

ALEXANDER DALZIEL

**Putin's media on  
the North American Arctic**

# **DISTORTED REALITY**

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# Contents

Executive Summary ..... 4

Introduction ..... 8

Greenland and the Kingdom of Denmark ..... 12

Canada: geopolitical agent..... 19

The United States and Alaska ..... 23

Overarching themes: Russia on the North American Arctic..... 31

Conclusion: A North American Arctic model ..... 33

About the author ..... 34

References ..... 35

Endnotes..... 46

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## Executive summary | *sommaire*

In a recent speech on the Arctic in Murmansk, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned the audience about the threat posed by Western Arctic nations and their NATO allies. He accused NATO of seeking to establish a “bridgehead for possible conflicts” in the Far North. Putin claimed that the polar region should be peaceful, marked by international collaboration and mutual good will between Arctic nations. However, he failed to mention his own country’s dubious record at peace-making. Putin also neglected to comment on Russia’s illegal and unprovoked invasion and ongoing war against Ukraine, and forgot to mention his own country’s rapid military expansion in the region.

Putin’s rhetoric reflects the wider media narrative in Russia – that Western Arctic nations Canada, the United States, the Kingdom of Denmark (which includes Denmark, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands) pose a direct threat to Russian ambitions in region.

Since Putin maintains an iron grip over Russian media, his anti-Western views have been reflected by major media outlets like *Krasnaya Zvezda*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, and *Independent Military Review* – the first two state-run, the last notionally independent but tied to the Putin regime. All three media organizations have offered distorted images of the North American Arctic. In their warped lens, Canada, the US, and the Kingdom of Denmark are conspiring with NATO allies to militarize the region in order to hem in Russia and strangle its economic opportunities. The Russian media’s anti-Western rhetoric has grown steadily worse over the past decade. News outlets regularly portray the US as a puppet master, aggressively building up heavily armed bridgeheads in Alaska, northern Canada, and Greenland to hold back a Russia characterized as a legitimate, co-operative Arctic country. When the US talks about “deterrence,” the Russian press interprets it as military and economic containment. As for Russia’s own military buildup, the media claims it is a legitimate response to counter the aggression and ambitions of North American Arctic countries, especially Canada and the United States. In other words, the West has left Putin with no other choice but to militarize the polar region. These sources never mention Russia’s aggression in Ukraine as a destabilizing factor.

Russian media typically portray Canada, Denmark, and Greenland – when it considers them at all – as passive pawns in the US’s larger geopolitical game in the Arctic.

This view came to dominate by the end of the past decade.

Certain actions and events commanded Russian media attention however, including Canadian-Danish collaboration in advancing their claims to parts of the Central Arctic seabed, or their intent to work together to build new icebreakers and ice-capable navy patrol ships. Russia media also certainly noticed US President Donald Trump's disruptive goal to buy Greenland, first articulated in 2019 and then later escalated by Trump in 2024 and 2025 following his re-election. Indeed, Russian media sought to exacerbate the divide between the US and Denmark by highlighting the unpopularity of the US position in Greenland.

It's important to note, not everything Russian media organizations say are lies. There is also a limited if superficial diversity of opinion, reflecting a state-managed media space, not freedom of thought. But the lens they apply constantly distorts the intentions and activities of North America's Arctic countries.

There is not much that Canada, the US, Greenland, or Denmark can do change the behaviour of Russian media, distorted as it is by Putin's authoritarian politics. Two lines of effort, however, will strengthen the resilience of the North American Arctic in the face of Russia's misrepresentations and set the record straight on the sort of region they collectively want to see:

- First, to counter false and imposed Russian impressions of the North American Arctic, Canada, the US, and the Kingdom of Denmark must present a clear, accurate, vision for the region. That collective effort should include contributions from Indigenous communities and state, provincial, and territorial governments, in order to effectively combat Russian propaganda.
- Second and relatedly, Canada and the US should collaborate closely with the Kingdom of Denmark, respecting Greenland's self-determination and the division of authority between Nuuk and Copenhagen, to create a trilateral security agenda for the North American Arctic. This agenda should look towards covering aerospace, maritime, economic and human security and the range of threats in these fields our countries face. [MLI](#)

*Lors d'une allocution récente sur l'Arctique présentée à Mourmansk, le président russe Vladimir Poutine a formulé une mise en garde contre les pays de l'Arctique occidental et leurs alliés de l'OTAN. Il a accusé l'OTAN de vouloir établir un « point d'appui pour des conflits futurs » dans le Grand Nord.*

*Poutine a affirmé que la région polaire devait être un lieu de paix, de collaboration internationale et de respect mutuel. Il a cependant passé sous silence les résultats peu glorieux de son propre pays en matière de maintien de la paix. Il a également omis de commenter l'invasion russe et la guerre actuelle, illégale et injustifiée, que son pays mène contre l'Ukraine, de même que le déploiement rapide de ses forces militaires dans la région.*

*La rhétorique de Poutine est à l'image du discours des médias russes, à savoir du danger immédiat que pose l'Arctique occidental – le Canada, les États-Unis et le Royaume du Danemark (y compris le Danemark, le Groenland et les îles Féroé) – pour les aspirations de la Russie.*

*Poutine, qui contrôle les médias russes d'une main de fer, a vu ses points de vue anti-occidentaux relayés par des organes de presse majeurs comme Krasnaya Zvezda, Rossiyskaya Gazeta et Independent Military Review. L'État supervise les deux premiers et le troisième reste lié au régime de Poutine malgré son indépendance officielle. Les trois ont présenté des images déformées de l'Arctique nord-américain. D'après l'un d'eux, le Canada, les États-Unis et le Royaume du Danemark, en accord avec leurs alliés de l'OTAN, auraient convenu de militariser la région pour isoler la Russie et limiter ses possibilités économiques.*

*L'hostilité des médias russes à l'égard de l'Occident n'a cessé d'augmenter au cours de la décennie. Ils décrivent souvent les États-Unis comme un marionnettiste qui empile les bases militaires puissamment équipées en Alaska, dans le Grand Nord canadien et au Groenland pour contrer une Russie vue comme un acteur légitime et coopératif dans l'Arctique. Lorsque les États-Unis parlent de « dissuasion », la presse russe y perçoit une forme d'endiguement militaire et économique. Concernant le déploiement militaire proprement russe, la presse insiste sur sa légitimité en invoquant les agressions et les ambitions de l'Arctique nord-américain, en particulier le Canada et les États-Unis. Autrement dit, l'Occident aurait contraint Poutine à militariser la région polaire. Ces sources ne mentionnent jamais la guerre menée par la Russie en Ukraine comme un facteur d'instabilité.*

*Les médias russes ont l'habitude de représenter le Canada, le Danemark et le Groenland – lorsqu'ils les prennent tous en compte – comme des pions dans la vaste stratégie géopolitique américaine en Arctique. Ce point de vue est devenu plus fréquent depuis dix ans.*

*Cependant, certains faits et gestes ont attiré l'attention des médias russes, comme la collaboration entre le Canada et le Danemark pour revendiquer des zones du fond marin au cœur de l'Arctique ou, encore, leur projet commun de nouveaux brise-glaces et navires*

*de patrouille capables d'opérer dans les eaux gelées. Les médias russes ont presque certainement aussi noté les revendications hégémoniques du président américain Donald Trump sur le Groenland, d'abord évoquées en 2019, puis renforcées en 2024 après sa réélection. Les médias russes ont effectivement tenté d'accentuer la division entre les États-Unis et le Danemark en insistant sur la désapprobation de la position américaine sur le Groenland.*

