

# A Menu of Arctic Specific Confidence Building and Arms Control Measures

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*Proposals to denuclearize the Arctic region span a time frame of 1964 to 2012, yet no substantial progress has been made towards denuclearizing the region. This is partly due to the proposals' consistent failure to present a series of viable confidence building measures (CBMs) and arms control measures to precede denuclearization. This paper seeks to fill the strategic gap of Arctic denuclearization proposals by presenting a menu of Arctic specific arms control and CBMs which seek to address the strategic and political gaps of previous Arctic denuclearization proposals, using both historic and modern works and ultimately offering a framework to advance the goal of an Arctic Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (ANWFZ). The formulation of this menu was guided by the key contention that the foundation of confidence is communication and information sharing. That is, arms control measures, to even be negotiated, must first be preceded by confidence building measures. Arms control measures require trust both in the negotiation and execution phase which can be provided for through established dialogue forums and confidence building measures. This menu for Arctic arms control and CBMs has been in development for several decades, starting with Franklyn Griffiths' 1979 partial Arctic demilitarization proposal, and has enjoyed an increasing amount of academic commentary, especially in the wake of the 2014 collapse of the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR) and Arctic Chief of Defense Staff (ACDS) meetings. These measures, however, have never been assembled into a comprehensive menu for consideration. Efforts towards comprehensive Arctic denuclearization can immensely benefit from this work if it is harnessed, harmonized and orientated towards denuclearizing the Arctic region. Doing so would begin charting the course of strategic stability leading towards cooperation and arms reduction which is absolutely crucial for any serious consideration of Arctic denuclearization.*

## Introduction

The idea of establishing a nuclear-weapons-free zone (NWFZ) in the Arctic is not a new one, with proposals for one having been made since the late 1950s (Armstrong, 1965). Some of these proposals were aimed at denuclearizing parts of the Arctic, like those made for a Nordic NWFZ by several Nordic governments in an effort to ensure low-tensions and shield the area from the arms race in central Europe (Atland, 2008). These proposals were taken up by academics and elaborated in academic circles, allowing over time, for the comprehensive formulation of an Arctic NWFZ (ANWFZ) (Rich and Vinogradov, 1964, Newcombe, 1981, Wilkes, 1984, and Axworthy, 2012). These proposals have also been adopted by Indigenous organizations, regional and

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international peace and disarmament groups, academic and Arctic specialists. Nonetheless, such a zone has yet to come to fruition.

In 1981 Robert Reford, an intelligence officer turned journalist and arms control advocate, published a piece in the *International Journal* entitled “Our Seat at the Table: A Canadian Menu for Arms Control,” in which he outlined an arms control agenda for Canada to pursue across a range of fields including the Arctic, submarines, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and chemical weapons (Reford, 1981). Reford sought to reinvigorate and reimagine the contributions that Canada could uniquely make to global disarmament and arms control initiatives. This paper takes inspiration from Reford in both its title and approach. Herein a ‘menu for Arctic arms control and confidence building measures (CBMs)’ will be offered, which seeks to address the strategic and political gaps of previous Arctic denuclearization proposals, using both historic and modern works and ultimately offering a framework to advance the ultimate goal of an ANWFZ.

Four confidence building measures will be outlined in addition to two Arctic specific arms control measures. None of these measures are novel, for they have all been proposed in the last four decades. What is novel, however, is presenting these together as a suite of measures in the context of achieving the necessary strategic environment to realistically pursue Arctic denuclearization. The absence of such a suite is the key reason for why the numerous proposals for an ANWFZ have failed. This is an attempt to begin filling that strategic void. It will become clearer through the analysis of each measure why this particular grouping of measures is being proposed. The guiding assumptions, however, are that the foundation of confidence is communication and information sharing and that arms control measures must be preceded by confidence building measures to even be negotiated in the first place, but also to act as the foundation for successful arms control. Arms control measures require trust, both in the negotiation and execution phase, established dialogue forums and confidence building measures provide for that. These then are the assumptions upon which this novel suite of measures is built.

