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THE UNIPOLAR MOMENT IN THE NORTH POLE – THE MYTH OF THE ARCTIC'S MILITARY IRRELEVANCE AFTER THE COLD WAR

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ABSTRACT: *The strategic importance of the Arctic today justifies a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the region. The post-Cold War period and the impact of unipolarity on the region are less studied periods from a military perspective. This analysis examines the military changes that took place in the European Arctic, Greenland, and North American Arctic (Alaska, Canada) after the Cold War and how they follow Charles Krauthammer's unipolar theory. The study concludes that it was not the region's lack of military significance that served as a catalyst for Arctic Exceptionalism, but rather the global military centre of gravity that shifted to other regions and threats. Therefore, this proves that military and security interests and Arctic cooperation are not necessarily mutually exclusive.*

KEYWORDS: *unipolar moment, Arctic, Russia, nuclear defence, Greenland, Arctic Exceptionalism*

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INTRODUCTION

Current political changes are making the Arctic increasingly important, underscoring the need to understand the dynamics of the region. The unipolar moment following the Cold War brought significant changes to the world order, but its impact on the Arctic has been less thoroughly analysed than the preceding era and the current events. However, this would be particularly justified, as after the Cold War, the image of a militarized Arctic began to be replaced by the concept of Arctic Exceptionalism, according to which the region is a unique area that enjoys immunity from the geopolitical problems of the world.

With the region's growing importance, it is increasingly necessary to obtain a complete picture of the military changes in the region in reflection of the creation of Arctic Exceptionalism. Therefore, a historical overview of this era is necessary, as without it, it is impossible to understand current events and draw correct conclusions. How the Arctic has changed in military terms during this timeframe can fundamentally contribute to our understanding of the origins of Arctic Exceptionalism and the threats it faces today.

In his 2022 study, Rasmus Gjedssø Bertelsen argues that the unipolar theory, which is rarely applied in the study of the region, is necessary for understanding the post-Cold War and (post-post-Cold War) Arctic.[1] The main findings of his study contribute greatly to

[1] Bertelsen 2022.

understanding the post-Cold War era Arctic, but little is said about the specific military changes caused by the unipolar moment. Bertelsen instead focuses on the development of liberal institutions. For this reason, this study deals only with military issues and not with the broader security policy, institutional changes, and developments in the region.

The study examines how the military significance of the Arctic has changed in the unipolar moment following the Cold War and whether Arctic Exceptionalism really arose from the region's declining military importance. It first briefly reviews the characteristics of the Cold War in the Arctic and discusses the theory of the unipolar moment. Following this, it focuses on the European/Russian Arctic, Greenland, and the continental US from the perspective of the unipolar moment. During this, the author argues that although a decline in the role of the military can be observed in some cases, it is more accurate to speak of a transformation of military challenges.

An important consideration in the analysis is which time period needs to be examined. To this day, there is debate about when the unipolar position of the US ended. For example, Christopher Layne wrote his study entitled "This Time It's Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax Americana" in 2012, while others, such as Alexei Pilko, believe that it has not ended at all, but that the old unipolarity will be replaced by a new one.[2] Other authors, instead of multipolarity, talk about the emergence of a polyarchic world, the core of which is that several greater powers coexist, and in this system, all the states, both greater and smaller, establish temporary alliances.[3]

For this reason, no specific time frame has been defined, but the main focus will be on the 1990s and 2000s.

THE ARCTIC IN THE COLD WAR

In order to examine the changes that followed the Cold War, it is worth briefly reviewing the main characteristics of the Cold War in the Arctic first. In my previous article, I already reviewed the main military issues concerning the region during the Cold War period, but it is necessary to recall these findings here as well, in order to analyse the effects of the unipolar moment.[4] The main conclusion of the article is that the strategic importance of the region predates even the Cold War, and that certain parts of the region (i.e., Greenland) already had military and strategic significance during World War II. During the Cold War, the role of the region was largely determined by strategies and concepts related to the use of nuclear weapons. The theories behind nuclear weapons had a direct impact on the nature of the military presence in the Arctic. From the early 1960s, with the principle of flexible response replacing mass retaliation, the strategic role of the region began to take shape for NATO, and it became a region that was understandable separately for the Alliance. Then, from the second half of the 1960s, it received greater attention due to the "Flexible Response" strategy (MC 14/3) issued by NATO's Military Committee. NATO's changed response in the event of an attack also shed new light on the Alliance's flanks. Subsequently, from 1970 until the end of the Cold War, the military significance of the Arctic could be understood in its own right.[5]

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2 Layne 2012; The new unipolarity will become a reality, the expert warns 2025.