*Il faut souligner que les médias russes ne sont pas totalement mensongers. Il y a également une gradation d'opinions plus ou moins filtrées ou futiles qui témoignent d'un paysage médiatique dominé par l'État, non pas d'une liberté d'expression. Mais les points de vue sont toujours fortement déformés*

*Le Canada, les États-Unis, le Groenland et même le Danemark n'ont guère la possibilité d'influer sur les médias russes, biaisés en l'état actuel par les politiques autocratiques de Poutine. Toutefois, pour renforcer la résilience de l'Arctique nord-américain face à la désinformation et définir clairement l'ordre régional souhaité, les deux axes de travail que voici sont envisagés :*

- D'abord, pour contrer les fausses perceptions sur l'Arctique nord-américain imposées par la Russie, le Canada, les États-Unis et le Royaume du Danemark doivent dresser un portrait réaliste et précis de la région. Pour lutter efficacement contre la propagande russe, il faut inclure les contributions des collectivités autochtones ainsi que des autorités étatiques, provinciales et territoriales.*
- Ensuite, le Canada et les États-Unis doivent collaborer étroitement avec le Royaume du Danemark, en respectant l'autodétermination du Groenland et le partage des pouvoirs entre Nuuk et Copenhague, dans le but de mettre en place un plan de sécurité trilatéral pour l'Arctique nord-américain. Ce plan doit englober la sécurité aérospatiale, maritime, économique et humaine, en tenant compte de la diversité des menaces qui pèsent sur nos pays. [MLI](#)*

## Introduction

Russia's leaders talk about the Arctic a lot. And they try to portray it in a specific way to their populace. As the centrepiece of the country's economic and strategic future, the Arctic region features in the Russian print media regularly. Part of that discussion is also about other countries in the Arctic. Some is about countries from outside the region, mostly China. Sometimes they discuss foreign corporations and non-governmental organizations. Since 2014, the period this paper will cover, Russian daily and weekly newspapers and their on-line websites have expressed their views on security in the Arctic, framing the nature of the threats they perceive to Russia's Arctic and the region as a whole.

In that framework, one geographic region of interest to Russians is the North American Arctic. In a prominent speech in March in northern Russia, Russia accused the US and NATO of building a “bridgehead” (платцдарм) in the Arctic to threaten Russia – an accusation that certainly includes the North American Arctic (President of Russia 2025). It consists of Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark and its autonomous territory of Greenland (see the section *Greenland – the near invisible actor* on page 14 for more on Greenland's governance in the Danish Realm), and the US. Since this region is of even greater interest to Canadians, Americans, Greenlanders, and Danes, this paper will examine a selection of Russian media to review how they frame the North American Arctic as a factor in Russian defence and security. The goal is highlight the narratives being presented to Russians, not to systematically deconstruct the articles for disinformation. However, the paper will flag falsehoods, misrepresentations and contested interpretations throughout, and also point readers to authoritative studies on some of the issues implicated in the articles, such as on defence alliances, military investments, and so on.



This report builds on insightful recent scholarship. That includes comprehensive work on the inter-relationships of the Arctic strategic narratives of influential states in the Arctic and on Russian approaches to the intertwined Baltic and Arctic strategic spaces (Bouffard et al. 2024; Sazonov et al. 2024). It also follows groundbreaking work that has identified the main pillars of Russian influence and disinformation campaigns in the Arctic (Landriault and Renaud 2024; Landriault et al. 2024; see Landriault 2024 for an overview).

The paper's conclusions align in several areas with this work. It aims to add more colour and prompt more public policy discussion for tailored, sensitive, and inclusive strategic communications and media strategies for the Arctic – ones that, contrary to the Russian model, benefit from contributions from across society, including those who live in the north of North America, not least Indigenous communities and their institutions.

### **The sources**

The sample comes from three prestigious Russian news sources:

- *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Красная звезда, or *Red Star*, hereafter *KZ*), published three times a week by the Russian Ministry of Defence.
- *Nezavisimoye Voennoe Obozreniye* (Независимое Военное Обозрение, the *Independent Military Review*, hereafter *NVO*), a weekly supplement to the national newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*.
- *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (Российская Газета, hereafter *RG*), the national daily newspaper of the Russian government.

These publications reach an audience in the millions in their print and online forms, when you add the relatively limited print circulations of *KZ* and *NVO* (in the low tens of thousands) and their more select military and military-focused audiences, to the larger and general dissemination of *RG* (at a print run of well over 150,000 copies) to public audiences. More importantly, they collectively have regular online readership in Russia in the tens of millions (Luzin 2019; Library of Congress 2025; Similarweb 2025). The paper explores the period from January 2014 to mid-January 2025.<sup>1</sup>

There is a considerable difference in tone between the military-oriented *NVO* (a privately owned outlet that generally supports government lines and whose owners are closely tied to the current mayor of Moscow) and the Ministry of Defence's *KZ* on one side, and the official line that *RG* follows.

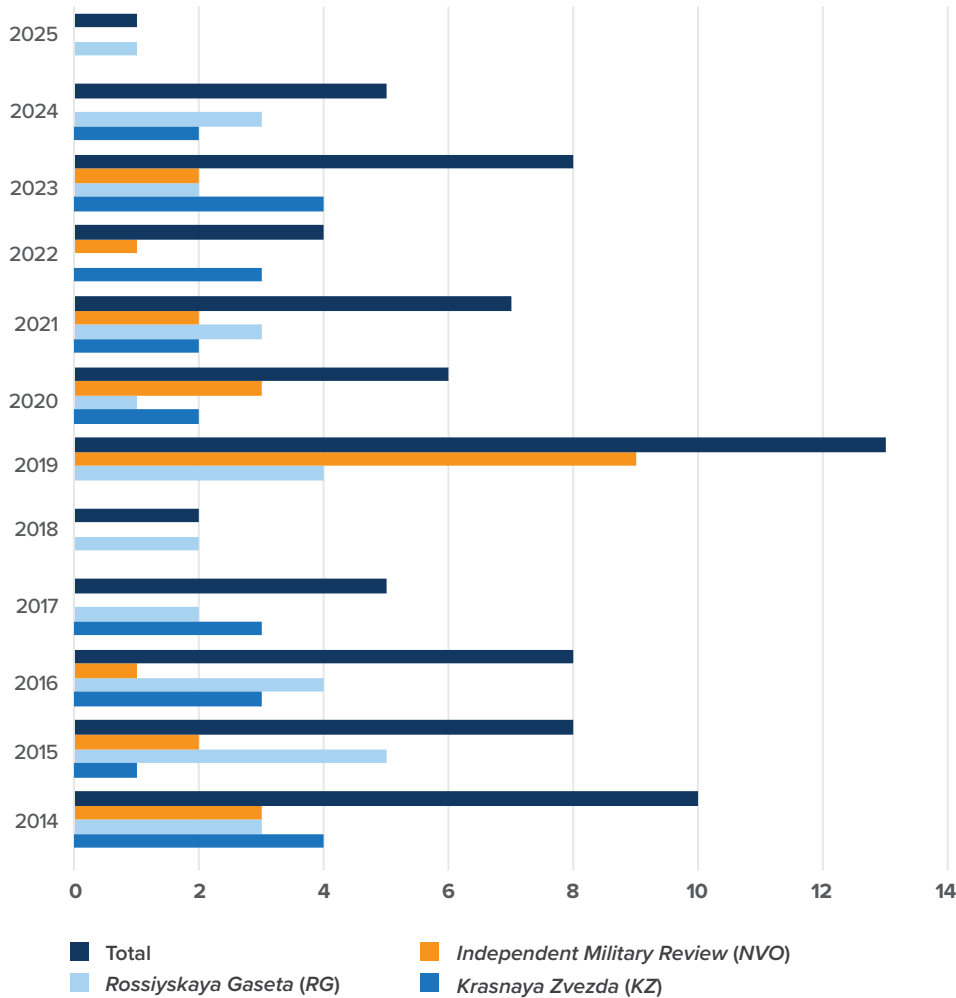
Though *NVO* and *KZ* articles were consistently more strident, *RG* echoed the government's more diplomatic lines. For instance, until late 2021 *RG* discussed co-operation with the US, Canada, and Denmark in a favourable light (Yegorov 2015 and 2016b; Zabrodina 2019 and 2021b), but broke completely and adopted a hostile line like *NVO* and *KZ* when it again picked up the topic in 2023.