#### *Arctic Confidence-Building Measures:*

1. Renew the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR)
2. Renew the Arctic Chief of Defence Staff Meetings (ACDS)
3. Establish an Arctic Security Cooperation Forum (ASCF)
4. Negotiate an Arctic Code of Military Conduct (AMCC)

#### *Arctic Arms Control Measures:*

1. Partial De-militarization of the Central Arctic Ocean
2. Arctic specific SSBN Sanctuaries / Arctic ASW Free-Zone

### **Strategic Confidence Building Measures**

It is first worthwhile to establish why confidence building and arms control measures are necessary steps in an Arctic denuclearization program. The short answer is because serious arms reductions, whether conventional or nuclear, will not be possible in a strategic environment where there is an emerging security dilemma. Lars Saunes, former Chief of the Royal Norwegian Navy commented in early 2021 that “[t]he way it is today, deterrence and military posturing are more or less the only signaling that takes place in the Arctic. That may lead to an accelerating security policy challenge

in the future. Right now, there is a security dilemma in the Arctic. The Arctic states are increasingly acknowledging this” (Sauner, 2021).

Arctic security expert Rob Huebert has argued that “[i]n a changing international system, the primary security requirements of the three most powerful states [the US, Russia and China] are now overlapping in the Arctic region, producing new challenges and threats” (Huebert, 2019: 75). Strategic state interests have grown and converged in the Arctic, while at the same time that Arctic coastal states have begun to systematically address “soft-security” threats through the development of constabulary forces. This, Huebert points out, makes it difficult “to separate the expansion and enhancement of military capabilities that can be used for offensive strategic purposes from those intended to defend local resources, shipping routes, and the Arctic environment” (Huebert, 2019: 76). In the context of increasing strategic interest, growing military presence, ambiguity between offensive and defensive postures, and now defunct security dialogue mechanisms, Arctic states are in the midst of an emerging security dilemma where “deterrence and military posturing are more or less the only signaling that takes place in the Arctic.” The antidote to this situation lies in a mixture of information sharing, verification, and harmonization of expectations to reduce opportunities for provocation, miscalculation and escalation – precisely what CBMs have historically offered.

The Arctic region is not totally bereft of inter-state cooperation. In fact, there has been substantial cooperation on environmental, shipping and soft-security issues. While this cooperative spirit has yet to “spill-over” into hard-security matters, there are indirect benefits to harness from such cooperative interactions. Heather Exner-Pirot has remarked that “It’s easy to forget that the origins of modern regional Arctic cooperation were based on disarmament efforts. There were intermittent efforts by academics, NGOs and politicians beginning in the 1960s, focusing specifically on the nuclear weapon free zones” (Exner-Pirot, 2019). And further that, “it was domestic interest in Arctic disarmament that eventually led to Canadian advocacy for the establishment of an Arctic Council, which persisted across Governments and parties” (Exner-Pirot, 2019). Historically, linkages have been drawn between the Murmansk Speech of 1987, the commencing of the Rovaniemi Process in 1989, the signing of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy in 1991, and the creation of the Arctic Council in 1996 (Depledge et al., 2019). The initial spark was aspirations for a ‘zone of peace’ so as to address Arctic militarization, the outcome was a cooperative forum, which although excluding hard security issues, has engendered an inter-governmental web of Arctic cooperation.

To this myriad of foundational cooperative initiatives can be added the 1996 Arctic Military Environmental Cooperation (AMEC) Program, which sought to address the management of spent nuclear fuel from decommissioned Soviet submarines. AMEC was an astounding moment in post-Cold War Arctic relations, as the US along with its allies and the USSR transitioned from nuclear confrontation to nuclear cooperation. The AMEC forum sought to address the cross-border nature of nuclear related environmental problems resulting from Cold War activity, including nuclear submarines. AMEC was eventually merged with the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program which pivoted AMECs orientation from environmental concerns to national security concerns. That is, AMEC became a forum through which the US and its allies could pursue and protect their national security interests vis-à-vis Russia’s nuclear capabilities.

The Arctic region's inter-governmental cooperative history, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has been focused primarily on 'soft security' issues like the environment, shipping and search and rescue. Such cooperation, however, was not bereft of hard-security interests as exemplified by AMEC, and the impetus to address 'soft-security' issue in the Arctic was actually engendered by state interest in Arctic disarmament. Thus, to begin serious consideration of hard-security cooperation in the Arctic is to bring the cooperative history of the Arctic full circle.

