

1. SECURITY AND GEOPOLITICS

RUSSIA IN THE ARCTIC, FUTURE CHALLENGES TO THE BALTIC STATES

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ABSTRACT

Long left out of the International community attention, the Arctic is becoming the new geographical space for the contest between the Russian Federation and West. This research assesses the challenges and threats the Baltic States and their Allies will face due to Russia's power developments in the Arctic. The focus of the research is on three components: the politics in the Arctic, military power development in the High North, and the impact of cooperation with China. The author analysis primary and secondary sources to obtain related arguments to derive the assessment of Russia's narratives in the official discourse and historical actions. The study continues with the negative consequences Baltics will have to cope due to the alliance between Moscow and Beijing. Despite the Kremlin, intentions to present activities in the Arctic as peaceful ones, the Baltic countries together with NATO will be challenged in the middle to long term: following this, the article makes strategic suggestions to the Baltic State's political and military officials to get ready in the short to long term.

KEY WORDS

Russian Federation policy toward Arctic, assessment of Russian Federation capabilities in the arctic policy, Polar Silk Road, northern arctic passage, Northern chokepoints and military 'bastions'.

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Introduction

'We are not threatening anyone, but, using our advantages, in this particular case – in the territory, we shall provide security for Russia and its people, in this respect, the Arctic region is extremely important for Russia' (Putin, 2018).

Long left out of the World powers attention, the Arctic is becoming the new space for the contest between the Russian Federation and the West. The Arctic discourse has been debated both bilaterally between nations and in many international organisations, making it a global issue (Laurelle, 2014 p. xi). Having the longest coast border with the Arctic, Russia has been left out from the strategic discussions about de-

¹ Opinions expressed by the author is his own views and do not reflect in any way the official policy or position of the Lithuanian Government, Armed Forces or General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania.

velopment in the region. However, the situation was changed on the 2nd of August, 2007, when the Russian Federation planted its flag on North Pole seabed (Stent, 2014).

Since then, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, outlined the ambitious programs to increase the national power in different narratives throughout 2009 and 2020. The latest Russian Arctic policy combines national strategies in military, social, historical, political and economic fields (Allan, 2018). Thought, interpreting the narratives, suggest to await for the new areas of disputes with Kremlin for the Baltic States allies in the High North.

For the last decade, Kremlin was building its military power in the High North by opening new military bases and building new icebreaking vessels. In the previous year, Russia had carried one of the biggest military exercises since the fall of the Soviet Union (military drill in 1981), which had been noticed by the United States – North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Hill, 2019). The future necessity to assemble sufficient military resources to counter new threats in the NATO's Northern flank might bring the resonance and negative consequences to the Baltic States. It might diminish or limit deterrence operations in the Eastern flank of NATO.

The antagonistic relations in the political and economic fields brings challenges for the NATO States in the North since Moscow has been drawing new ambitions in the Arctic. Within the same time, Kremlin has started the developments of its strategic alliance with the People's Republic of China, as Russia was pushed to Asia because of the sanctions from the Western States (Karaganov, et al., 2018). Although Moscow partnership in Europe is complicated, Putin might use its opportunity in diplomatic dialogue with the president of

Xi Jinping the People's Republic of China, as the United States presidential administration declared unwillingness to accept China in the dialogue around the Arctic in 2019 (News Agencies, 2019). At the same time, China had been restricted in its actions in the Pacific – Indian region (Malle, 2017). Some scientists suggest that such an alliance might bring the world to the new order with Russia – China leading (Karaganov, et al., 2018).

The argument is that Russia develops its power in the Arctic to return to the Global Community and to challenge the liberal democratic order. Consequently, it brings new challenges to the Baltic States. Therefore, this research aims at assessing the possible challenges that the Baltic States and their Allies in NATO and the EU might face following the Russian Federation activities in the Arctic region.

Despite the evidence that Moscow aims at drawing its intentions and activities in Arctic space as peaceful ones, the Baltic States should be ready to face coming security challenges together with Western Allies. The political analysts well know the fact that 'the Russian president told his defence chiefs to concentrate on building up infrastructure and military units in the Arctic' (Harding, 2013). Following this, the focus of the research paper is to answer such questions: First, can Russia use its political and military powers to threaten NATO in the Arctic? Second, what challenges might the Baltic States face if NATO relocates its resources to the Northern flank? Third, can Russia increase its military power using the strategic alliances with China to challenge NATO in the Baltic region?