The authors of the articles studied here are numerous. The most prolific, like *RG*'s Ivan Yegorov and Ekaterina Zabrodina, who each wrote five articles touching on the North American Arctic during the period under consideration, work the foreign policy and national security beat generally. Falichev and Molchanov cover a range of military topics in *KZ*. Nobody wrote more than two articles on the topic for *NVO*. Most only work the file for a few years at most, and the majority of the authors appear only one or two times in the data set. Occasionally, a preeminent foreign policy writer such as former Foreign Minister Yevgeniy Primakov appears (2015), or journalists interview an academic (Yeliseeva 2022) or military official (Kozak 2022). In at least one instance, the editor gave the pen to an expert on international security, in the case of Aleksandr Bartosh (2023), a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Military Sciences.

“Media outlets are telling Russians that the United States is building Arctic “bridgeheads” in Alaska, northern Canada, and Greenland that threaten Russia.

All their narratives evolved over time. In *NVO*, there was little talk of the North American countries in relation to the Arctic until 2019. This contrasts with a flurry of articles in *KZ* between 2014 and 2016, followed by no reporting from 2017 to 2019, and ending with an uptick to a steady number of reports from 2020 to early 2025. *RG* produced Arctic-related content steadily over the decade, with 2022 being the only year in which no security-related Arctic-North America articles appeared (likely because the Russian government was

**FIGURE 1:** Articles on the North American Arctic in Russian media, by year



recalibrating its Arctic policy after the invasion of Ukraine) (see Figure 1). Except for coverage of the Arctic Council, *RG* talked much less about the role of foreign countries in the Arctic until 2019, concentrating heavily on Russian domestic policy with only glancing reference to Canada, the United States, Greenland and Denmark.

The media outlets are telling Russians that the US government is building Arctic “bridgeheads” (платформы) in Alaska, northern Canada, and Greenland that threaten Russia, backing dominant threads of Russian policy analysis and media describing the US as a “hegemonic” power (see, for instance, Sushentsov 2024). As one recent article puts it, the United States is turning the whole

Arctic into a bridgehead against Russia and, to a lesser extent, China (Gasyuk 2024). Russia media mostly sees Canada, Denmark, and Greenland as either passive spaces in which the US can largely do what it wants, or as in league with US goals and intentions, which centre on containing Russia and denying it the natural resources and shipping lanes of the Arctic.

During the lead up to and after Russia's full invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russian media increasingly portrayed Canada, Denmark, and Greenland as subservient to US goals in the Arctic. Canada and Denmark recede into roles as pawns in US stratagems (see also Landriault and Renaud 2024), with a slight deviation in the case of Greenland, which gets more attention because of US President Donald Trump's threats in 2019 and again in 2024–25 to acquire direct control of the territory. In the Russian media's portrayal of all these players, the US (generally, but not always) has hostile intentions rooted in economic motives. The media suggests that US corporations seek to exploit the Arctic's natural resource wealth and sea lanes – assets and opportunities that otherwise would predominantly belong to Russia, which the media implies is a true Arctic state with legitimate interests (Kuzar' 2014 and Shcherbakov 2020).

## Greenland and the Kingdom of Denmark

Of all the North American Arctic countries (and perhaps of all Arctic countries), the Kingdom of Denmark attracts the least attention in Russian press. Recent research has noted that Russian state sources have called Denmark a consistently “Russophobic” country, in part because of the cross-political near consensus on Russia as a threat, which has made Denmark one of the most significant per capita contributors to Ukraine's defence since 2022 and a supporter of European sanctions against Russia (Serritzlev 2024; for a Danish take on Russian views of Denmark and Greenland, see Hansen 2025). Greenland also has the power to independently sanction other nations, and it, too, has imposed sanctions on Russia (Gad 2025).

But when it does come up, it is often in relation to two interests that Putin and the Kremlin deem most vital: jurisdiction on the seabed of the Central Arctic Ocean; and the effectiveness of Russia's nuclear arsenal (almost entirely

in relation to the United States' Pituffik Space Base in Greenland's north). Greenland itself is rarely mentioned, and the source documents only considered it after 2019 as making decisions of its own. Greenland is mostly treated as a passive space where the US conducts monitoring and space activities, and in some cases as a launching pad for air and sea power projection in the Arctic Ocean. Denmark's investments in its military garnered no mentions. The main theme of the Greenland-Denmark relationship is Greenland as a way for Denmark to gain control of larger swaths of the Central Arctic Ocean seabed.

### ***Greenland the unknown***

A low level of knowledge about Greenland is evident in Russian publications. One article accidentally named Kangerlussuaq the capital, which is, in fact, Nuuk (Labetskaya 2021). Greenland probably has more presence in Russian media as a topic of scientific and natural history interests (Yurkov 2018).

Greenland is treated unproblematically as a part of Denmark. Calling Denmark "the Kingdom" – which would reflect an understanding of the division of governance responsibilities between Nuuk and Copenhagen (see next section) – surfaced only three times (all in *RG*). Two primary narratives come up in these Russian sources. First and most importantly, Denmark is a country competing (through Greenland) with Russia for territory in the Arctic Ocean (Zabrodina and Kovaleva 2019). In an early article on the topic, the author states that Denmark and Greenland (an uncommon joint mention) were submitting claims to the United Nations' Commission on the limits of the continental shelf (see United Nations 2024) for the Arctic Ocean seafloor, including the North Pole (Nikiforov 2014). Continental shelf claims are one of the few areas of international competition in the Arctic where Russia journalists do not cite the US as the primary actor. The underlying assumption is that Greenland is a means for Denmark to extend its authority in the Arctic.

### ***Greenland: the near invisible actor***

The root theme in Russian media when it comes to the autonomous territory of Greenland is that it does not make its own decisions. These three media sources rarely mention it, rarely differentiate it from Denmark, rarely refer to it as the Kingdom of Denmark or mention Greenland as the reason for Denmark's



**FIGURE 2: The Arctic polar region**



Source: CIA Fact Book.

status as an Arctic nation. They assume Greenland's subordinate role in Danish foreign policy and institutions. Implicitly, decision-making power, in this view, resides in Copenhagen, even though Greenland has controlled almost all facets of domestic policy since the implementation of the *Self-Government Act* in 2009, with Denmark retaining foreign policy, national security, and defence

responsibilities (see Danish Government 2025). Due to this invisibility and Denmark's status (though unnamed as such) as a small US “vassal” power in Russian media (Falichev 2022; see Landriault and Renaud 2024), it becomes a passive base for US operations and power projection, rather than the self-governing ally it is in maintaining global and Arctic security, carving out its own room to manoeuvre on the international stage (Olsvig 2022; for authoritative scholarship on Greenland-US relations, see Jacobsen and Olsvig 2024; for Greenland's foreign policy, see Government of Greenland 2024).