### ***Why Military-to-Military Dialogue is Essential***

The main objective of military-to-military dialogue in the Arctic is to preserve, or restore if necessary, a 'low tension' strategic environment via increased levels of communication and information sharing so as to avoid or curtail the eruption of an Arctic based security dilemma (i.e., unnecessary action-reaction cycles).

The US Navy's 2020 strategic blueprint "A Blue Arctic" notes that "unintended military accidents and conflict, and spill-over of major power competition in the Arctic all have the potential to threaten US interests and prosperity," and thus insists that "US Naval forces must operate more assertively across the Arctic Region to prevail in day-to-day competition" (The United States Department of the Navy, 2021). The irony is that in the US Navy formally recognizing that a spill-over into the Arctic is possible, and by making preparations for such a scenario, it is making it all the more likely. Arctic spill-over is poised to become a self-fulfilling prophecy if Arctic capable states continue to militarily build up in anticipation for it. Communication, information sharing, and harmonizing expectations can stunt the action-reaction cycle by clarifying intentions and actions.

Military activity will continue in the Arctic for the foreseeable future, this is especially true because of the constabulary and safety responsibilities that Arctic state militaries have been entrusted with. Military-to-military dialogue should thus be understood as a sort of pressure release valve, intended to reduce, if not eliminate, adversarial perceptions related to military activity in the Arctic region. It is to contextualize all the necessary military activity in the Arctic region in cooperative and transparent tones rather than competitive and adversarial ones. It is essential that Arctic specific mechanisms of military-to-military dialogue be developed as the "military efforts of regional states to protect their interests in the region, fueled by fear and mutual lack of trust, may create 'action-reaction' dynamics as well as risk creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of militarization and escalation" (The United States Department of the Navy, 2021).

Expanding the Arctic Council's mandate to allow for the inclusion of hard security issues and topics has been floated as a possible way to begin seriously addressing hard security in the Arctic. Indeed, the former Prime Ministers of Iceland and Finland both endorsed considering whether the Arctic Council's mandate should be expanded to include hard security (Tømmerbakke, 2019). Most Arctic experts who have opined on the matter have warned against expanding the Council's mandate, primarily out of fear that this could paralyze the work of the Council and undermine the now well-established cooperative relations regarding soft security and their potential for further growth (Groenning, 2016).

This analysis heeds the warnings of potential Arctic Council paralysis and instead suggests the formulation of a parallel defence diplomacy track to compliment and exploit the soft security cooperation achievements of the Council while not threatening their vitality or future potential.

This dual-track approach would seek to exploit the spirit of inter-governmental cooperation on Arctic soft security matters, not by including hard security matters into already existing cooperative forums, but by creating a parallel institutional track. This would ensure that soft security cooperation is insulated from the more contentious hard security cooperative efforts while at the same time opening up hard security cooperative avenues.

### ***Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR) and Arctic Chief of Defence Staff (ACDS)***

While the end of the Cold War calmed military activity in the Arctic and led to several cooperative ventures, like the AMEC, military interest and activity returned to the Arctic in the mid-2000s. Arctic states recognized that in such a context dialogue is required to avoid misperception and miscalculation. Thus, the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR) and Arctic Chief of Defence Staff (ACDS) were initiated in 2011 and 2012, respectively. Both forums suffered significant setbacks, however, in the wake of Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea. Western Arctic States, in solidarity with Ukraine, chose to cease engaging with Russia at the military-to-military level in the Arctic context, and Russia withdrew from the ASFR.

Some Western commentators have voiced a discomfort with reinvigorating these two forums out of concern that doing so would tacitly condone Russia's position in Ukraine (Boulegue, Depledge, 2021: 2). Other commentators have stressed that good behavior need not be a pre-condition for talks, or that Arctic cooperation opportunities ought to be approached in a "compartmentalized" fashion (Exner-Pirot, 2020: 102). The negotiation of a NWFZ, or any arms control measure, in the Arctic entails delicate deliberations regarding strategic stability and wider security concerns, for such discussions to be fruitful. Many point to the 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine as a spark point of deteriorating diplomatic relations in the Arctic. While it is true, and evident, that it has reduced levels of cooperation and good-will in Arctic governance forums and even caused splitter meetings, such events need not totally dictate the much broader negotiations and cooperation prospects. One can look South for evidence that diplomatic breakthroughs are still possible through international fora where Russia and NATO member states are involved. An October 2016 meeting of the Convention of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) Commission, which Russia chaired, produced a breakthrough in the form of an agreement to designate the Ross Sea as a marine protected area (Conley, Melino, 2016: 3). These negotiations included Russia, China, the United States and several other NATO member states.