3 Boda 2023, 12–13; Boda 2024, 6.

4 Szalkai 2025.

5 Szalkai 2025, 46–47.

For the US, Greenland was a source of raw materials and meteorological information, and its geographical location made it strategically essential for the defence of continental America and the supply of Europe, even during World War II. During the Cold War, the US increased its military presence on the island, always adapting to the challenges of the time. While previously there had been no need to establish air bases, this arose in the 1950s due to new military requirements. Subsequently, due to advances in long-range aircraft and missile technology, the island's function was transformed once again, this time taking on strategic importance in communications and early warning. On the other side of the Atlantic, missile defence and early warning were also key considerations. Constructions began here in the 1960s, and the missile defence early warning system was continuously expanded until the end of the Cold War.[6]

For Europe, the GIUK Gap[7] was one of the most important strategic points in the region. Although the role of the passage changed during the Cold War, its importance remained the same. In the early decades, Soviet submarines had to pass through the passage to strike America. Later, with the development of missile technology, this requirement ceased to exist, but NATO continued to attach great importance to the passageway due to the protection of transatlantic routes. Similar to the passageway, the Scandinavian Peninsula was also of great importance due to its flight routes and land border with Russia.[8]

THEORY OF THE UNIPOLAR MOMENT

In order to understand how the unipolar moment influenced the military significance of the Arctic after the Cold War, it is necessary to briefly review what the unipolar moment actually is.

The term was first used in 1990 by neo-conservative political commentator Charles Krauthammer in his article "The Unipolar Moment" published in *Foreign Affairs*. In his opinion, several ideas existed about how the post-Cold War world would function. These included the emergence of multipolarity and the elimination of the risk of war. In his view, these were all misconceptions; the world did not become multipolar, but unipolar. This means that there is one central world power, the US, supported by its Western allies, while small aggressive states with weapons of mass destruction are emerging, which increases rather than reduces the risk of war.[9] In his words:

The unipolar moment means that with the close of the century's three great Northern civil wars (World War I, World War II and the Cold War) an ideologically pacified North seeks security and order by aligning its foreign policy behind that of the United States.[10]

However, he also emphasizes that multipolarity will eventually emerge and that the world order will resemble that of the period before World War I. However, until then, the US will remain the sole world power for decades. The decline of the US will not be caused by imperial overstretch, but by domestic political reasons. The reason for this is that the US

6 Szalkai 2025, 44–49.

7 The name is derived from Greenland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom. It is a strategic maritime passage between the three islands. See more: Padányi 2025, 110–111.

8 Szalkai 51–52.

9 Krauthammer 1990, 23.

10 Krauthammer 1990, 25.

resembles the former British Empire. It is a trading, maritime power based on a stable global economy. For this reason, eliminating threats that jeopardize these factors is not a burden, but a necessity.[11]

In 2002, Krauthammer revisited his decade-old theory in an article titled "The Unipolar Moment Revisited" published in *The National Interest* magazine. In this article, he continues to advocate his views. The Soviet Union collapsed, the European Union focused on internal integration and the welfare model rather than military capabilities, and China grew stronger but was still lagging far behind. The result is a dominance that is unprecedented, as even the British Empire had to keep a closer eye on its rivals. He also points out that while many initially disputed his theory, over time, it has become clear to everyone.[12] In this article, reflecting on the terrorist attacks of September 11, he places great emphasis on the issue of terrorism. He criticized the United States for not taking the threat of terrorism seriously before September 11, while in a unipolar moment, the fight against terrorism is of paramount importance.[13]

Critics of the theory, such as Christopher Layne, argued that other countries view US hegemony as a threat and that the unipolar moment did not change the fundamentals of international relations.[14] Another critic of the theory, Robert W. Murray, argued that "Though it is difficult to deny that the world has become more stable at the systemic level, the role of hard power and military capabilities did not disappear with the Soviet Union; instead, the use of militarism to achieve national goals in the unipolar moment greatly decreased as a direct result of the values and grand strategy of the United States."[15]

Proving the critics right and in line with Krauthammer's 1990 prediction regarding the emergence of multipolarity, China and Russia very quickly began to criticize US supremacy in their joint statements. In 2009, Susan Turner examined Russia and China's joint campaign for a multipolar world order. She highlighted that a "constructive partnership" was established between the two countries in 1994, and then from 1996 onwards, the term "strategic partnership" was used. In her analysis, Turner drew attention to the (joint) statements of the two countries. One example is the 1996 statement by Yevgeny Primakov, then foreign minister and later prime minister, to Kremlin News Broadcast, in which he emphasized that Russia must act as a counterweight to the forces that want to dominate the transition from a bipolar system to a multipolar one. Turner also recalled the 1997 Joint Russian–Chinese Declaration about a Multipolar World and the Formation of a New World Order, one of the first joint statements to reflect the view already expressed in Primakov's statement.[16] However, considering that Krauthammer himself claims that the unipolar moment is only temporary, these criticisms merely supplement his theory rather than refuting it.