*Russian media has depicted  
Greenland as an object  
of geopolitical competition.*

In earlier discussions of NATO's supposed “militarization” of the Arctic, Russian media organizations fail to mention either Denmark or Greenland, apparently subsuming them into NATO (Mukhin 2015a and b). Denmark itself in some cases does not warrant mention. There is no explicit reference to Danish defence policy or investments, even since 2022, when Denmark took a lead role in arming Ukraine and began rapidly increasing its defence spending; an offhand remark about Denmark's involvement in NORDEFCO (the Nordic Defence Cooperation group – see NORDEFCO 2025) air defence activities is one of the only examples (Yeliseeva 2023b).

Denmark as a military actor does appear alongside Canada, the US, and Norway. First described as a “Northern Alliance” (Kislyakov 2020), these four countries (sometimes five with Iceland), the articles contended, were pursuing their economic interests in the Arctic, including their desire to widen national jurisdiction over the Arctic Ocean's continental shelf. Claiming Russian militarization of the region, they were bolstering their militaries across the region (Russian Government 2021). Denmark also ranks in the first-tier of NATO countries conducting a “global hybrid war” (мировая гибридная война) against Russia, one front being the Arctic (Bartosh 2023). In the broader framework of NATO, Denmark formed part of a “Northern

European era” in the Alliance, with former Danish prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen leading the organization (2009–14), followed by former Norwegian prime minister Jens Stoltenberg (2014–24) (Trunov 2020).

Russian media has depicted Greenland as an object of geopolitical competition. Most prominently, the interest has been in the context of US territorial aspirations. Responding to US President Donald Trump’s proposal in 2019 to buy Greenland from Denmark, one Russian writer called the US presence as a 78-year military occupation and noted that the US moved the original Indigenous inhabitants when it built Thule airbase (Shirokorad 2019; for reliable assessment about their displacement, see Jacobsen and Olsvig 2024). Washington was expressing more and more interest in Greenland each year. Economic motives rear their head: an author assumed commercial oil and gas projects were behind the purchase idea. Copenhagen, however, was emphasizing the right of self-determination of Greenlanders; Greenlanders themselves were treating the US idea with “barely concealed suspicion” (Gasyuk 2019 and Dronina 2019b). The US proposal was an irritant in US-Danish relations that had brought the “semi-hidden” and “smouldering” “Greenland question” (гренландский вопрос) into the open (Trunov 2020). Russian media gave prominence to the official Russian response, citing the statement of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov that Greenland matters were far from Russia’s borders (Labetskaya 2021).

Greenland as a place that can make decisions for itself begins to emerge in Russian media in 2022. In *NVO*, an article discusses how the United States, in its plans for investments in “Thule” (not Pituffik, notably) space base, failed to consult with the Danish parliament or Greenlandic government, breaching its treaty obligations to both and sparking the ire of Greenlandic authorities (Bergquist 2022). Another article, somewhat quizzically, reports on the decision of the Kingdom of Denmark to include ministers of Greenland and the Faroe Islands (the Kingdom’s third region) at a 2021 Arctic Council meeting. In the article, Lavrov noted that Russia would like to expand trade and economic projects with Greenland, and invited Greenlandic authorities to economic forums in Russia (Labetskaya 2021) – opportunities that never came to pass because of Greenland’s cutting of economic ties with Russia after February 2022 (Jacobsen and Rahbek-Clemmensen 2024; Gad 2025).

It was only in January 2025 that Russian media began to portray Greenlanders as fully active political agents, when it became geopolitically

useful for Russia. In the wake of Trump's renewed bid in late 2024 and 2025 to make Greenland part of the United States, the article noted that most Greenlanders objected to becoming a US colony after centuries of being a Danish one. Russian media also discussed Greenland's efforts to strengthen its autonomy: in the first mention of a Greenlandic independence movement observed in these publications, Greenland's then Prime Minister Múte Egede spoke against the US offer and called for independence from Denmark. Denmark could not sell the island, the article stated, but Greenlanders could be bought for a "trifling sum" of a million US dollars per inhabitant – a rather crass statement about Greenlanders. Such a move would not be – "to put it mildly," the article quipped – in line with the international order, and the Danes would only find out about the deal after the fact (Bovt 2025).

### ***(Sea)bedfellows: Denmark and Canada in the Arctic Ocean***

These sources, however, sometimes paired Denmark and Canada as Russia's competitors in the Arctic Ocean. Greenland was a means to extend Danish power into the Central Arctic Ocean and control parts of the continental shelf, along with Canada. The Danish-Canadian relationship was one of mutually beneficial positioning. Canada, for instance, supported Denmark's claim that a stretch of the underwater Lomonosov Ridge is an extension of the Greenlandic continental shelf (Vinokurov 2019). Denmark hoped to lay claim to the North Pole this way (Juntunen and Heiskanen 2014). Russian, Canadian, and Danish interests "intersect" or "overlap" ("пересекаются") on the delineation of the Arctic continental shelf; they had not resolved their differences, and the negotiations would likely be "stormy" (Medvedev 2015 and Molchanov 2016c). At times, articles mentioned the US alongside Canada and Denmark as aiming to widen its national jurisdiction on Arctic Ocean seabed (Russian Government 2021), but for the most part, the Russian media treated Canada and Denmark distinctly from the United States.

The media portrays Russia's seabed activities as scientific and economic. They are thus justified. This will be a recurrent theme in the sections below: the United States and its allies adopt an aggressive, militaristic stance, whereas Russia's activities are oriented towards the betterment of Russia's economy and people. It ties to another recurrent argument, that of the "lost decade" – the claim that Russia needed to accelerate its activities, military or otherwise, in the Arctic because in the pre-Putin era of the 1990s, Russia lost focus on

the Arctic, while Danish, Canadian and US efforts never faltered. Russian writers never abandoned this contention, but altered the description of the players, focusing more on NATO in recent years (Yeliseeva 2023b).

### ***Bridgehead Greenland***

In the Russian media, though, Greenland is largely a passive space for a US “bridgehead.” The theme here is the US military installation in Greenland’s north, formerly known as Thule Airbase, and since 2023 as Pituffik Space Base. Russian writers focus on Pituffik’s role in air and outer-space monitoring and surveillance. The United States is modernizing Pituffik for early warning of nuclear strikes and setting it up – reminiscent of the Cold War – to house strategic bombers and fighter jets. It will be the main US base to conduct operations in the air and at sea, including “new” submarine missions, all against Russia (Yeliseeva 2023a, Sysoev 2024a, Riskin 2019 and Kozak 2022). Seizing upon a graduate student’s article in a journal at a prominent US university (Jonsson 2023), one article talks of eastern Greenland as a base for a proposed new NATO Arctic Command (Iceland and Norway were alternatives to Greenland), which would include military bases in Alaska, northern Canada and Norway (Yeliseeva 2023b). Such a command has yet to appear, but for these Russian journalists, Greenland fit into a network extending US power across the North American, North Atlantic, and European Arctics.

According to this perspective, Greenland also connected militarily to other parts of the territorial US. First among them is Alaska. Russian media drew links between Alaska and Greenland because of the outer-space-oriented military infrastructure they house at Clair Air Force Base and Pituffik (Dronina 2019c and Ivanov 2019a). New York State is another connection, as the Russian media refer in several instances to the US National Guard there having the ability to deploy to Greenland (Ivanov 2019a). In perhaps the most thoroughly North American Arctic synthesis to be found in these articles, one article proposed a scenario of a “Russian-Anglo-Saxon” Arctic, where the United States absorbs an independent Greenland and works closely with an aligned Canada and Norway to control Arctic waterways (Bovt 2025).



## Canada: geopolitical agent

Canada receives more diverse treatment than the Kingdom of Denmark. Russian media portray Canada occasionally as an independent actor, more often as a US sidekick, and most frequently as part of a collective, US-led effort to dominate the Arctic. It is not just a sidekick defending the North American Arctic: Canada is working, Russian media claims, with the US to contain Russia; Canada is a participant in the battle for the Arctic (Juntunen and Heiskanen 2014; Bartosh 2023), a conventional military and non-conventional “hybrid” player. Finally, northern Canada is passive space, available for a US bridgehead.