It has been previously reported that Russia is interested in resuming the annual ACDS meetings, with Russia's Ambassador-at-Large for the Arctic stating that "Russia supports resuming the annual meetings of the Chiefs of the Armed Forces in the Arctic states in order to prevent deterioration of the military policy situation in the Arctic. This would be an effective measure to build trust and security in the region" (Danilov, 2021). Russia is not alone in suggesting resumption of these meetings. The US International Security Advisory Board recommended in 2016 that the US resume military-to-military dialogue with Russia through the ASFR and ACDS particularly noting that "U.S. interests would be served by resuming military-to-military engagement with Russia in the Arctic on the basis of a determination that the advantages of doing so would outweigh the impact (if any) on U.S. policy with respect to maintaining, along with other nations, pressure on Russia to resolve Ukraine/Crimea issues on satisfactory terms" (International Security Advisory Board, 2016). Notably, it can be assumed that the calculations of these assessments have changed due the fluid geopolitical dynamic of US – Russia relations since 2016.

While opinions abound on how, when, and where Arctic hard security dialogue should be orchestrated, it is nonetheless agreed that “the establishment of a military-security dialogue among the Arctic states would be a crucial step in building security architecture into the region” (Cepinskyte, Paul, 2021). A first step would be to re-engage Russia through the already existing Arctic military-to-military forums, which would bring things back to the pre-2014 status quo. Of course, should the establishment of such a forum be achievable without the reinvigoration of the ASFR and ACDS it would be welcome and a significant step towards Arctic military-to-military dialogue. The goal, and necessity, is to reinvigorate/re-establish military-to-military dialogue, how it happens, under what format or name, is secondary as long as the parties are satisfied.

### ***Arctic Security Cooperation Forum (ASCF)***

An Arctic Security Cooperation Forum, whether it be a complimentary mechanism to the ASFR and ACDS, or a parent body with ASFR and ACDS as subsidiary organs would serve not only to address present security concerns but also be positioned to handle security disputes on the horizon. At its core, such a forum would “encompass talks on military stability and conflict prevention measures in the Arctic region,” and such a forum could “be called the *Arctic Security Cooperation Forum (ASCF)*” (Zandee et al., 2020: 48). This forum would formalize and make predictable the desired military-to-military dialogue and provide the framework to address emerging issues.

Issues on the horizon that could be addressed by such a form include: the outstanding boundary disputes in the Arctic region and the deployment of cruise missile capabilities in the Arctic. Russia has been developing and expanding such capabilities in recent years which has prompted the US to state its intention of outfitting future Arctic Coast Guard icebreakers with cruise missiles (Makichuk, 2021). More broadly, discussions could be considered on Arctic nuclear deterrent postures of the US and Russia, which could be an important forerunner to discussions on SSBN sanctuaries or ASW free zones.

Such a forum for dialogue and information sharing would be valuable in and of itself, but such discussions naturally lead to discerning what sort of military action is acceptable to the parties involved, whether this be made explicit via assertions within formal discussions, or implicit by the reactions of parties within such dialogues. Therefore, an Arctic Military Code of Conduct could be the hallmark agreement to rationalize, solidify and guide the work of the ASCF, for dialogue and information sharing can naturally lead to engagement and the harmonization of principles. It would then become the natural forum for negotiation of further cooperative agreements or arms control measures like the extension of the current bilateral Incidents at Seas Agreements (INCSEA) to the Arctic region, or should a more Arctic specific agreement be desired; proposals have also been made for an “Arctic Code for Unplanned Encounters at Seas (CUES)” (Berbick, Saunes, 2020).