Therefore, the primary and secondary sources are analysed to obtain related arguments and derive assessments. The Russian Federation official narratives, policy documents, statements by the Kremlin

officials were used as the primary sources to support the arguments of the research. At the same time, the presentation of research done by scholars and experts, and articles were used to provide a contextual interpretation of the problem and support the recommendations. In the beginning, the paper summarises the Russian Federation political narratives and policy documents concerning the Arctic and the future strategy in the High North. Then research follows in the assessment of Russia's military power developments in the Arctic, with the analysis of possible scenarios on how military resources might be used both direct and asymmetric ways, with the suggestion of how it might affect the Baltic States. The research continues with the critical evaluation of possible challenges Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania might face due to the Moscow's – Beijing's strategic alliance in the Arctic.

The Arctic in the Russian Federation's politics

The elite in Kremlin recognises the Arctic region to be significant for the Russian Federation both the politically and economically. Country's '...major Arctic objective ... has been to promote and protect its claims continental shelf territories beyond the two-hundred-nautical mile economic exclusion zone' (Stent, 2014 p. 205). The strategic importance of the Arctic is addressed in dominant Russian political narratives and policy documents, which had been revised regularly. Kremlin was presenting the Arctic region as the area for future cooperation and equal competition (RF President, 2015). However, recent developments have shown that this area might bring more challenges to the liberal democratic world as a consequence for the Baltic States.

In the energy strategy narratives of 2003 and 2009, the Arctic region was represent-

ed as the critical geographical region with its natural resources needed for Russia's future development (Closson, 2017). Following the historical examples, Moscow should be expected to consider using all possible the hard power resources and elements to control natural deposits or at least to have influence over their use. While, the question comes, where the soft power could be used in the Arctic. It is well known that Moscow has limited capabilities and lack of technology, which is needed to explore in the High North environment. As a result of the power of attraction, might be used to find partners and investors with the commitment to share future beneficial findings.

The first Kremlin political narrative representing the Arctic strategic document was signed more than ten years ago and had been focused on the regional and international cooperation on an equal basis to meet Russia's national interests (RF President, 2008). Nevertheless, the Russia's policy in the Arctic signed on the 5th of March 2020 is more aggressive than previously mentioned discourses. The document highlight a need to protect Russian Federation in the Arctic exceeding the internationally agreed territory of Russia. Additionally, same document opens new threats to Norway and challenges to Allies while opening Kremlin intentions to exercise presence on Spitsbergen Island.

In 2019, Putin stated that Russia '...invites all countries participating in this organisation [Arctic council], as well as other states, cooperation in the Arctic' (TASS, 2019). That is where the attraction power examples might be monitored to implement the same strategic goals with the Western countries or companies of the West. Russian Federation has possessed the biggest fleet of icebreakers in the world and Putin has announced plans to build thirteen

more before 2035 converting Russia into a very attractive partner for the global shipping companies, which are seeking to use shorter sea routes than through the Suez Canal (TASS, 2019). One such example is the announcement of the most significant Danish shipping group A.P. Moller-Maersk to explore the Northern sea routes together with the Russian government-owned nuclear-powered icebreaker company Rosatomflot (Jacobsen, et al., 2019).

Continuing with the political narrative, there is a need to mention 'the National security strategy of the Russian Federation' (2015) and 'the Economic Security Strategy of the Russian Federation for the period until 2030' (2017) (RF President, 2015; RF President, 2017). The findings from those documents suggest that the Arctic will become the field of competition, which most probably will have significant consequences on the future world order.

In the same documents, it is possible to note intentions to use the political and the economic policy asymmetrically to dominate in the region with the back-up of military and the secret service capabilities. Such possible scenarios have direct relations with the current Russian Federation military doctrine, which will be addressed in the forthcoming research paper' chapter.

The next national narrative described the political strategy for the period until 2030. It brings a fact to attention that Moscow had been planning to use national waters shipping regulations in the Russian Federation economic waters and to delineate border agreements (with all interested subjects) along the Northern coast and the Arctic Ocean (PF President, 2017). Recently, Kremlin issued the statement about the discovered five islands in the Franz Josef Land archipelago (the Kara Sea area of the Arctic Ocean), which was followed with Kremlin intentions to expand Russia's

national borders more to the North (TASS, 2019). The Kremlin decision will consequently have an impact on the political level to the Baltic States' alliance States: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the United States. The disputes might be brought to international institutions like the United Nations.