### *Canada as an independent actor*

*NVO* and *KZ* between 2014 to 2016 portrayed Canada as at the forefront of militarizing the Arctic, after which this narrative receded. Media outlets paid detailed attention to Canadian military policy and plans. The inclusion of ice-class patrol vessels (what are now known as the Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships (AOPSs) or Vessels (AOPVs), officially the Harry DeWolf class) in the Royal Canadian Navy’s (RCN) modernization plans garnered coverage (*KZ* 2014; Tomilenko 2014), as did plans for the Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) to get a new polar icebreaker. However, these sources failed to mention Canada’s evolving plan to building two polar icebreakers and eight AOPS (six for the RCN, two for the CCG) – an omission suggestive of the evolution of Russian narratives towards an exclusively US focus.

An argument between Canadian officials and a Danish newspaper gave an opportunity to Russian media to frame Canada’s “militarization” in the region. The disagreement was over a quotation of then Foreign Minister John Baird about Canada’s readiness to use military force against Russia in the Arctic, if needed (Damkjær 2014; Quinn 2014). Baird claimed that the Danish newspaper misquoted him, but the *KZ* article implies that the quote was accurate – and that Canada was taking numerous steps to build up its military presence in the Arctic.

The largely factually correct points made to support that claim hardly suggest a fully unleashed militarization. It mentioned relatively modest investments: Canada had established an army training centre (referring to the Canadian Armed Forces Arctic Training Centre in Resolute Bay, Nunavut,

opened in 2013) and the building of the Nanisivik Naval Facility on Baffin Island, Nunavut (which Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced in 2007 – and was still not fully operational as of 2025. See Harvey 2025). The article cited other developments that were not new items: Canada planned to launch new monitoring satellites (RADARSAT-2 – sent into orbit in 2007, notably from Russia’s Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan), enhance NORAD’s monitoring capabilities, and maintain its intelligence collection site on Ellesmere Island (Canadian Forces Station (CFS) Alert).

*“Russian media has used Canada as part of the justification for why Russia needs to strengthen its military.”*

The article grouped investments in the civilian Coast Guard’s icebreaker fleet with the construction of ice-cable warships for the Royal Canadian Navy. “Even other decisions have been taken to strengthen the Canadian military presence in the Arctic,” the article vaguely concluded. It also asserted that the Canadian government believes that it owns the North Pole (Tomilenko 2014). Notably, Russia’s claim also includes the North Pole (Buchanan 2023).

Over the last decade, Russian media has used Canada as part of the justification for why Russia needs to strengthen its military (Petrov 2014), again at times drawing on the “1990s lost decade” narrative. Russian media showed interest in Canadian military exercises. It covered both the 2016 “NUNALIVUT” military exercise and the Canadian Army winter exercise “Stalwart Goose,” as well as Canada’s participation in the US-UK-led ICEX submarine exercises in the Beaufort Sea (Molchanov 2016a and b; on the exercises, see United States Navy 2024, Department of National Defence 2016 and 2025). Despite Canada’s persistent efforts to minimize perceptions of NATO’s role in the Canadian Arctic (Gricius 2024) and emphasize that its exercises there were not NATO exercises, these statements did not inoculate against Russian media presentations of these exercises as NATO. By 2022, Russian writers were stating that Canada already had a “sufficiently developed” northern military infrastructure, including dual-use facilities (Kozak 2022).

Canada, along with its partners, was using these to counter Russia in the region (Russian Government 2021) – an exaggeration, to say the least, given the low level of military infrastructure and capability in the Canadian Arctic to this day, noted in Parliamentary and Senate reports (House of Commons, National Defence Committee 2023; Senate, National Security and Defence Committee 2023).

### **Canada as a US sidekick**

The United States is never far from Canada in Russian media. The portrayal of Canada as a US sidekick extended across the last decade. Canada got standard treatment as part and parcel of the North American military backdrop in the Arctic. Moreover, Canada is active not just defending North America with the United States – the Russia media does not describe what the North American Arctic countries are doing as defensive in nature – but as an active geopolitical partner, trying to contain Russia and interfering in its internal affairs. At its most extreme, the US has absorbed Canada as its “satellite” or “vassal” (Falichev 2022), but nuances enter that description from time to time, mostly about tensions between Ottawa and Washington.

A picture emerges of Canada as working in tandem with the United States in containing Russia. Together, they are militarizing the Arctic (Myasnikov 2014). Canadian-US Arctic operations against Russia had a long history: US and Canadian icebreakers, one article claimed, had impinged on the Arctic in Soviet times (Timokhin 2019). Canadians at CFS Alert assisted the United States in conducting extensive intelligence work to map the Arctic (Molchanov 2015). Articles explored ideas circulating in the Western press, for instance a 2016 *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece proposing Canada allow US Navy vessels to sail the Northwest Passage (likely Borgerson and Byers 2016), pointing to a meeting between US President Barack Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau where they discussed a “new partnership” in the Arctic on shipping and coast guard cooperation. That article went on to describe, indirectly, Canada facilitating NATO’s presence in the Arctic to create an “Arctic Front” in a “second Cold War” where the “NATOers” (натовцы – a deprecating term in Russian) were preparing to confront Russia (Molchanov 2016a). In reality, Canada has been tentative at best about introducing NATO into the Canadian Arctic (for an authoritative introduction to Canadian Arctic strategy, see Lackenbauer 2020).

Canada as a US henchman persists into this decade in ever more aggressive portrayals. These accounts frame Canada as abetting US goals and working against global interests. US and Canadian special forces were plotting to disrupt northern Russia's economy and society, an (unsubstantiated) allegation of foreign interference (Kozlov 2021). The 2023 *US Implementation Plan for the 2022 National Strategy for the Arctic Region* called for more co-operation with Canada (Nesterov 2023). Doing Washington's bidding, Canada was forming an alliance – likely the “Arctic Security Dialogue” Canada proposed in 2024 (Government of Canada 2024, for analysis, see Dalziel 2025) – with the European Arctic countries to undermine the Arctic Council and oppose Russia and China (Sysoev 2024b). Canada, as a member of the G7, was permitting the United States to make the G7 a tool of Arctic policy (Bartosh 2023). Canada was letting the United States exploit its industry, citing Canada-Finland-US ICE Pact for icebreaker construction (Falichev 2024b). Canada is motivated by the same desire as the United States – to access and exploit the region's natural resources – and to prevent Russia from doing the same (Falichev 2022 and Sysoev 2024b).

### ***The Northwest Passage***

Given the importance of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) to Russian economic and strategic planning, Canada's Northwest Passage (NWP) – the “other” Arctic transport corridor (Kuzar' 2014) – is of interest to Russian media as a signal of US intentions on polar shipping (Zabrodina and Kovaleva 2019). It is framed as a competitor to the NSR and as a source of tension and opportunity in the Canada-US relationship (see Lackenbauer 2020 and Dean 2025 for insightful analysis and comparison). Articles describe Canadian “nervousness” about US intentions towards the NWP, particularly in the context of relations between Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau and US President Trump (in his first term) and highlight US statements about potentially conducting FONOPs (freedom of navigation operations) in waters that Canada claims as national but the US sees as international (Juntunen and Heiskanen 2014; Trunov 2020; Timokhin 2019). Canada's position stymied US goals to have its own NSR; while articles lamented that Canada would not acknowledge the (purported) alignment between the Canadian and Russian positions on the NWP's and NSR's legal status (Kuzar' 2014), others saw Canada and the US as spoilers of Russia's NSR plans. Moreover, despite Canada and the US's disagreement over the NWP, it did not inhibit their geopolitical co-operation (Kislyakov 2020).