### ***Arctic Military Code of Conduct (AMCC)***

While it is true that Russia has recently made disproportionate investments in its Arctic military capabilities and infrastructure, Russia’s geographic, demographic and economic context must be kept in mind – it has the largest Arctic based population, the largest littoral frontage, immense natural resources extraction activities and perhaps the most promising Arctic shipping sea-route within its EEZ territory. This may partially justify Russia’s infrastructural build up, for military capabilities are often used in the Arctic region for constabulary and search and rescue purposes. The provocative shows of force, however, are less justifiable, but need not be pinned solely on

Russia for “[o]n one hand Russia has become more aggressive since 2008 but it is also reacting to new weapons systems introduced by the U.S., Russia isn’t acting on their own but in an effort to contain NATO and reacting to posturing of the U.S.” (Huebert, 2021).

The point here is that the mere presence of militaries in the Arctic is not inherently problematic, nor is military build-up *per se*, but the ongoing and increasing occurrence of provocative shows of force made possible by those presences is concerning and should be addressed by the regional states. This is because in the absence of dialogue mechanisms, information sharing tools, or established norms of conduct, the margin for misinterpretation and ensuing escalation is high. Peace and stability are heavily degraded by provocative, mischievous and/or surprise military activities. Ernie Regehr has observed that “the most basic characteristic of a security zone that has matured into a cooperative security community... is that there exists a reliable expectation that states within that regional community will not resort to war to prosecute their disputes” (Regehr, 2019: 285). While this may be what the Arctic regional states formally proclaim in their policies, and even within relevant agreements like the Ilulissat Declaration, these words can be fundamentally undermined by action, like that of competitive military build-ups or arm races. It is therefore imperative in the Arctic region to discern whether ‘remilitarization’ efforts are militarily competitive in nature, which would erode expectations of cooperation, or if such build ups actually facilitate public safety and regional security. Such discernment is possible through programs of dialogue, information sharing, transparency and mutual verification. Current Arctic governance forums, however, are currently inadequate to facilitate the type of dialogue and information sharing needed to reduce tensions and prevent misunderstanding.

An Arctic Military Code of Conduct (AMCC) would seek to “define, collectively, the red lines of military activities in the northern high latitudes, while also creating a dialogue mechanism that would promote greater transparency and lay the ground for a less conflict prone relationship between NATO and Russia in the region” (Depledge et al., 2019) Commentators have rightly suggested that such a Code would not be easy to negotiate and that the most prudent entry point to negotiations will be to mutually determine what behaviour is *not* acceptable within the region and to then build outwards (Regehr, 2019). This could include, for example: dangerous maneuvers, surprise exercises, simulated attack drills, communications jamming, turning off of transponders, and guidelines on live testing. Thus, the goal of an AMCC would be to reduce irresponsible, flagrant or provocative military actions, and brinkmanship, all aimed at enhancing transparency, norm cultivation and preserving/guaranteeing a ‘low tension’ political-military Arctic environment. Indeed, just the negotiation of such an agreement would be an important first step for dialogue and confidence building.

It has been noted that there are several applicable precedents or existing agreements that could be expanded to include activities in the Arctic region within the context of negotiating an AMCC. Among these are: the Open Skies Treaty; The Incidents At Sea Agreement (INCSEA); the Agreement on Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities; and the Vienna Document 2011 (on confidence and security building measures) (Goodman, Kertysova, 2020). INCSEA and the Agreement on Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities are two US- Russian bi-lateral agreements signed in 1972 and 1989, respectively. They both sought to reduce tensions between the two nuclear superpowers by establishing mutually agreed upon expectations for their forces and mechanisms to address concerns. The Vienna Document 2011 is a regime of confidence and security-building measures designed to enhance transparency concerning military activity

conducted within the OSCE's zone of application, which includes all land, air and sea areas of all European and central Asian participating states (this includes Russia from its Western border to the Ural Mountains). It includes provisions for such things as: annual exchange of military information; defence planning information exchanges; consultation and cooperation mechanisms; prior notification for certain military activities; observation of certain military activities; and constraining provisions for large scale military activities. Seeing that all Arctic regional states are party to at least one of these CBM agreements it is reasonable to expect that they could act as frameworks for developing an AMCC, relevant provisions from each could be adapted to the Arctic context and included in the AMCC agreement.

