. URL: <https://chinaus-icas.org/research/the-u-s-dods-2024-arctic-strategy-is-a-welcome-respite-from-fatalistic-views-on-china/> (accessed 4 September 2024).

<sup>15</sup> 2024 Arctic Strategy. Washington: The Department of Defense, 2024. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Jul/22/2003507411/-1/-1/0/DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY-2024.PDF> (accessed 1 September 2024).

<sup>16</sup> USA and Norway: Will Build Satellite Station at Andøya For Early Missile Warning. URL: <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/usa-and-norway-will-build-satellite-station-andoya-early-missile-warning> (accessed 16 September 2024).

leen Hicks clarified that the Arctic will be used to test artificial intelligence systems and unmanned platforms<sup>17</sup>.

According to the text of the strategy, the reconnaissance system should be based on the continued modernization of the US-Canadian NORAD system, which combines air defense and missile defense functions, as well as radars installed in Northern European countries. Western experts note that NORAD is “capable of detecting and tracking certain targets” (in other words, not all targets)<sup>18</sup>. Canada will actively participate in the modernization, having allocated \$27.8 billion for these purposes in 2022.

Another NORAD function being developed is maritime surveillance. In addition, the Department of Defense is expected to invest in projects for the use of unmanned aerial vehicles. The plan is to ensure data exchange between land, sea, air, and space-based platforms not only in the United States and Canada, but also in European Arctic states.

Under the NORAD modernization agreement announced by the US and Canadian defense ministers in 2021, most of the projects will be completed by 2030, including the introduction of over-the-horizon radars to increase NORAD’s range; underwater sensors off the coast of North America; advanced navigation systems to complement the existing GPS, satellite and radio communications systems for the Canadian armed forces; and the delivery of improved short-, medium and long-range air-to-air missiles<sup>19</sup>.

However, the United States has yet to achieve full coverage of the Arctic with a system of communications satellites above 65 degrees north latitude. Electromagnetic interference typical of Arctic latitudes objectively hampers stable communications. For this purpose, it is planned to use military and commercial satellites of the United States and its European NATO allies. In addition, by 2030, it will be necessary to ensure the transfer of large amounts of data via communication systems to support the aviation group, unmanned aerial vehicles, the unified radar system, near-Earth satellites and other infrastructure<sup>20</sup>.

Harsh weather and complex geomagnetic conditions create a special challenge for high-tech inter-service forces. There are difficult tasks of developing new or adapting existing equipment and weapons to low temperatures, repairing infrastructure suffering from melting permafrost and long-term underfunding, and conducting operations in Arctic conditions.

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<sup>17</sup> Vincent B. DOD’s New Arctic Strategy Calls for Better Tech to ‘Monitor and Respond’. URL: <https://defensescoop.com/2024/07/22/dods-new-arctic-strategy-better-tech-monitor-respond/> (accessed 16 September 2024).

<sup>18</sup> Erwin S. Pentagon’s Arctic Strategy Emphasizes Space and Satellite Capabilities. URL: <https://spacenews.com/pentagons-arctic-strategy-emphasizes-space-and-satellite-capabilities/> (accessed 16 September 2024).

<sup>19</sup> NORAD Modernization Project Timelines. URL: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/allies-partners/norad/norad-modernization-project-timelines.html> (accessed 12 September 2024).

<sup>20</sup> 2024 Arctic Strategy. Washington: The Department of Defense, 2024. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Jul/22/2003507411/-1/-1/0/DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY-2024.PDF> (accessed 1 September 2024).



There is also a military-scientific task of reliably predicting weather conditions using modeling of processes occurring in the ocean, atmosphere, and ionosphere<sup>21</sup>. Assessing these plans, it should be noted that such studies and models require constant data acquisition, including from numerous sensors distributed over the vast expanses of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation. But the blocking of international scientific cooperation with the Russian Federation in the Arctic on the initiative of the West made this data inaccessible to Western scientists, which means that the models will not be reliable enough. In this regard, the task set in the strategy of the US Department of Defense remains far from an effective solution.