### ***The northern Canadian bridgehead***

Like Denmark, however, Russian media often described US military goals and activities in Canada without reference to Canadian intentions. Again, Canada becomes a passive space for US geopolitics, a bridgehead where the US is building up its power to confront Russia (Riskin 2019). When NATO Secretary Stoltenberg visited northern Canada in 2023, he used it as a stage to do the US's bidding, repeating US messaging about the threat of Russia-China co-operation (Yeliseeva 2023a; Labetskaya 2023). Russian media portrayals of the binational NORAD regularly fail to mention Canada at all (Nesterov 2023 and Falichev 2024b). As an example, when one writer discussed the US prioritizing aerospace monitoring in the Arctic, he spoke of the United States installing radar stations in Alaska and northern Canada without any mention of Canada being an active part of that effort (Nesterov 2021; for analysis of Canada in NORAD, see Charron and Fergusson 2021). In another article, the author, when examining a graduate student's publication (Jonsson 2023) that proposed new military bases in northern Canada, failed to mention any Canadian position on the idea whatsoever (Yeliseeva 2023b). From Alaska to Greenland, US military installations would extend across the North American Arctic, apparently with Canada (and the Kingdom of Denmark) standing by and watching (Ivanov 2019a).

## **The United States and Alaska**

The United States is the prime mover in Russian conceptions of threat in the Arctic (for a contrary view of US strategy, see Boulègue et al. 2024). Russian media characterize it as a bellicose and resource-voracious country, setting those characteristics against an innocent Russia with legitimate intentions there. For the entire period under consideration, Russian media have been preparing domestic audiences for confrontation with the US in the Arctic, persistently using the United States as a foil to deflect critiques of Russia's own actions (notably, strengthening its military posture) and reassure audiences that the government's course is justified and progressing. Given the focus here on the North American Arctic, two narratives will be explored, emphasizing North



American geography: first, that the United States is seeking to dominate the Arctic, at the expense of Russia's economic and security future; and second, that US domestic economic motives drive this expansion and containment strategy.

### ***Preserving global hegemony***

A mainstay of the Russian press is that the United States is seeking to perpetuate a global hegemony. In that view, American power beyond the continental United States is most often the focus. Two articles, one before and one after February 2022, provide an insightful frame of reference for core elements in the Russian media view. When compared, the two articles indicate a subtle shift from a description of US readiness to deny Russian dominance in the Arctic, to preparing for armed confrontation there. The first article quoted Admiral Aleksandr Moiseyev, commander of the Northern Fleet, from a December 2021 speech that Russia was militarily inferior in the Arctic when compared to the United States and NATO. Alleging Russian militarization of the region, the US, Canada, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland were building up their militaries and had 50 "military infrastructure facilities" in the region, including "dual-use" civilian infrastructure to serve military purposes. The article claimed that the Western nations' goal was to deny Russia's dominance of the region "by all means possible" (Russian Government 2021).

The next Moiseyev article from was from June 2022. It was silent on Russia's invasion of Ukraine but intensified its language on the NATO threat in the Arctic. The main triggers were the decisions by Finland and Sweden to seek NATO membership – decisions that, in reality, hinged on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a neighbouring, peaceful state. Stating that this development "could not *not* worry us," Moiseyev contended that the US added Finland and Sweden to NATO to prepare for a confrontation with Russia. Accordingly, Russia required military investments to protect its economic interests in the Arctic Ocean and NSR (Kozak 2022). This is complete disinformation – pretending that the US somehow had control over the foreign policy direction of Finland and Sweden, which both joined NATO of their own accord because of Russia's aggressive behaviour (Linnainmäki et al. 2024).

The Russian media had built towards this depiction for ten years. It claimed that a battle was underway as all the regional countries militarized the Arctic (Juntunen and Heiskanen 2014). It forecast a geopolitical contest

between Russia and United States in the Arctic by 2020. It accused Washington of having an Arctic agenda for NATO, connected to Ukraine (Kuzar' 2014). NORAD's commander noted in 2020 that the Arctic had become a route for conventional weapons, adding to the pre-existing nuclear threat. US military leaders claimed that the US needed a strong presence in the Arctic to maintain a favourable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and European theatres (Shcherbakov 2020). NATO's "tentacles" reached into the Arctic, as the United States was continuing an effort started by Napoleon and Hitler to destroy Russia and war "could" happen in the Arctic (Falichev 2022). The US after 2022 was out to break the Arctic Council, to the detriment of Indigenous peoples who used it to solve problems on an international level (a rare reference to Arctic Indigenous peoples in the articles studied) (Gasyuk 2024). This litany of allegations and claims forms a decade-long chain.

### ***The resource race and freedom of navigation***

According to the Russian media outlets, economic motives lie at the heart of US Arctic strategy. This fits into the idea of a "resource race" for the Arctic – at least on the part of the other Arctic countries (Landriault 2024). *NVO* and *KZ* have consistently depicted the US as covetous of the region's riches –and trying to prevent Russia from developing them (Medvedev 2015, Dronina 2019, Russian Government 2021, Stepanov 2023 and Bovt 2025). *RG* articles largely noted the US interest in the resources without implying rivalry over them (Yegorov 2016a and Petrov 2016), seemingly more concerned about the US insistence on freedom of navigation (Sukhanovskaya 2017 and Zabrodina 2019). By 2022, a more conspiratorial tone emerged (Sysoev 2024a and b). The 2024 US Department of Defense Arctic strategy was the product of an "overseas establishment" (a phrasing made deeply ironic in Russian by using the word – "истеблишмент" – a direct transliteration of English "establishment," which conveys a pejorative sense) that wanted to "use the Arctic." A set of American corporations want access to the natural resources; tech companies like Starlink, SpaceX, and OneWeb were at work in NORAD (Falichev 2022, 2024a and b).

In an interview, a Russian political scientist, Dr. Aleksandr Perendzhiev from the Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, reportedly claimed that the Arctic had become a fundamental issue for some states and transnational corporations. US containment policy attempted to limit Russia's development of natural resources in the Arctic Ocean. It did so by directly or indirectly

working with Canada, Denmark, Iceland and Norway. Perendzhiev claimed the US was building an “Anglo-Saxon” (apparently including the Nordic countries) “Arctic Ocean Alliance” to exploit the region’s gas reserves. Investments in 5G telecommunications networks in Alaska were, apparently, part of this containment agenda (Yeliseeva 2022). The same political scientist later argued that a “Collective West led by the US” sought to make the Arctic its own. The United States was unceasingly advancing its interests in the Arctic and preparing to clash with Russia for its resources. Russia’s announcing its “sovereignization” of the NSR had further motivated the United States, and the scholar claimed that a 2012 National Intelligence Council (NIC) assessment and the 2022 Arctic strategy had made “High North” natural resources the “most important” area of US national security.

### ***The Alaskan bridgehead***

Russian media articles carried a general theme: that the US, largely driven by economic motives, is militarizing the Arctic by establishing region-wide bridgeheads. NATO had put in place a “north” regional plan, which was to be coordinated and executed from a headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia (for a factual review, see Loorents 2024). Admiral Rob Bauer had stated that NATO needed to better coordinate defence in the Arctic: despite its preparations, NATO simply was not ready to confront Russia in the Arctic. The 2023 US Arctic Implementation Plan, the article noted, came out at same time as Bauer’s remarks, tasking the US Department of Defense to expand American military activities in the region (Nesterov 2023).