The negotiation and execution of an AMCC may also be an ideal way to engage China on hard security issues in the Arctic region. This is becoming more imperative with the release of China's Arctic Policy in 2018 and its developments and deployment of icebreakers in the Arctic region (People's Republic of China, 2018). The US Coast Guard has openly declared China as a threat to American interests in the Arctic region, noting that it fully expects China to replicate its current provocative actions in the South China Sea in the Arctic region once it develops sufficient Arctic military capabilities (United States Coast Guard, 2019). Thus, any serious attempt to develop a comprehensive AMCC will not only include current and active Arctic military capable states but those who will be so in the near future. Such a strategy also has the niche benefit of not singling out Russia as the sole hostile actor and creating a West versus Russia dynamic in the negotiations (Depledge et al., 2019).

## **Two Arctic Arms Control Measures**

The end goal of Arctic specific CBMs is to bolster a degree of confidence amongst Arctic states so that arms control measures for the region may be negotiated which tend towards disarmament and eventual denuclearization. Two such arms control measures are worthy of consideration and ought to be addressed in future ANWFZ proposals for they promise to preserve and enhance strategic stability in the region and would therefore enhance denuclearization prospects.

### ***ASW Exclusion Zones / SSBN Sanctuary Agreement***

The Arctic emerged as an ideal forward positioning location for SSBNs during the Cold War, as the mutual geographic proximity of each of the superpowers allowed for a credible first strike threat, whether by cruise or inter-continental ballistic missiles. As missile technology progressed it became possible for the then Soviets to threaten the American homeland from Soviet home waters, but as Adam Lajeunesse notes, "a launch from waters within the Arctic Archipelago, or even as far north as the Lincoln Sea, off of the tip of Greenland would cut SLBM flight time in half (from thirty to fifteen minutes), while lower flight trajectory would hinder detection" (Lajeunesse, 2016: 229). While the Americans could position themselves in the vast expanses of either the Atlantic or Pacific oceans to credibly threaten the Soviets, the Soviets with the bulk of their sea-based nuclear deterrent in the Kola Peninsula had to transit the well-guarded GIUK gap to achieve commensurate freedom of operation. These geographic realities prompted the Soviets to position their SSBNs in Arctic waters. To these rationales could be added the natural protection that was offered by sea ice in the Arctic Ocean, which provided near invulnerability to SSBNs and SSNs (Lajeunesse, 2016: 229).



The best way to approach theorizing about and developing a practical elaboration of SSBN sanctuaries is through a strategic analysis, to see whether in fact such sanctuaries carry sufficient strategic value to forego other deployment options. As noted, the strategic value of the sea-based deterrent is its degree of invulnerability and thus credible second-strike capability. Russian SSBNs can pose a sufficient threat from their home bastions, that is, they need not enter the Arctic Ocean region to enter into credible range to threaten North American targets. Forward deployment is thus not a strategic necessity, it is a provocative political/military gesture. Further, entering the Arctic Ocean region would cause unnecessary threat exposure to Russian SSBNs. The Russians have developed SSBN sanctuaries/bastions close to home ports so that Russian surface vessels, aircraft and SSN attack submarines can protect Russian SSBNs from enemy ASW activity. Therefore, forward positioning provides little or no strategic value in terms of deterrence and actually exposes Russian capabilities to unnecessary threat levels (Purver, 1987: 17).

What is the incentive then for Russian submarines, whether SSBN, SSGN or SSN subs, to leave their sanctuaries? A priority incentive would be to blunt/thwart American SSN forays into or towards Russian sanctuaries through interception missions which may push Russian subs close to Canadian and American coastal waters. Another strategic incentive would be for Russia to forward position its SSBNs in Canadian waters for a decapitation/precursor strategy. To do so in peacetime, or at least, outside the context of hostile and escalating relations, would be unnecessarily provocative and of little strategic value. It is also hard to justify Arctic deployment, and all of its attendant risks, when the same net outcome can be achieved from either Atlantic or Pacific stationings. Arctic stationing, however, does promise greater stealth and invulnerability due to current ice coverage – the ability to pass from ice coverage to open waters with ease to stymie detection is perhaps the greatest strategic interest in Arctic forward deployments. Nonetheless, climate change has begun to show that strategic ice coverage will not be a perennial feature of the Arctic region, the prospect of which should move the US and Russia to consider more seriously the need for at least a bi-lateral agreement to guarantee a sufficient degree of SSBN invulnerability to preserve and bolster deterrent stability (Huebert, 2011: 383-400).