[11] Krauthammer 1990, 23–27.
[12] Krauthammer 2002, 6–7.
[13] Krauthammer 2002, 7.
[14] Layne 2006, 9.
[15] Murray 2012, 13.
[16] Turner 2009, 163–164.

CHANGE OF NUCLEAR DETERRENCE IN THE UNIPOLAR MOMENT

The theory of unipolarity needs to be supplemented with a review of the new nuclear deterrence theory that emerged after the Cold War. The reason for this is that during the Cold War, as previously discussed, nuclear theories played a significant role in the military revaluation of the Arctic over actual military presence. It is therefore logical that a changing global nuclear situation could once again influence the military role of the Arctic.

The end of the Cold War and the unipolar moment had a significant impact on nuclear deterrence. The "second nuclear age" dawned when India and Pakistan became nuclear powers. Some date it from 1998, while others place its beginning somewhat earlier. However, there is relative agreement on the characteristics of this era. It was typically marked by much greater proliferation than the previous period, and the nuclear monopoly of the great powers came to an end. The new system has encouraged small states to acquire nuclear weapons. This, in turn, could lead to an unstable nuclear arms race. Another change is that the nuclear powers themselves are different from what they were during the Cold War. Weapons of mass destruction are now available to less powerful states, and so the previous logic of deterrence will no longer work. In addition, preventive wars have also become more common. Finally, vertical proliferation also appears. Due to Russia's reduced nuclear spending, the doctrine of mutually assured destruction is less viable, and the US may gain nuclear primacy.[17]

However, when examining the theory of nuclear weapons and the unipolar moment, it should also be mentioned that not everyone agrees that there is a unipolar moment with regard to nuclear weapons. According to some branches of the realist school, if we place nuclear weapons at the centre of the balance of power, then we cannot speak of unipolarity, because although the US has the most powerful nuclear arsenal, Russia is not far behind and has the capability to destroy the United States. In many respects, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a significant decline in economic, soft power, and conventional military strength. In contrast, Russia still had decisive capabilities in terms of nuclear weapons. Similarly, other nuclear powers in the international system, such as France and Great Britain, are also capable of causing significant destruction with their arsenals.[18]

The theory of unipolarity outlined in this section has two main features that may be relevant to the Arctic. One is that, unlike in a bipolar world order, there are not two great powers facing each other, but a single superpower facing smaller revisionist rogue states. Since there are no such states in the Arctic, the main military focus will theoretically shift away from the region, while economic issues may receive greater emphasis. Another aspect is the issue of nuclear weapons, which, according to the arguments presented, will pose a different kind of threat globally, but will also not lose its significance entirely in NATO (US)-Russia relations, as Russia's nuclear capabilities have remained relatively intact. Thus, based on this theory, military devaluation may be observed in the Arctic, but the issue of nuclear weapons might be an exception to this process, as it may remain a key issue even after the Cold War.

[17] Fettweis 2018, 51–54; Deudney 2011, 302.
[18] Deudney 2011, 289–290.

THE CHANGING MILITARY SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ARCTIC IN THE UNIPOLAR MOMENT

European Arctic – Russia

It is worth examining the European and Russian Arctic together, as they clearly interact with each other due to their proximity. Although the region's military significance declined with the end of the Cold War, following the theoretical framework, it remained an important issue, albeit in a different context than before.

A good example which clearly shows that Russian attention did not shift away from the region with the collapse of the Soviet Union is that in 1992, then Russian President Boris Yeltsin and then Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney signed a memorandum of agreement on the development of their countries' Arctic territories. Among other things, this included ambitious plans such as the Arctic Bridge, which would have connected Russia, Norway, and Canada (and, in its future iteration, China too, as seen in Figure 1).[19]