To summarise, the chapter there is a need to remind that Moscow had been following their official political narratives in the past, as so there is a big probability that Kremlin elite would continue doing so. The political and political-economical narratives listed in the paper could have made us believe that the Russian government will be capable of balancing cooperation and competition in the Arctic. Nevertheless, the plan to use the military and economic powers had been already in place and should be considered during the decision-making related to the High North region.

The Russian newly signed Arctic policy, security strategy, economic strategy or the new doctrines with the combination of the statements by Vladimir Putin have addressed the Arctic and Northern borderline of Russia. The high-level interest and involvement suggest the following outcome that the geographical region can become the future area for the disputes challenging global politics to change. Besides, Kremlin has been seeking to establish the Northern Sea Road from Vladivostok to St. Petersburg. Whereas, affecting the States around the Baltic Sea, which are interested in the decisions related to the use of the Arctic routes.

Russian military power in the Arctic

Along with the development of the economic and political powers in the Arctic, Russia is developing its military power. Moscow has been presenting that the military growth in the region is defensive. Nev-

ertheless, the use of Russian military power to strengthen or replace the political power and/or economic power had been observed both in Ukraine in 2014 and Georgia in 2008.

Recent researches have addressed possible scenarios where Russia can threaten Western states in the Arctic region. Freedom of navigation operations, defend a threatened oil platform and 'go out and fight in ice', with the conclusion that Russia can only challenge them (English, et al., 2018 p. 346-347). However, the authors recognised Russia's future potentiality to threaten NATO member states in the maritime domain. At the political domain, the United Kingdom has issued Defence Arctic strategy in 2018, where the Defence secretary presented it with the following comment:

'Russia, with more submarines operating under the ice and ambitions to build over 100 facilities in the Arctic, are staking a claim and militarising the region. We must be ready to deal with all threats as they emerge' (The UK, 2018).

To understand Kremlin intentions in the High North, there is a need to analyse the national discourse such as: 'Strategy for the development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation and ensuring national security for the period until 2020' (RF President, 2008), 'On the basics of state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the period until 2035' (RF President, 2020) and 'Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation' (RF President, 2014). The new Moscow policy confirms the findings of the possible future threats from Russia. The intentions to create joint forces in the North '...capable to organize military security ... during different military political situations' must be addressed before further assessment (RF President, 2020). The new Russia's military discourse should appear in the year 2020 as the situation had changed from 2014

and Moscow had recognised a need to anchor the achievements and guide development of the military power.

Firstly, it is appropriate to address the Military doctrine touching upon Russian strategy for the developments in the Arctic. The military power instruments and elements are discussed in this narrative, which talks about '...the military security, defence and protection of the state border' (RF President, 2008). In the last decade, Kremlin had improved the existing structure, composition and logistical support for the Armed Forces, had re-established and opened new military bases, had started to develop the infrastructure for the troops to perform tasks in the Arctic. According to the Moscow times which had referenced the commander of the Russian Northern fleet, there were '...sixty bases and units across the region, located in forty-eight remote and hard-to-reach-places', which had been resupplied for the winter in 2019 (TheBarentsObserver, 2019).

Following the assessment of the same narrative, appears the soft power example, which can be viewed as the smart power strategy instrument to reinforce Russia's military power. The document supports peaceful intentions to address a need for electricity in Russia's Far East region to develop socio-economic welfare. Due to such circumstances, Russia had launched the floating nuclear power vessel Academic Lomonosov to Pevek harbour in 2019 (TaraLaw, 2019).

By chance, the military presence in this same region is very high (Col Forsyth, 2018), the Anti Access/Area Denial (A2AD) systems, military airfield, Bastion-P and Bak systems have been located on Russia's continent and the close islands representing a Northern Sea Road chokepoints or military 'bastions' (Auerswald, 2019). It can be challenging to oppose Moscow

statement that current military developments should be accepted as defensive in nature (Allan, 2018). However, it might bring to doubt when remembering the Cimmerian case in 2014.

Secondly, Moscow states, that 'Russian military built up is not a sign of aggression, it is defensive in nature', and the analysis of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation of 2014th should be able to prove that (Allan, 2018). The Arctic had been mentioned only in one place of this document, where it describes the use of military forces and other military power elements during the peacetime. Nevertheless, this policy had been used to justify military and secret service actions in Ukraine in 2014 and Georgia in 2008 wars to protect Russian speakers and supported separatist regions of mentioned states.