An agreement aimed at reducing submarine-based warfare in Arctic waters while also enhancing and preserving strategic stability in the region would be best achieved through a SSBN Sanctuary Agreement or ASW Free-Zone Agreement. Proposals for such a zone date back to the 1980s but have received relatively little attention or updating until very recently, and even then in very small ways (Regehr, 2019). Ronald Purver, writing in 1983 suggested that a “type of strategic ASW control measure would be the creation of SSBN sanctuaries or ASW-free zones, from which adversary ASW forces and installations would be barred (and which would also, incidentally, make initial acquisition of trail more difficult.) Verification would appear to be quite feasible by the use of the defending party’s own sonar detection systems” (Purver, 1983: 427). Specifically, sanctuary zones were proposed on the Russian side in the Barents Sea, Sea of Okhotsk and on the American side in the Gulf of Alaska (Purver, 1983). Other than the suggestion that these sanctuaries extend “a specified distance from a state’s coast (in the order of several hundreds of miles)” no concrete zonal boundaries or mapping of these proposals has been done (Purver, 1987: 19). Based off of this imprecise suggestion however, the EEZs of both states in the suggested areas could be considered as a starting point for negotiations.

The possible provisions of such an agreement are neatly captured in the definition of an SSBN sanctuary offered by Willy Østreng as “a geographically defined sea area which is declared out of

bounds to antisubmarine weapons. In an area of this nature the superpowers pledge themselves not to use or to deploy antisubmarine weapons. This is an area in which strategic submarines possess no ‘natural’ enemies (attack submarines) and where their survival is guaranteed” (Østreng, 1982: 107).

Ernie Regehr has observed that “the stability of the global strategic environment would be significantly bolstered by a US and Russian agreement not to deploy their SSBNs close to each other’s territories and not to track and thus threaten each other’s SSBN’s with attack submarines in agreed locations” (Regehr, 2020: 208). SSBN sanctuaries would provide through a bilateral agreement what both sides have been trying to achieve through more provocative and destabilizing offensive tactics – credible and lasting retaliatory sea-based deterrent capabilities.

An additional measure, whether it be agreed to in initial negotiations or be pursued as a follow up measure would be to establish upper limits on the number of ASW capabilities, particularly hunter-killer SSNs seeing that they are truly the most threatening and thus destabilizing element in this equation. Ronald Purver specifically suggested that “limiting the number to less than two or three times the number of the opponent’s SSBNs would be an effective measure of control” since it would restrict each side from tracking and or targeting all of each other’s SSBNs at a given time (Purver, 1983: 427). It is unclear, however, how this measure would account for the strategic deterrence considerations of other rivals with ASW capabilities, like China.

### ***De-militarization of the Central Arctic Ocean***

In his 1979 piece “A Northern Foreign Policy” Arctic expert Franklyn Griffiths proposed “a regime of limited demilitarization” for the Polar Basin Area which he defined as “the Arctic Ocean lying to the seaward of the line demarcating the offshore exclusive economic zone of the littoral states” (Griffiths, 1979: 60-61). Within this zone, Griffiths proposed that the surface waters and ice be demilitarized. His proposal explicitly ignored the sub-surface waters which, at the time, were suspected to be used by SSBNs. This arms control proposal was echoed by numerous Arctic security commentators through the 1980s and even in more recent commentaries from 2013 onwards (Regehr, 2019, Exner Pirot 2019). The proposal has largely remained untouched in its composition except for Ronald Purver suggesting it be expanded to include all waters of the Arctic Ocean including those within the EEZs of the littoral states (Purver, 1981: 130).