The second direction of the implementation of the US military strategy in the Arctic is associated with the involvement of not just individual NATO countries, but also the structures of the alliance itself. The strategy states that the alliance has a strategic interest and obligation under the treaty “to protect NATO territory in the Arctic”<sup>22</sup>. In fact, this means the inclusion of the Arctic in NATO’s zone of responsibility in response to Russia’s unwillingness to join a “rules-based” world order, i.e., rules imposed by the West at its discretion.

The strategy supports NATO’s regional policy plan, which will serve as the basis for developing the alliance’s Arctic operations concept<sup>23</sup>. The US Department of Defense will coordinate with its allies through the Arctic Security Policy Roundtable (Russia was excluded in 2014), meetings of Arctic defense ministers, the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, and other organizations. At the domestic level, the Department of Defense plans to interact with the State Department, the Department of Homeland Security, the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies, and scientific organizations conducting polar research. For coordination purposes, the Arctic Strategy and Global Resilience Office was created in 2022. As for expanding the mobilization resource, the strategy also envisages continuing joint training of special operations forces: both at the level of bilateral military cooperation and through NATO. It is planned to involve the Reserve (National Guard) and Coast Guard forces in training programs for operations in the Arctic.

The third direction of strategy implementation is ensuring a military presence in the Arctic through independent and joint exercises, patrols, and the permanent deployment of joint forces in Alaska, which form the first line of deterrence against the enemy.

The strategy envisages a further increase in the intensity of exercises in the Arctic, including the most important ones for the Department of Defense — Arctic Edge; Northern Edge (involving Indo-Pacific Command); Ice Camp (submarine fleet); Nanook (Northern Command and NORAD); Noble Defender, Vigilant Shield (Northern Command); Nordic Response, Dynamic Mongoose,

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<sup>21</sup> 2024 Arctic Strategy. Washington: The Department of Defense, 2024. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Jul/22/2003507411/-1/-1/0/DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY-2024.PDF> (accessed 1 September 2024).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Regional Perspectives Report on the Arctic. Strategic Foresight Analysis. Norfolk: HQ SACT Strategic Plans and Policy, 2021. URL: <https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/regional-perspectives-2021-04.pdf> (accessed 1 September 2024).

Arctic Challenge (joint forces in the European Arctic)<sup>24</sup>. For illustration: 20 thousand military personnel from 13 NATO countries took part in the Nordic Response exercises in Northern Norway from March 3 to 14, 2024 alone. Fifty submarines, frigates, corvettes, aircraft carriers, amphibious ships, 100 fighters, transport aircraft, and maritime reconnaissance aircraft were involved<sup>25</sup>. In turn, they were only part of the Steadfast Defender exercises, which took place in January–June with the participation of 90 thousand military personnel from 31 NATO countries — the largest exercise since the Cold War and aimed at practicing the alliance’s actions in the event of an attack by Russia (including the transfer of forces from the United States, landing from the sea, and strategic deployment)<sup>26</sup>.

The US joint forces in Alaska can be increased on a rotational basis if necessary. The forces are intended for action not only in the Arctic, but also in any part of the world, interacting with NATO allies if necessary. In addition to traditional tasks, the joint forces will carry out maritime patrols in the Arctic, including the Faroe-Icelandic border, patrols in Icelandic airspace, and support deployment operations of US and NATO forces in the Arctic states. Finland and Norway will obviously be of primary interest.

Much is already being done in practice to support the implementation of the strategy. The US Department of Defense has stated that it will support the construction of at least 8 icebreakers for civilian and military needs. This project will be carried out through cooperation with Canada and Finland, which Washington announced in July 2024<sup>27</sup>. The fact is that the United States has not built heavy icebreakers for almost 50 years and is counting on technological assistance from its allies. However, given the failure of the previous US icebreaker program, there are serious doubts about the new initiative.

A. Ferguson stated that although there is no complete clarity on the financing of Arctic military programs, the budget at least covers the costs of reconstructing the Pituffik Space Force base in Greenland (\$7 million), purchasing special equipment adapted to low-temperature conditions for the 11th Airmobile Division, which forms the core of the American armed forces in Alaska (\$280 million), and creating a high-frequency satellite communications system with protection against interference for US forces operating in the Arctic (\$1.8 billion)<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> 2024 Arctic Strategy. Washington: The Department of Defense, 2024. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Jul/22/2003507411/-1/-1/0/DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY-2024.PDF> (accessed 1 September 2024).