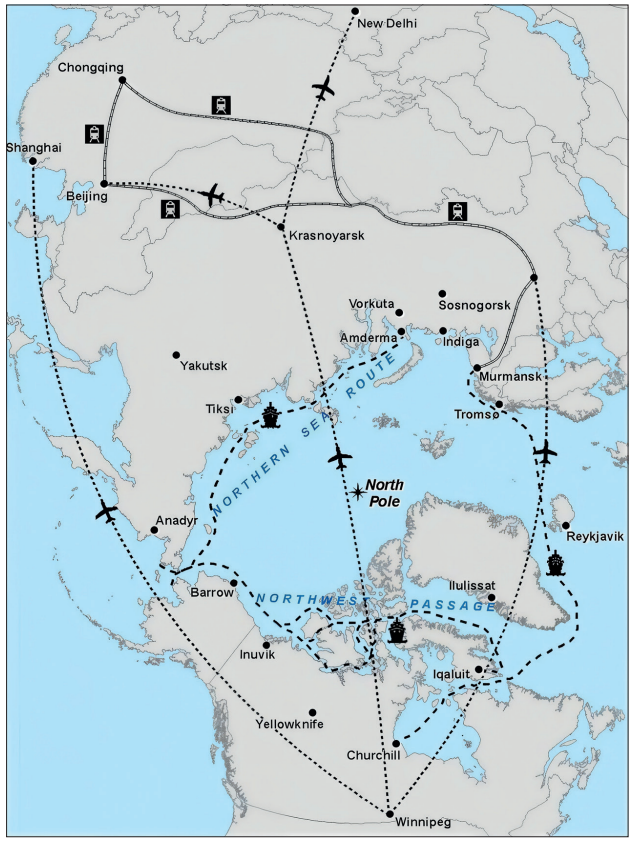


Figure 1 *Arctic Bridge*
Source: *Stephenson 2012, 327.*

[19] Bazsó-Vigh 2025, 27.

This attitude has not changed with the arrival of the new president. On April 5–6, 2000, President Putin, immediately after his first election, but before his inauguration, travelled to the Arctic region, to the city of Murmansk, where he spoke about the importance of the region, the Northeast Passage, and the Northern Fleet. In his speech, he emphasized that the Arctic is a strategic reserve for Russia in the next century and a significant factor in Russia's economic and foreign policy towards the world.[20]

Focusing on the field of military, one aspect is that the Russian Northern Fleet, whose primary function is nuclear deterrence at sea, remained a decisive factor even after the Cold War. The submarines stationed on the Kola Peninsula also represented a strategic capability that could not be ignored. In addition, the role of the Russian Coast Guard and the Northern Fleet in protecting economic interests was also enhanced after the Cold War. These organizations became responsible for protecting Russian economic interests in the Russian-European Arctic. This includes pipelines, offshore installations, and ships. The reason for this is that LNG[21] and oil carriers, as well as onshore and offshore petroleum infrastructures, can be attractive targets for terrorists.[22] This inevitably involves a blurring of civil and military roles, as the coast guard's duties include policing, border control, search and rescue, assistance with passage and navigation, oil spill response, and other environmental damage prevention.[23]

The second important military aspect is nuclear weapons. When examining military issues after the Cold War, it should be noted that Western–Russian cooperation went through several ups and downs in the post-Cold War era. Kristian Åtland referred to this as "re-securitization." According to him, the consequence of this is "a partial revival of Soviet-era security thinking and defense planning, also with regard to the European Arctic."[24] Within this framework, First Russian Deputy Defence Minister Andrei Kokoshin presented the concept of a "Northern Strategic Bastion" (NSB) in the mid-1990s, which was approved by President Yeltsin in 1998. This was a stark change after the waning hours of the Soviet Union when "in 1987, during a trip to the Kola Peninsula, Mikhail Gorbachev (…) proposed to transform the Arctic into a 'zone of peace', in what later became known as the 'Murmansk Initiative'."[25]

This concept was based on Soviet naval doctrine, which argued that the nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) force would be strongest when it could conduct its operations in relatively safe domestic waters. During the Cold War, the Barents Sea was the strongest bastion of the Soviet fleet, but as the war drew to a close and thereafter, the size of the Northern Fleet was significantly reduced, primarily for financial reasons. However, Russian submarine capabilities continued to pose a challenge to NATO in the European Arctic.[26]

Following the initial rapprochement after the end of the Cold War, NATO's eastward expansion encouraged the Yeltsin administration to halt the decline of the navy and reorganize it, as contemporary Russian thinking held that the navy was the only branch of the

[20] Ilyás 2025, 177.
[21] Liquid Natural Gas.
[22] Åtland 2007a,13
[23] Márton 2016, 128.
[24] Åtland 2007a, 21.
[25] Schaller 2019.
[26] Åtland 2007b, 500.