Katarzyna Zysk suggests that the developments by Russia in the Arctic now has '...the potential to threaten NATO allies and provide a base for threatening the North Atlantic maritime highway to Europe' (Blank, 2019). In the beginning, she suggests considering such challenges as nuclear deterrence. Next, Zysk see it as the strategic gateway for the Northern Fleet to be used in Atlantic and Pacific. Finally, Russia is forming 'bastions' to secure transportation. Last, Moscow locates intelligence capabilities closer to the NATO northern alliance's states.

Thirdly, Russia has been strengthening its military capabilities in the Northern part of the region, which must be addressed wider, than only through the military shipyard development. The nuclear power vessel Academic Lomonosov's had become only one example, which presents the arguable purpose of developments in the Northern Route chokepoints space, tracing it is military or civilian. Following this, Moscow provides research with other ex-

amples of icebreaker's capability developments. The Ivan Papanin will be built as the coast guard multipurpose vessel, followed by the Nikolay Zubov (similar class vessel). The new multipurpose coast guard vessels are planned to be fitted with '...an over-the-horizon anti-surface/land-attack capability, something more commonly associated with a frigate or a destroyer than a patrol boat' (TheMaritimeExecutive, 2019). Such developments have been recognised as a threat to United States national security. In 2017, the US Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Paul Zukunft suggested to '...accelerated delivery of the first heavy icebreaker in 2023' to increase readiness for the possible challenges and threats in the Arctic region (Military, 2017).

Before the summarising of this chapter, it is essential to note that the part of Russia forces dedicated for the Arctic region has not been assigned to the Northern Fleet military district/Joint Strategic Command (established in December 2014). They are still subordinated to the Western, Central and Eastern military districts. Following that, the military developments in the Murmansk Oblast, Archangelsk oblast together with the Komi Republic should be considered while analysing the possible threats to the Baltic States as offensive simulation had been exercised during the Zapad 2017 (Johnson, 2017).

Continuing with the summary, analyses suggest that both narratives bear information on strategic planning to develop military capabilities in the Arctic for defensive and security purposes. However, the historical examples from Ukraine and Georgia must be considered while estimating all possible future military threats. The tasks Russia's forces had practised in the recent military drills in the Western military district in 2017, and the Eastern military district in 2018 might be used in Baltics.

The findings suggest the most significant challenges to the Baltics, that Putin might turn military capabilities in the High North against NATO nations or NATO itself. Such developments NATO might face while opening the deterrence or defensive operations in the Northern flank similar to the ones in the Eastern flank. As a consequence, three Baltics will be forced to use their own resources to replace allies troops on the ground and maintaining the same level of deterrence in the NATO East.

Russia's cooperation with China in the Arctic

To explore and use all possible resources in the Arctic Russian Federation has been searching for the partners, who can provide human resources, building capabilities, financial support and technology. Being one of the rejectionist nations, Russia has been looking forward to challenge the liberal democratic order and has been pushed to search its strategic alliances in the East.

Consequently, Moscow had found another rejectionist nation in Asia, which have been seeking to become the leading economic power in the world after 2050, the People's Republic of China. According to the Russian scientists Sergey Karaganov and Dmitry Suslov, both Russia and China were '...pushed into de facto alliances' by the European Union and the United States (Karaganov, et al., 2018). Nevertheless, they remain the two competitive states in the race for world power, too.

Firstly, the argument that China could use an alliance with Russia is presented as logical. It is difficult to deny that Moscow needs China's money and resources in the Arctic region. Nevertheless, why China needs Russia? Beijing's 'One road, one belt' strategic project has been facing hardship in the Indian Ocean and the China Sea by '...the Quad – the partnership of the US,

Japan, India, and Australia' (Karaganov, et al., 2018).

Following difficulties with the development in the strategic project, China released its 'China's Arctic policy' on the 26th of January 2018 (Wong, 2018). This narrative had displayed the efforts to build the 'Polar Silk Road' as an alternative to the sea road through the Suez Canal. Surprisingly, this decision has been received plausibly by Kremlin who looks for the opportunities to put themselves in the advantage position during the bilateral negotiations with Xi Jinping. Russia remains one of the Arctic Council members that to the most extent have accepted the Beijing policy to be the Near-Arctic state.

Secondly, the cooperation between Russia and China in the Arctic have been rolling through 'scientific research, resource exploration and exploitation, shipping and security' (Wong, 2018). The study, resource exploration and exploitation have not been affecting the Baltic States. Whereas, the shipping and security fields can be addressed and assessed separately. Russia has been searching for opportunities to build ports along the Northern Sea Road from the Asia-Pacific to Europe.