Russian media described several bridgeheads to contain Russia. “Scandinavia” was the most significant, where the United States was installing an “anti-Russian infrastructure,” after Finland and Sweden announced their applications to join NATO in 2022 – or as one article put, after the US “dragged” them into it (Trunov 2020; Yeliseeva 2023b). Norway was the United States’s most loyal ally in the region (Trunov 2020). There is much more to say about the Scandinavian angle, but for the purposes of this paper, the concentration here will be on the state of Alaska (the Canadian and Danish/Greenlandic bridgeheads being described above).

Alaska is the main US Arctic bridgehead – a somewhat surprising way to talk about an internal part of the United States. Russian observers express a steady set of concerns about US expeditionary capability in all the bridgeheads,

### Recycling the narrative

One finding in the research is telling about the state of Russian media. Russian outlets are not just repeating core messages. They are repeating some of them almost word for word.

An example is two articles published by KZ. They contained almost identical wording when describing US military investments in Alaska, making only small changes to adjectives. Moreover, they ascribed those exact same words to different sources. What KZ presented as the words of a journalist in the first case then allegedly came from the mouth of an expert source in an interview in the second:

“... the United States possesses substantial combat forces in the High North, ranging from air bases in Alaska with more than a hundred fifth-generation F-35 and F-22

fighter jets to nuclear submarines operating in Arctic waters.” (Nesterov 2023)

“... the United States possesses substantial combat forces in the High North, ranging from air bases in Alaska with more than a hundred modern F-35 and F-22 fighter jets to nuclear submarines in Arctic waters.” (Falichev 2024a)

Each immediately then speak about the re-establishment of the US Army's 11th Airborne Division in Alaska in 2022.

Whether this reflects editorial laziness, an overly zealous enforcement of core messaging, or the use of artificial intelligence, it highlights that the Russian media, to say the least, is not aiming for originality of thinking or the honest communication of viewpoints on Arctic issues.<sup>3</sup>

and Alaska is the densest location for the infrastructure of power projection, allowing for quick deployment throughout the Arctic. The long-time presence of NORAD facilities is a central factor, with Russian media noting President Barack Obama's “activation” of ballistic missile defence (BMD) there (Mukhin 2015a and b). The fears translated into titles like “The Pentagon Is Preparing for Battles in the North,” an article that makes Alaska a key point – along with Norfolk, Virginia – in the integration of the US military's Atlantic and Pacific capabilities (Ivanov 2019a).

This portrayal gains prominence in Russian media after 2021. Articles claimed that the United States was turning Alaska into its most powerful bridgehead for activities above the Arctic Circle, constructing or improving air, sea, and space bases in Nome, Fort Mackenzie, Adak, and Barrow (Yeliseeva 2023a). Alaska now housed fleets of F-35A and F-22 fighter aircraft; nuclear submarines could operate from there; the United States was equipping it for better aerospace monitoring, including by launching low orbit satellites and locating radar stations there (Nesterov 2021; Falichev 2024a). The media

repeatedly mentions the 11th Airborne Division's (literally – see text box) elite US expeditionary capability, able to deploy to Norway and other Arctic locations (Falichev 2022; Nesterov 2023; Yeliseeva 2023a). The United States had political will behind these investments, the creation of the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies in Anchorage reflecting a bipartisan consensus in the US Congress to dominate the Arctic, driven by economic interests. In sum, Russian media portrayed the Arctic as a place of potential conflict. The US Army, Airforce and (although not mentioned, presumably) Navy had all embedded in their respective Arctic strategies five areas of warfare: cyber, land, sea, air, and space (Nesterov 2021).

Alaska is also a bridgehead for the US Coast Guard (USCG). The Russian media emphasized it as a military service closely tied to the national security agencies, projecting power into the Russian Arctic via its icebreaker fleet (Molchanov 2015; Mukhin 2015b; Kislyakov 2020); one article, consistent with *RG's* previously more upbeat editorial line, praised the USCG for constructive relations with Russian counterparts, diverging from the harsher lines coming from the Pentagon and US Department of State (Zabrodina and Kovaleva 2019). A search for improved deep-water ports had resulted in “frontline” (передовые) USCG bases in Barrow and Nome (Kislyakov 2020 and Bartosh 2023). Icebreakers operating from Alaska would support the economic goals driving US policy (Molchanov 2015) and strive to contain Russian economic development (Timokhin 2019).

Russian media entertained the prediction that the United States would rapidly expand its icebreaker fleet as part of a geopolitical program – a confidence not in tune with reality, given the issues US icebreaker construction has faced (US Government Accountability Office 2024). In covering the announcement in 2018 of the Polar Security Cutter program, for instance, Russian media framed it as an urgent priority, with short timelines – a sign that the United States was again, after a hiatus since Soviet times, trying to assert itself in the Arctic, a “slow but certain” march north (Timokhin 2019; Vinokurov 2019). The USCG had plans to build three by 2027 (Kislyakov 2020); another stated the United States planned to build six, a tool essential to dominating the Arctic (Yeliseeva 2023a). Despite earlier articles about US aspirations to build a nuclear icebreaker fleet (Mukhin 2015a and b; Batenyova 2017), by 2023 a writer noted that the US had put off such efforts for the future (Bartosh 2023).



Expeditionary capabilities at the Arctic bridgeheads in Alaska and the territory of US allies were also geared for hybrid war, in particular interference inside Russia. While the Norwegians and Finns were more often mentioned alongside the US interfering in Russian Arctic society, Russian media also mentioned Canada and Denmark, calling them part of an “anti-Russian coalition” (антироссийская коалиция) (Bartosh 2023). Articles described the European Arctic as a bridgehead for such activity, and Russian media hinted at interference across the Bering Strait and North Pacific (Molchanov 2016c and Kozlov 2021). Articles also accused the United States of using hybrid methods in a coercive campaign of “indirect, unacknowledged, and asymmetric actions,”<sup>2</sup> the Arctic being one front of a US global hybrid war (Bartosh 2023). The articles provided no specific evidence to back up their claims.

Media outlets also alleged that US special forces (спецназ) were conducting interference operations in Russian Arctic territory (Riskin 2019, Kozlov 2021 and Bartosh 2023). In the 2019 US Department of Defense Arctic strategy one author saw statements about training special forces for fighting in Arctic conditions as disingenuous, because special forces allegedly conducted operations abroad and did not defend borders. US special forces were part of a “non-traditional warfare” strategy, the sharp end of a hybrid war (a term invoked frequently in *NVO*, in this case as “hybrid methods” – “гибридные методы”) being waged by the United States. This hybrid war also included diplomatic pressure, sanctions, and propaganda. By inserting “agents of influence” and buying off local elites and activists (the articles offered no evidence or particulars), the US was stimulating separatism in northern Russia across the “ice and sea;” US involvement “cannot be excluded,” said one author, because the US “would cut off its nose to spite its face” (“назло бабушке отморожу уши”) (Kozlov 2021). This is an excellent example of one of the primary narratives identified by a recent academic study on Russian information campaigns, of the US as a destabilizing force in the Arctic (Landriault and Renaud 2024).

These articles have another function: amplifying intellectual and rhetorical support of official Russian strategy. Supporting directions taken in Russia’s 2020 Arctic Strategy and Arctic Development Strategy documents, one author called for an agenda of socioeconomic investment in the Russian north to counter the potential threat of US interference (Kozlov 2021). In addition, claims in the Russian media that the United States and its allies are using hybrid methods provide cover with domestic audiences for Russia to do

the same, a move also present in official Russian strategic documents like the 2021 *National Security Strategy* (Bartosh 2023; Dalziel 2024a).