armed forces capable of repelling Western aggression from the sea. The essence of the NSB concept is to concentrate a significant part of Russia's maritime nuclear deterrent forces in the European Arctic, reinforced by the full arsenal of the Russian Armed Forces. Its function is twofold: to provide credible nuclear deterrence and to maintain a navy capable of securing Russian interests at sea. The deployment of this strategic force to the Kola Peninsula is no coincidence, but it does not stem from Russia primarily expecting a Western attack from the Arctic. The reason for this was, first, that during the Cold War, the Soviet Union invested significant resources in mapping and exploring the Arctic, thus gaining a significant advantage in the region, and second, that from here it was easy to reach the Atlantic and Arctic Oceans and potential targets on other continents. It can therefore be said that Northwest Russia and the Northern Fleet did not lose their importance with the end of the Cold War, but rather gained in relevance. Furthermore, in addition to geopolitical reasons, the industrial and economic facilities located in the region and the protection of economic interests in the Arctic have also made the region of vital importance.[27] The military importance of the concept and the region is well illustrated by the fact that even in 2006, 11 of Russia's 15 operational strategic nuclear ballistic missile submarines were based in the Northern Fleet, and the remaining 4 in the Pacific Fleet.[28]

It should be noted, however, that although Russia had strategic plans for the Arctic after the Cold War and built up significant military strength in the region, its military presence was more limited than before. In 2002, for example, not a single SSBN submarine left port, and it was not until 2009 that these submarines resumed regular patrols, still lagging behind US SSBN patrols in both length and frequency, which always maintained 6–10 on sea patrols.[29] NATO submarines were also present in large numbers in the region. There were 3–4 permanently stationed in the Barents Sea and another 8–10 in the Atlantic Ocean.[30]

Just as Russia's military presence in the Arctic adapted to the new challenges of the post-Cold War era, similar processes can be observed on the European side. The role of military presence did not diminish with the end of the Cold War, but its function changed significantly. In the post-Cold War Norwegian perception, Russia appeared as an unstable and unpredictable superpower, and the relationship between the two countries was characterized by asymmetry. In the early years, Russia was still seen as a "lingering threat", and the possibility of an invasion was considered. From 1998, however, defence policy focused less on Russia, and from 2002 onwards, the focus of the armed forces shifted to expeditionary operations and responding to domestic crises.[31] Meanwhile, the Norwegian Navy and the Coast Guard, like their Russian counterparts, were also strengthened after the Cold War to effectively prevent illegal fishing, raw material extraction, and to protect industrial infrastructure.[32] In addition, the armed forces of the two countries began cooperating in the 1990s. In 1994, the Norwegian and Russian navies held their first joint military exercise, then, starting in 2004, they began holding trilateral exercises, in which the US also participated. These were held at regular intervals until 2013.[33]

27 Åtland 2007b, 507, 509–512.
28 Åtland 2007a, 13.
29 Regehr 2020, 191.
30 Åtland 2007b, 510–511.
31 Saxi 2023, 114.
32 Åtland 2007a, 13.
33 Åtland 2020, 167.

The Danish navy also underwent significant changes during this period. In the 1980s, Denmark's participation in NATO was rather limited, even though it publicly supported its decisions. In addition to having one of the smallest defence budgets in the country, it conspicuously sought neutrality. It is no coincidence that the term "Denmarkization" appeared as a derogatory term at this time. However, the end of the Cold War had a significant impact on Danish defence thinking. With the threat gone, it had much greater room for manoeuvre in foreign policy, which provided an opportunity to restore its international reputation among its allies. The unipolar moment allowed Denmark to participate more actively in NATO and to reorganize its navy, as Norway and, to a certain extent, Russia did. While a significant part of the navy has been modernized with the aim of participating in NATO and UN operations far from Denmark, the patrol vessel fleet of Greenland and the Faroe Islands has only received limited upgrades in the form of three new patrol vessels. Although the three ships represent a significant leap forward compared to their predecessors, even in 2010, they were still operating without a fire control system and with a crew of 19 instead of 43.[34]

Summarizing the impact of the unipolar moment on the European/Russian Arctic, it can be concluded that, in certain aspects, both sides reacted similarly to the changes in the global environment. The military significance of the region did not cease (it was even upvalued in some respects by the Russian side), and the parties continued to treat each other with caution. However, the end of the Cold War logic is well illustrated by the fact that the adoption of the Northern Strategic Bastion concept in 1998 and the concentration of Russian nuclear forces in the region coincided with Norway and Denmark's shift in focus from territorial defence to mission tasks.

This highlights the fact that Russian armament and nuclear bastions in the north were considered less of a threat than during the Cold War, and that Russian reorganization was seen more as a defensive measure, even though the region had become even more important to Russia.

Greenland

Given that Greenland's decisive strategic role stemmed from the bipolar Cold War system, the island's role was significantly reevaluated in the 1990s. Although the island's post-Cold War strategic importance was not affected, it was an important moment in 1995 when the US acknowledged that it had stored nuclear weapons in Greenland during the Cold War, two years after admitting that Strategic Air Command bombers routinely overflew Greenland with nuclear weapons during most of the 1960s. Interestingly, in the same year, the Danish government investigated nuclear activities in Greenland and concluded that the US had acted in good faith. Responsibility was attributed to the late Prime Minister H. C. Hansen instead, who in a 1957 meeting with the US Ambassador had failed to clearly articulate Denmark's non-policy stance when asked whether Denmark wished to be notified of any potential US nuclear deployments in Greenland.[35]

[34] Choi 2021, 188–190.
[35] Kristensen 1999.