Due to the current developments, China became the perfect investor with its intentions to establish the 'Polar Silk Road'. Officially, Beijing is interested in linking the China Sea with the Baltic Sea with an end harbours for the trade with European countries while Russia has presented its intentions to build ports in the White Sea to support the 'Polar Silk Road' needs. One of successful Russia's example is the agreement with the Poly International Holding Co. of Beijing to construct mega-port near Mudyug Island in the Dvina river delta (Buxbaum, 2016). This project is located close to the Archangelsk, and will become the mega-port with the intention to be linked with the

Ural region, through the new railway construction. While economic by nature, it will become the latest example, which should improve Russia's military capabilities by providing additional options for Russian military command. They will be able to reinforce the Northern military district units with the Central military district resources.

Thirdly, the most important field for the cooperation between two rejectionists for the Baltic States is the military one. It has a direct link to current and future military threats and challenges. The joint military exercises between Russia and China have been taking place since 2012. However, it has been the first time in 2017 (21st to 28th of July) when China's People's Liberation Navy joined Russia's Navy in the Joint Sea 2017 drill which took place mainly off the coast of Kaliningrad (Tucker, et al., 2017). Both Lithuania and Sweden had reacted with the statements to China officials in the Baltic capitals that Beijing should understand States of the Baltic region seeing the purpose of such exercises as a provocation (Tucker, et al., 2017). The security cooperation has not been limited to the naval military drills and included other examples as Zapad 2017, Vostro 2018 and Centre 2019. Nevertheless, the annual Joint Sea drills have been observed along with the 'Polar Silk Road' space, as they were held in the South China Sea, the East China Sea and the Sea of Japan.

The cooperation between Russia and China needs broader research. Nevertheless, it is possible to summarise the chapter with Putin's statement during the Valdai conference in 2019 that such relations are good examples of the strategic partnership. The infrastructure developments along the Northern Sea Road are presented as peaceful developments in order to gain economic and financial benefits for both countries. However, the joint projects have

been signed to develop shipping infrastructure along northern Russia's coast, and railway construction to connect Archangelsk and Ural should be analysed through the military perspective. Due to such improvements, Russia's Northern fleet will have the opportunity to increase its mobility from the Pacific to the Atlantic Oceans and the Baltic Sea. The renovated railways and roads will support quicker enforcements to the Western military district from the Centre one. All of which shall strengthen Russia's military power in the region.

Following the historical examples from Ukraine and Georgia, this reinforcement of the military power can become an attractive tool for Moscow to be used in political and economic disputes with NATO and Western countries while applying it in the bilateral diplomacy policy. It is difficult to assess the unity of such a strategic alliance between Russia and China. However, it is expected that Russia will try to find ways to use the partnership to change or challenge the world order.

Conclusion

The present evidence shows Moscow's intentions to challenge the existing world order by establishing a new area of competition, where Russia will be able to accumulate new technology and bring resources faster than Western countries. Such arising threats to the liberal democratic order, as a conscience, will bring new challenges to the Baltic States. The analysis of the use of the official Russian narratives in this research suggests that Moscow's elite uses officially presented doctrines both directly and asymmetrically as it is suggested in the smart power strategy by Josef Samuel Nye. Although Putin and other officials from Kremlin present Russia's intention and developments in the Arctic as peaceful, it most likely will bring competition and

new challenges or even threats both for the Allies in NATO and for the Baltics. Furthermore, such activities can involve another global power – China. This country has introduced intentions to establish a faster sea commune line to Europe, which is named the 'Polar Silk Road'.

The first question addresses Russia's use of its political and military powers to threaten NATO in the Arctic. Firstly, findings suggest that Putin has been using Russia's soft and hard power means to accomplish political and economic objectives. Until now, Moscow is not ready, either capable of threatening Western states directly as the Northern Sea Road cannot be opened for most of the year. Nevertheless, Russia most likely will challenge countries, which have a direct connection with the Arctic legally and politically.

The political decisions as a future legal challenge of the use of transit waters along the Northern route will be reinforced with Russia's military power. In the short to middle term, the Baltic States must be ready to support politically its allies in international institutions, such as the United Nations. Secondly, the growing strategic political and economic alliance with China can be used to preserve sanctions from the West. Besides, the new strategic alliance can be used to question the effectiveness of such institutions and the existing legal framework of the world order.