<sup>25</sup> Media site — Nordic Response 2024. URL: <https://www.forsvaret.no/en/exercises-and-operations/exercises/nr24> (accessed 9 September 2024).

<sup>26</sup> Zverev Yu. Steadfast Defender: What to Expect from NATO's Largest Exercises in the 21st Century. URL: <https://eurasia.expert/steadfast-defender-chego-zhdad-ot-krupneyshikh-uchenyi-nato-v-khkhiveke/?ysclid=m0xvortru870160848> (accessed 3 September 2024).

<sup>27</sup> Rosen Y. Alaska highlighted in new Department of Defense Arctic strategy. URL: <https://alaskapublic.org/2024/07/29/alaska-highlighted-in-new-department-of-defense-arctic-strategy/> (accessed 16 September 2024).

<sup>28</sup> Burchett C. US military's Arctic strategy calls for new tech, better communications to maintain regional stability. URL: <https://www.stripes.com/theaters/us/2024-07-22/pentagon-arctic-climate-change-china-russia-14564133.html> (accessed 1 September 2024).

### ***Expert assessments of the new strategy***

The new US military strategy in the Arctic has received mixed assessments from the American and global expert and analytical communities.

Amid the crisis in foreign policy, neo-isolationist sentiments are gaining popularity inside the US, uniting a group of critically minded experts. They believe that the new military strategy in the Arctic exaggerates military threats from Russia and China. For example, according to the author of “The American Conservative”, Russia’s modernization of its Arctic military infrastructure is connected with the importance of the region for the country’s economic development, while its conventional offensive potential is very modest. China’s activity in the Arctic is primarily economic in nature. Moreover, relations with Taiwan and the situation in the Taiwan Strait are much more important for Beijing. This is where China is preparing for possible military action<sup>29</sup>.

Part of this group of experts believes that the new strategy has not completely overcome the declarative nature (which was characteristic of D. Trump’s strategy), it lacks internal integrity, and it does not specify the place of the Arctic among other priorities of American security policy. In their opinion, the slogan of the strategy “monitor and respond” indicates that the Arctic will not be among the top priorities, and the policy will rather be of a passive-reactive nature. For example, the text of the strategy contains a phrase that it will be necessary to balance between the Arctic and other threats to US national security in order to find optimal ways to respond<sup>30</sup>.

A serious argument questioning the feasibility of the strategy is the lack of official comments on the provision of the new strategy with the US military budget<sup>31</sup>. The attention and resources of the Pentagon, as follows from the briefing of US Deputy Secretary of Defense K. Hicks, are primarily required by Ukraine, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific region. The Norwegian military attaché in the US, O. Hagen, also noted that disputes are possible between the US and its European allies due to the lack of funding for Arctic policy<sup>32</sup>.

The second group consists of American experts with a moderate position. In their opinion, the strategy is not aimed at increasing confrontation with China and Russia. They note that the text of the strategy speaks of the increasing activity of China and Russia, but they are not called allies or partners who have the same strategic goals of anti-American nature. A comment by Assistant Secretary of Defense I. Ferguson, one of the authors of the strategy, states that “this document [the strategy] is not about a confrontation... despite this alignment, we still see it as a little bit superficial at the military level... and I don’t want to suggest in any way that they [Russia and

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<sup>29</sup> Little A. NATO’s Arctic Strategy is an Overreaction. *American Conservative*. August 26, 2024. URL: <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/natos-arctic-strategy-is-an-overreaction/> (accessed 16 September 2024).

<sup>30</sup> McCusker E. The Defense Arctic Strategy — Continuation of Words. URL: <https://www.aei.org/foreign-and-defense-policy/the-defense-arctic-strategy-a-continuation-of-words/> (accessed 13 September 2024).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Grandy J. Pentagon Arctic Strategy Aims to Enhance U.S. Presence, Exercise More Often. URL: <https://news.usni.org/2024/07/23/pentagon-arctic-strategy-aims-to-enhance-u-s-presence-exercise-more-often> (accessed 17 September 2024).