The role of the Thule base itself was expanded after the Cold War. It no longer served only military functions, but also civilian ones. The BMEWS radars[36] functioned as a space control centre. The radars surveyed every man-made object in orbit around the Earth, including non-functional satellites, rocket boosters, and other space debris.[37] In addition, it also served as a research centre, fulfilling another civilian function. This is well illustrated by the fact that, after the Soviet threat had diminished, the US Arctic Research Commission discussed withdrawing American soldiers from the base for a short period of time due to the maintenance costs.[38]

At the same time, military presence did not ultimately cease at the base, and within the framework of the National Missile Defense (NMD) plan laid out in the new defence concept of 1998–99, it continued to perform its previous predictive function, and was even further developed by the US administration.[39]

The NMD program is a system of systems, the functions of which are distributed to different sites over vast distances linked by high-speed data communications. According to the plans, it would consist of six parts:

1. initial launch detection and tracking system,
2. five ground-based early warning radars (including one in the UK and one in Greenland),
3. four or more, possibly as many as nine (including one in the UK, Greenland, and South Korea) X-band (high-frequency, short-wavelength) radars,
4. interceptor booster, a modified three-stage commercial "off-the-shelf" very fast rocket that carries the exoatmospheric kill vehicle (EKV),
5. exoatmospheric kill vehicle, the on-board computer of which processes updates on the location of the hostile missile after the EKV has separated from the booster,
6. Battle Management, Command, Control, and Communications (BMC3) network.[40]

For Greenland, the plan is to upgrade the existing early warning radars in the first phase, followed by the second and third phases, with Thule to be also equipped with an X-band radar (see Figure 2).[41]

The official request regarding the inclusion of the base in the missile defence shield was made in December 2002 by the US, and after a lengthy debate, the *Igaliku Agreement* with the US and Denmark was concluded in 2004. This agreement replaced the 1951 agreement that had been in force until then.[42] It established that the Thule base was

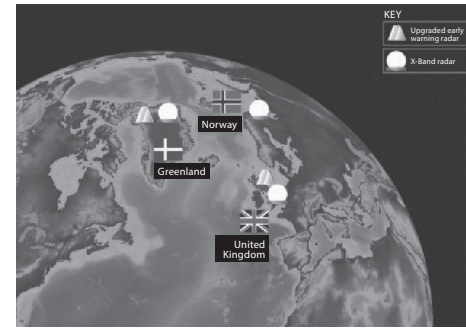


Figure 2 *Europe's Role in National Missile Defense*
Source: *Valasek 2000, 34.*

[36] The Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS) can predict ballistic missile launches deployed by 1961. Of the system's three radar stations, one was deployed in Alaska, one in Greenland, and one in Britain. See more: Szalkai 2025.
[37] Taagholt – Hansen 2001, 56–57.
[38] Takahashi et al. 2019, 11.
[39] A National Security Strategy for a New Century 1998.
[40] Smith 2000, 10–11.
[41] Valasek 2000, 34.
[42] Takahashi et al. 2019, 7–8.

the only defence area in Greenland and allowed the US to carry out the desired developments at the base.[43]

The main motivation behind the development program (officially) was fear of North Korean and Middle Eastern missiles, while arms control agreements with Russia guaranteed cooperation. At the June 4 Moscow summit in 2000, Presidents Clinton and Putin signed a Joint Statement of Principles on Strategic Stability. The agreement emphasized that the international community is vulnerable to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which must be addressed jointly.[44] According to the White House website:

The United States has made clear to Russia that we are prepared to engage in serious cooperation to address the emerging ballistic missile threat and have identified a number of specific ideas for discussion. At the June 4 Moscow Summit, Presidents Clinton and Putin signed an agreement to establish a Joint Center for exchanging early warning data on missile launches; they also agreed to explore more far-reaching cooperation to address missile threats.[45]

However, this statement is seen in a somewhat different light, given that Russia, together with China, significantly criticized the US during this period (as detailed in the previous section), and also heavily criticized the National Missile Defense program. Russia was not entirely convinced by the argument that the defence system had been designed solely to counter threats from North Korea and the Middle East. As the 2002 report of the Congressional Research Service reveals, Russia believed that the system, combined with American nuclear and conventional weapons, would place the United States in a position of strategic superiority and undermine stability. The combination of NATO enlargement and the NMD program could undermine Russia's strategic nuclear deterrent and possibly acquire a disarming first strike capability, with even a relatively limited missile defence capability. For this reason, Russia indicated under both the Clinton and Bush administrations that if the United States withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and deployed an NMD, Russia would withdraw from a range of offensive arms control agreements and deploy multiple warheads on its intercontinental ballistic missiles to overcome a U.S. NMD or deploy new intermediate-range missiles or shorter-range nuclear systems to enhance its military capabilities.[46]