The second question addresses what challenges the Baltic States may face if NATO uses its resources in the Arctic in the long-term as the Alliance must be ready to reinforce NATO Northern flank. First, Russia has recognised its Western and Northern military districts as priority areas for the modernisation and disposition of new units to challenge NATO in the Eastern flank and to develop military superiority in the Arctic.

The military developments in the maritime domain have been recognised as new threats by the United States, the United Kingdom and Norway. Such countries as Canada and Denmark might follow. The conclusion comes while analysing the examples in the past when Russia had used its new military and civilian resources asymmetrically. In future, NATO might need to dedicate its resources on the Northern Flank, while cutting resources in the East. Following such a scenario, the Baltic States will have to be ready to dedicate national resources to substitute dispositioning of the Alliance capabilities in the region and to support NATO Northern Flank. Lithuanian example's to dedicate 2.5 percent of national GDP for defence in following years must be followed by the other Baltic States.

Second, the military games exercised by troops in the Western military district of Russia had involved troops training from the Northern military district. Such build-up of the military forces can receive reinforcement from the Central military district through the existing railways and newly agreed transport infrastructure constructions with China. The analysis suggests that Russia had no intentions to use its military capabilities from the Northern district for the possible aggression in the Baltic States. Nevertheless, it can have an impact on the NATO reinforcement coming through the Baltic Sea, if the Northern fleet would succeed to deny the maritime access to the Danish straits.

As a result, the control of Suwalki Gap and the need to diminish Kaliningrad A2AD would play a significant role in countering Moscow military aggression. The Baltic officials must consider growing its military reserve numbers due to several findings. First, Russia's possibility to increase speed to reinforcement military capabilities in the

region. Second, increasing military challenges in the NATO Northern flank, due to Moscow's development in the Arctic.

Summarising, the elite of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will have to monitor military developments in the Arctic in parallel with the analysis of the threats coming from the Western military district. Baltic States must be more pro-active and dedicate sufficient finances to continue development of national military power to get ready to meet threat at home and challenges in the Northern NATO Flank.

The last question, can Russia increase its military power using the strategic alliance with China to challenge NATO in the Baltic region is related to Moscow's rejectionist intentions to challenge the liberal democratic order. Firstly, Western sanctions to Kremlin pushed Putin to search for other alliances in Asia and the Middle East to diminish the economic impact on Russia. On the other side, China has faced the United States domination in the Pacific and the Indian Oceans. As a result, Beijing has been pushed to initiate its 'One road one belt' plans to connect to Europe. The Moscow's offer to use Northern Sea Road was well received by Beijing. Such offer had followed with the new initiative, which was named the 'Polar Silk Road'. Such strategic partnership was crowned with the military cooperation leading to the exchange of technologies and drills for the military. Also, such military drills between Russia and China will bring new challenges to the Baltics and the High North.

Secondly, such cooperation leads to infrastructure developments in the northern part of Russia, where Moscow had limited resources and technologies. As a result, the new roads, ports and railways will be constructed. It should allow Kremlin to move faster its forces from the Ural region to Western and Northern areas. The Baltic

States and NATO should be ready to face substantial military forces in the Baltic region. Lastly, together with the increasing mobility of military units in Russia, the Baltic States must be prepared to face China militarily capabilities. The cooperation and strategic alliance with Beijing could not rule out the possibility to confront China's forces in the region.

As China openly see the Baltic States seaports as the transit points and areas for the future investment for its 'Polar Silk Road' Russia will face competition and may use all opportunities to challenge the Baltics. The critical evaluation of relations between the Baltic States has shown that they are more competing with each other than following joint strategy in the economic and trade areas with other countries and international companies. Thus, there is a need to get ready for future opportunities in the fields of economy and trade with China, and to start analysing new possible Moscow confronts, which might occur due to the common interest in the Baltic Sea region. Nevertheless, China being the plausible economic partner, can bring new challenges. However, this research does not aim to address challenges from China and does not bring advice, how to counter them.

The argument that Russia is developing its national power in the Arctic to return to the Global Community and to challenge the liberal democratic order can be verified partially. However, the indicators show that Moscow is expanding its economic and military power in the High North. Therefore, the Baltic States must be more united and proactive in strategic agreements. Countering threats and challenges, the elites of the three Baltic States have to start a productive trilateral dialogue to find the common policy, should unite in messaging readiness to face all the threats and chal-

allenges with or without the support from the Alliance. The Baltic States should consider better coordination with neighbours in the North and Poland. Commitments to the international security must be clear and supported both with the resources and funding for the national needs and readiness to reinforce Alliance in the North, if needed.

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