China] are in that [high interoperability] level of cooperation”<sup>33</sup>. It can be assumed that consensus on military policy in the Arctic has not yet been reached in US governing circles. Many American officials directly involved in Arctic policy see the problem of growing confrontation with Russia in the Arctic as clearly artificial against the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis, although there are many supporters of a tough confrontation with Russia and China in the Arctic in the US Department of Defense.

The third group of experts agrees with the offensive pathos of the US military strategy in the Arctic and assigns NATO a key role as a guarantor of stability. However, even they note that the nature of threats emanating from Russia as the main military opponent of the US is not actual (requiring a substantive response to the threat), but only potential: “Russian military capabilities in the Arctic pose potential threats to the US and its allies”<sup>34</sup>. According to this point of view, in order for NATO as an organization to guarantee stability in the region, it is necessary to create logistical capabilities in the Arctic for the military presence of non-Arctic NATO members. An arms race will be an undesirable but inevitable process, since Russia has a number of advantages, such as an icebreaker fleet<sup>35</sup>, which NATO will have to neutralize.

Non-Western experts tend to assess Washington’s new military strategy in the Arctic more negatively. In particular, Chinese military experts, assessing the US strategy, note its confrontational nature, which is determined not by the regional agenda, but by the general deterioration of relations between Russia and the West. They believe that China’s military capabilities and ambitions in the Arctic are clearly exaggerated and have an ideological (anti-Chinese) character. They point out that China has come first in threat assessments that are based on unsubstantiated attribution of aggressive intentions to it, which speaks in favor of the deterioration of US-Chinese relations both in the Arctic and in other regions<sup>36</sup>.

In their opinion, the US strategy will contribute to the further escalation of military threats and the arms race in the Far North. They believe that the restoration of coordination mechanisms and military confidence-building measures in the Arctic may take a long time. Non-Arctic observer states in the Arctic Council can make a certain contribution to normalization by participating in consultations and creating new mechanisms for regional coordination. China’s interest in military cooperation with Russia in the Arctic can be explained by its intention to prevent Russia from becoming excessively weakened under increasing pressure from the US/NATO and to preserve the

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<sup>33</sup> Martin J. The U.S. DOD’s 2024 Arctic Strategy is a Welcome Respite from Fatalistic Views on China. URL: <https://chinaus-icas.org/research/the-u-s-dods-2024-arctic-strategy-is-a-welcome-respite-from-fatalistic-views-on-china/> (accessed 4 September 2024).

<sup>34</sup> Erwin S. Pentagon’s Arctic Strategy Emphasizes Space and Satellite Capabilities. URL: <https://spacenews.com/pentagons-arctic-strategy-emphasizes-space-and-satellite-capabilities/> (accessed 16 September 2024).

<sup>35</sup> US Department of Defense releases 2024 Arctic Strategy. URL: <https://www.army-technology.com/analyst-comment/us-department-of-defense-arctic-strategy/?cf-view&cf-closed> (accessed 16 September 2024).

<sup>36</sup> Xu Keyue. US hypes ‘threats from China, Russia’ in Arctic strategy, to push for militarization in the region: expert. *Global Times*, 23 July 2024. URL: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202407/1316573.shtml> (accessed 21 September 2024).

Northern Sea Route as an alternative route to Europe, given the instability in the Persian Gulf and Suez Canal [12, Petrovskiy V.E.].

The Russian expert community notes that the new US military strategy in the Far North fits into plans to ensure a permanent presence in the Arctic in economic, political and military dimensions, as well as to gain dominant positions in the region<sup>37</sup>. This document shows that the US is going to take full advantage of Finland and Sweden joining NATO and the prospect of freeing the Arctic seas from ice by 2030.

At the same time, according to a number of Russian analysts, firstly, the text of the strategy prioritizes stability over increasing strategic competition in the region. Secondly, the US is not yet ready for a military confrontation in the Arctic, if only because it does not possess a “full-fledged grouping of forces and means to conduct large-scale operations”. Thus, Russia has a pause of several years from direct military pressure, which does not cancel other, non-military means of deterrence from the West. In addition, the US intends to actively attract investment from allies to create a common military infrastructure in the Arctic<sup>38</sup>.