Russian uncertainty about why the system needs to be deployed in Greenland and Norway in response to the threat from the Middle East was supported by the fact that critics of the program raised the same issue back in 2000. Theodore A. Postol emphasized that the Alaskan component of the system would be tasked to collect detailed intelligence data on Russia's long-range ballistic missiles. According to him, "the data collected by these radars will be of primal value to a U.S. national missile defense system. The information will be fed into the NMD database, which will increase the discrimination capabilities of the proposed system against Russia's ballistic missiles."[47] In his assessment, it is unclear whether the system violates existing agreements, but even if it does not, it is clearly provocative, and both Russia and China were aware that these developments were perfectly suited to be used against them.[48]

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43 Agreement between the United States of America and Denmark 2004.
44 National Missile Defense 2000.
45 National Missile Defense 2000.
46 National Missile Defense: Russia's Reaction 2002, 4–12.
47 Postol 2000, 32.
48 Postol 2000, 32.

Greenland's role in the unipolar moment was rather mixed and contradictory. On the one hand, in line with global trends, its function in the former bipolar system has undergone significant changes. It can be observed that civil aviation and research activities have also received significantly more attention than before, and the US presence in Greenland has also shrunk considerably, which was also set out in writing in the 2004 agreement, stipulating that Thule is the only defence zone on the island. On the other hand, the US has not given up on the island's strategic function against Russia, as evidenced by its place in the NMD program. Although the program was not officially designed to counter a major power threat, it is difficult not to notice, as already pointed out in 2000, that developments related to early warning capabilities on the island and in the Arctic in general were always primarily directed against Russia and China. Taking into account the clearly visible characteristics of the era, this highlights a key factor that is still highly relevant today. The United States has fundamental strategic interests in Greenland, which are unrelated to changes in the global system.

Continental US

Finally, it is necessary to briefly mention how the continental defence of the US changed after the end of the Cold War, with particular regard to the North Warning System (NWS), which was agreed upon by the US and Canada in 1985 and replaced the former Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line.

The North Warning System radar line (see Figure 3) was built in 1987–88 to replace the outdated DEW Line, which, although expanded with several new stations during its operation, did not see any development in radar technology itself. New structures were placed at 11 existing DEW Line stations, two dismantled Pine Gap sites, and a Polevault Line site on southeastern Baffin Island. In addition, around 40 unmanned short-range (112 km) gap-filler radars were deployed, and eight radars in Canada's eastern Arctic and eight in the west began being constructed from 1990. The radar system has been supplemented with interceptor fighter bases at Anchorage, Cold Lake, Bagotville, and several smaller ones in Alaska and Canada. Furthermore, Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft were stationed in Alaska for rapid response, and Over-the-Horizon Backscatter (OTH-B) radars to detect air-breathing and rocket-powered targets.[49]

The new system eliminated the flaws of the DEW Line, as well as low-altitude coverage gaps, and improved radar performance while reducing operational and maintenance costs. It was able to detect modern aircraft and cruise missile threats from Russia. Canada was given a greater role in the operation of the system than it had previously had. Canada's previous low level of participation in the system's operation meant a loss of sovereignty for the country. The 1985 agreement allowed Canada to take over the system on its territory and contribute significantly to its operation. It was tasked with replacing 51 DEW Line stations with 31 stations that fitted into the new system.[50]

[49] Fletcher 1990, 274–275.

[50] North Warning System 1998, 3.