US Arctic strategy documents have captured Russian media attention throughout the last decade. These have confrontation with Russia as a focus, some articles allege. The 2022 US Arctic Strategy and its subsequent 2023 implementation plan (United States Government 2022 and 2023) had an “anti-Russian sub-text,” all four pillars of the strategy in one way or the other aiming to contain Russia. Russian media consistently interpreted “deterrence” as “containment” – partly an editorial choice, but also due to the difficulties of translating English “deterrence,” as the nearest Russian equivalent, *сдерживание*, literally means “holding back” and therefore also implies containment (see Charap et al. 2022 and Dalziel 2024b for analysis; Labetskaya 2023 and Bartosh 2023 for examples). They articulated containment strategies – although in fact the documents do not ever use that word – not just of Russia, but also of China in the Arctic, under the banner of upholding an international rules-based order. That logic transcended US administrations, the first Trump and then the Biden presidencies holding it in common. Russian media saw these Arctic geopolitics as evidence that Washington views Russia as one of the fundamental threats to the United States (Labetskaya 2023; Bartosh 2023).

### ***US containing China and Russia’s Arctic relationship***

The Russian press has described China as another country that the US sees as a threat in the Arctic. This trend started in 2019 and has picked up steam since 2023. The Russian media has increasingly offered an accommodating view of China as a player in the Arctic, and an accompanying fusion of Russia and China as the targets of a US Arctic containment strategy. As early as 2019, Russian articles noted the sensitivity of the United States to China’s presence in Arctic and the joint framing of China and Russia as adversaries in US strategic documents, such as the 2019 and 2024 Department of Defense’s Arctic defence strategies (Droning 2019, Ivanov 2019b; Riskin 2019). Since then, the media has, in effect, recruited China to Russia’s side (Sysoev 2024a; Bovt 2025). The US containment strategy had become two pronged: “preventing” Russian control and “denying” Chinese influence in the region (Bartosh 2023). The “Collective West” could not tolerate growing Russia-China co-operation in Arctic (Yeliseeva 2023b). Russian media claim that the US has developed an integrated military-political and economic presence in the Arctic

specifically to counter Russia-China co-operation (Labetskaya 2023). Russian media endorsed China as a model Arctic player, playing by the rules and with a clearly articulated, legitimate interest set, while accusing Western critics of exaggerating the threat (Bartosh 2023).

This serves different purposes: it justifies Russian collaboration with and the presence of China in the Arctic – a gift of enhanced legitimacy to China’s aspiration to be a polar power, and likely very welcome in Beijing. Furthermore, in something of an inverse move considering North American and European concerns about Russia-China Arctic co-operation, it uses US-China geostrategic rivalry to benefit Russian plans and posture. It is a public, informational dimension of the tightening ties of the two key players in the Eurasian Arctic (Dalziel 2024b). Russian media are recognizing that perception and making use of it to critique US legitimacy in the region, a thrust of current Russian strategic communications (Bouffard et al. 2024).

## **Overarching themes: Russia on the North American Arctic**

Three themes emerge from the last decade of Russian written-word media about the Arctic. First, almost any action that North American Arctic countries take in the Arctic will be seen as potentially hostile. The media’s deployment of the “dual-use” narrative is a case in point. While dual-use always contains a bi-directional sense – military investments having civilian benefits, civilian investments having military benefits – the Russian conception is that that dual-use infrastructure is mostly about civilian assets becoming of use to the armed forces. That is a highly contestable conclusion. In the Canadian Arctic, for instance, dual-use purposes are more often about local communities benefiting from a nearby military installation to improve their access to electricity, medical services, transportation, and supplies (Senate, National Security and Defence Committee 2023); the term can also have a completely non-military sense: sub-sea fibre cables, for instance, can be dual-use, collecting data for climate science and sea conditions, as well as delivering data. These all have negligible benefits for military power projection.

The media's presentation of the dual-use concept may say more about the Russian understanding of it than how it works in North America. Russian strategic documents most notably invoke a concept of dual-use in discussing military investments. The media's portrayal is perhaps to be expected. In the research conducted for this paper, Russian writers regularly used official Russian strategic documents in their work (another example of the relevance of these documents as "public").

*Almost any action that North American Arctic countries take in the Arctic will be seen by Russia as potentially hostile.*

Second, as geopolitical tensions mount between Russia and the United States, the Arctic's other countries become less important in Russian coverage and analyses. For instance, while Canadian defence policies attracted attention in the first years of this report, Russian media concentrated almost exclusively on US leadership statements, strategy documents, and military activities after February 2022, failing to mention key developments in Canada in terms of icebreaker and patrol ship construction. The agency of Canada and Denmark recede as tensions with US mount (although, as mentioned, Greenland's agency is actually ascendant as of 2025).

Third, it must be remembered that Russia media is mostly for Russian consumption. It is not for non-Russian-speaking international audiences. The depictions of an aggressive and disruptive set of North American Arctic countries, allegedly using hybrid warfare to undermine Russian economic initiatives and foster separatism, prepare Russians to accept that their government doing the same is legitimate, in the name of national defence and security. It is also about protecting President Putin's regime. The longevity of the narrative of a lost 1990s in Arctic policy, accompanied by the view that the US and its allies never stopped arming their Arctics, is an example. It is a way to get Russians to perceive the Putin regime as a durable source of stability and security. Given that that era was more than 25 years ago, the regime may soon run short on ideas to advance its credibility (Yakovlev 2021).

## Conclusion: A North American Arctic model

There is not a much that Canada, the US and the Kingdom of Denmark can do change the behaviour of Russian media, distorted as it is by Putin's authoritarian politics. The main response is through strengthening the North American Arctic, not just militarily, but also economically and politically. Two steps stand out for immediate action.

First, the most effective antidote to Russian propaganda is a clear vision for the North American Arctic, built trilaterally. Part of that is a campaign of strategic communications, to ensure the citizens of Canada, Greenland, Denmark, and the United States know the policies and plans of their governments in their northern regions. That will help debunk Russian mis and disinformation before it emerges. Indigenous partnerships will be essential to the effectiveness of such a vision, as will be territorial, provincial/state and municipal levels of the government.

Second and closely related, Canada and the United States need to work closely with the Kingdom of Denmark to establish a new comprehensive security agenda to support that vision. Understanding the division of governing responsibilities between Nuuk and Copenhagen in the constitution of the Kingdom and the recognition it gives to the right of self-determination the Greenlandic populace holds is the starting point for re-examination of the air, sea and land defences, the national security measures, the economic security frameworks and human security considerations that will give the northernmost reaches of the continent the certainty to achieve their economic and development goals. This can only be accomplished by Ottawa and Washington working with Greenlandic and Danish counterparts. With a comprehensive plan for the future of North America's Arctic, there will be less room for Russian falsehoods and distorted realities. [MLI](#)

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## Endnotes

- 1 The methodology involved retrieving data from open sources via the Integrum Database, using the query: (сша ИЛИ гренландия ИЛИ дания ИЛИ канада) И (вооружение ИЛИ оборона ИЛИ вооруженный ИЛИ минобороны ИЛИ милитаризация ИЛИ безопасность ИЛИ нацбезопасность ИЛИ армия ИЛИ военный) И (арктика ИЛИ арктический). In sorting the retrieved data for relevance, articles that i) had an Arctic or Northern thematic focus, and ii) included more than two sentences with substantive mentions of the state actors under consideration were saved. The publications were chosen for their prestige, expert readership and reach, as well as for the fact that all issues of these publications were available for the period under study, from January 2014 until January 2025. The author would like to thank Mr. John Kaye for masterfully conducting the research.
- 2 A translation of “косвенных, неавторизованных и асимметричных действий”.
- 3 The author derived this point from discussions held at the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security, Anchorage, Alaska, in June 2025.



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