It can be assumed that the US Department of Defense will adopt an additional document, more clearly disclosing the concept and action plan within the framework of the strategy. This is indirectly confirmed by the “National Intelligence Estimate”, published by the National Intelligence Council, to which experts from the US Congressional Research Service refer: as a result of global warming, competition for Arctic resources will increase, which will lead to an aggravation of relations between Arctic and non-Arctic states, an increase in military activity in the region by non-Arctic states to protect their investments, new transport routes and to gain strategic advantages over competitors. According to the National Intelligence Council, an open military conflict is possible in the Arctic in the future. It could either involve Russia and unnamed non-Arctic states if they persistently show military activity in the straits of the Northern Sea Route, which Russia considers to be internal waters (obviously, we are talking about US allies). Or it will be a conflict between China and the Arctic states in the event of its economic consolidation in the Arctic<sup>39</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

The new US military strategy in the Arctic considers the policies of the Russian Federation and China as a destabilizing factor in the region and leaves no space for cooperation with them, which may lead to an escalation of tensions in the region in the medium term. The US has gained a significant geopolitical advantage due to its guaranteed military presence in Finland and Sweden. At the same time, the strategy does not contain a clear statement of the threats that come from

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<sup>37</sup> American “dancing on arctic ice” will get warm Russian reception. URL: <https://19rusinfo.ru/politika/75390-amerikanskije-tantsy-na-arkticheskom-ldu-vstretjat-goryachij-russkij-priem> (accessed 16 September 2024).

<sup>38</sup> Andrey Krivorotov — On the new strategy of the US Department of Defense. URL: <https://porarctic.ru/ru/comments/andrey-krivorotov-o-novoy-strategii-minoborony-ssha-v-arktike/> (accessed 4 September 2024).

<sup>39</sup> Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress. CRS Report R41153. Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2024. Pp. 29–30. URL: <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R41153.pdf> (accessed 18 September 2024).

the Russian Federation and China. The plans for a very specific build-up of infrastructure and the US/NATO military presence in the Arctic are a response to imaginary threats that could only hypothetically arise from the Russian Federation and China. Apparently, there is still no consensus within the US Department of Defense and the expert and analytical community on the content of the US military policy in the Arctic. This is largely due to the reluctance to get involved in a military escalation with Russia and the understanding that the US has insufficient resources for a more offensive policy in the Arctic.

The United States has de facto included the Arctic in NATO's zone of responsibility, and the official announcement of this by the alliance itself remains a formality. In the Arctic, Russia's land border with NATO has increased to one and a half thousand kilometers. The US sees the expansion of the alliance to include Sweden and Finland as a step to strengthen its global dominance and as a springboard for containing Russia and China in the Arctic.

In the perspective of 2030, the new strategy is aimed at the progressive expansion of the US military infrastructure in Alaska and Northern European countries; accumulating experience in conducting operations in the North American and European parts of the Arctic; further increasing the number and duration of anti-Russian military maneuvers with the development of deployment elements and offensive actions. The depth of military cooperation between Finland and the United States and whether the new military strategy is provided with funding will be of key importance for Russia's security. At the same time, the US will try to shift a significant portion of military costs to European countries, especially to NATO "neophytes" such as Finland and Sweden.

The build-up of permanent US/NATO military presence and military infrastructure in Finland, Sweden and Norway creates the main threat to Russia's security. If the US strategic plans are implemented, not only Russia's strategic nuclear arsenal on the Kola Peninsula, but also densely populated industrial areas and military-industrial enterprises located both in the North-West and in the central regions of Russia, will be at risk. The increasing risks of a military conflict in the Arctic will be linked to Russia's survival and will require appropriate response measures.

The US military strategy in the Arctic is unlikely to cause serious disagreement between Republicans and Democrats after the presidential elections in November 2024, regardless of the outcome of the vote. The only restraining factor will be the budgetary capabilities of the US administration that comes to power. In fact, the new military strategy of J. Biden has not overcome the declarative nature of D. Trump's strategy, but the hegemonic ambitions have been continued. Apparently, the clarification of the priorities of the US Arctic military strategy will take place after reaching a domestic political consensus in the US following the elections, if it happens at all. Otherwise, a significant distance will remain between the ambitious US military plans and reality.

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