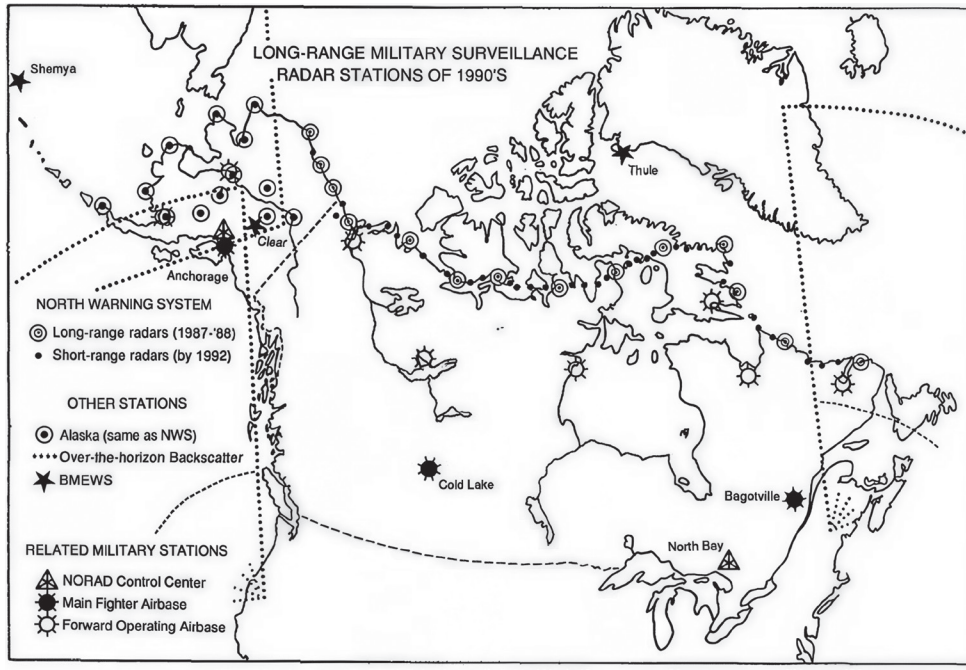


Figure 3: *Long-range military surveillance radar stations of the 1990s*
Source: *Fletcher 1990, 273.*

Beyond that, however, the US has significantly reduced its military presence in Alaska. According to Siedler William J. from the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, "the years since the end of the Cold War have been ones of major change for the military in Alaska."[51] The Air Force placed Galena and King Salmon Forward Operating Bases in caretaker status after 1989. Shemya Island, which was a refuelling station for Northwest Airlines and the U.S. Military Transport Service in the Korean War, as well as home to the 375th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, was renamed Eareckson Air Station in 1991 and has been downsized. The Army closed Fort Greely by 2000, which was opened as the Arctic Training Centre (ATC) in 1948. Furthermore, the Navy also closed Adak Naval Air Facility by 2000, which served as the main base for the Alaskan Sea Frontier (ALSEAFRON) from 1950 to 1993.[52] This behaviour clearly reflects the idea presented earlier that, after the Cold War, general military attention shifted away from the Arctic, but nuclear defence remained relevant in the region.

CONCLUSION

The study examined how the end of the Cold War and the radically different global situation following it affected the military presence in the Arctic. Looking at three key areas of the

[51] Siedler 1996, 73.
[52] Siedler 1996.

region, it can be concluded that Krauthammer's unipolar theory was fairly well reflected in the military changes in the Arctic. Based on this theory, it was expected that the military presence in the Arctic would undergo significant changes during this period.

This was precisely the process observed in the cases examined. The specific military presence developed in different ways: while the US began to significantly reduce its bases, the region played an even greater role in Russian naval strategy than before (although Russia also closed many bases after the Cold War). At the same time, the main strategic challenges no longer concerned the Arctic, and attention shifted to other regions. As a result, the nature of military presence in the Arctic has changed, as can be seen, for example, at Thule Air Base and in the modernization of Arctic countries' navies, where the protection of infrastructure and the fight against illegal fishing and mining have become key considerations, rather than territorial defence. Thus, military presence in the Arctic did not cease after the Cold War, but transformed activities were carried out according to a significantly different logic. An exception to this process is the issue of nuclear defence, which not only did not decline in the 1990s, but also underwent significant developments, as can be seen from the US development program and the fact that Yeltsin devoted considerable attention to the region, even with his limited defence resources.

The analysis thus leads to two conclusions. For one, Greenland has such strategic importance to the US that it continued to pay close attention to it even during a period when a significant number of bases in the region were being closed. The second, and probably more important, conclusion is that Arctic Exceptionalism did not arise from a complete lack of military interest. It is clear that the end of the Cold War did not mean the end of the region's military importance. In fact, it was precisely at this time that Russia concentrated its nuclear focus even more in the region. It was the global military centre of gravity that shifted to other regions and other types of threats.

What does this mean for the present day and for the concept of Arctic Exceptionalism? It was not the region's lack of military significance that served as the catalyst for Arctic Exceptionalism, which was clearly not the case. It is much more accurate to speak of a process in which military challenges affecting the region were transformed, in parallel with the global rise in the importance of other regions. From the perspective of today's great power competition, this is a very important observation because it proves that military and security interests and Arctic cooperation are not necessarily mutually exclusive. With that being said, the increasing importance of the region, climate change, and the emergence of new players such as China do not necessarily mean that the region will not be characterized by a more competitive and confrontative mindset in the future, but does give cause for some optimism.

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