It is essential to note that Griffiths and those commenting on his proposal in the 80s and 90s all justified this proposal through one key premise: “to freeze the level of military activity at current levels, and if possible, to reduce it” (Griffiths, 1979: 60). That is, such proposals were attempting to formalize the then non-militarized status of the surface waters and ice of the Arctic Ocean, to preserve what was in reality already the status quo. This was the case because of the climate, geography and technological limitations of the day. Climate change, however, is altering the historically formidable ice of the Arctic Ocean, making travel through the area, whether commercial or military, more accessible in the years to come. In response, states have expressed their interest in weaponizing icebreakers and plans for ice-capable surface vessels, both of which forecast weaponized surface patrols in the Arctic Ocean in the near future (Regehr, 2020: 207). This prospect is perhaps one of the most serious problems that proposals for demilitarizing the Arctic Ocean would have to contend with.

Thus, the reality of military activity, or the prospect thereof, on the surface of the Arctic Ocean is radically different today, which makes this measure all the more necessary. Imminent militarization cuts both ways, for while it makes an Arctic Ocean de-militarization agreement more urgent as an arms control measure it would also have to be negotiated in a context where state interests are more intensified and the necessary strategic sacrifices more serious. Geography and climate no longer have total control over what is militarily possible on the surface waters of the Arctic Ocean, it is now up to the states to decide whether or when the Arctic Ocean will be legitimately used as a military theatre or not. It is clear that preserving, or at least limiting, the extent to which the Arctic Ocean is used as a military theatre enhances the prospect of more comprehensive Arctic denuclearization proposals.

Such an agreement would have various benefits for efforts towards Arctic denuclearization. It would create a military buffer zone between Arctic nations, specifically the US and Russia, and thus act as a disengagement and deconfliction mechanism (Wilkes, 1984). It would reduce the incentives and justifications for developing Arctic military capabilities or the build-up thereof and thus act to suppress the Arctic security dilemma (Huebert, 2021: 89). In conjunction with an ASW free-zone, or on its own, such an agreement would decrease the vulnerability of SSBNs by curtailing options for surface based ASW in the area, which would stabilize US and Russian nuclear deterrent postures.

In the context of increasing ‘soft security’ cooperation in the Arctic, through the Search and Rescue Agreement for example, it is important to clarify that such a demilitarization agreement would not totally prohibit military presence on the surface waters of the Arctic Ocean. Rather, such an agreement could follow the precedent and structure of the Antarctic Treaty which, although demilitarizing the Antarctic, allows for military personnel and equipment to be used towards scientific and peaceful ends. Emulating this is crucial, seeing that Arctic state military’s have increasingly taken on constabulary and scientific support functions which ought to be facilitated. In fact, such a demilitarization agreement would enhance and protect these cooperative achievements by increasing transparency and norms of conduct.

Both of these Arctic specific arms control measures would tend towards larger Arctic disarmament and denuclearization efforts by reducing the legitimate military scope and use of the Arctic and by building further confidence and military transparency in the region. Moreover, these measures are specifically aimed at enhancing strategic stability in the region through assuring deterrent invulnerability by reducing the need and incentive for provocative offensive moves like ASW tracking or weaponized icebreakers. These measures are thus worthy of consideration by ANWFZ proponents since they would improve the strategic environment and thus work to create the environment in which grander denuclearization negotiations could be considered.

## **Conclusion**

The steps outlined here are a program of actions for filling the strategic gap of historic ANWFZ proposals and would work to create the conditions necessary for negotiation of a zone to be considered. There are numerous starting points, for some commentators have suggested even more preliminary steps ahead of formal military-military dialogue resumption like academic cooperation and Arctic inclusive research groups like the Newport Arctic Scholars Initiative. The ‘menu’ offered here, while laid out in a format and progression which the author believes to be ideal, remains but a ‘menu’ that future scholars or policy advocates may wish to pick and choose, even to re-order.

The crucial point is to commence dialogue, build confidence, reduce arms, preserve and enhance strategic stability.

In separating hard and soft security discussions, or military specific and non-military discussions, a two-track method of cooperation is developed, one in which two tracks are running in parallel to each other, to the benefit of each other, while remaining mutually insulated from each other to preserve one another's efficacy should crises or diplomatic impasses emerge. This has also been referred as an "interdependent continuum." (Boulege & Depledge, 2021).

This 'menu' for Arctic arms control and CBMs has been in development for several decades now, starting with Franklyn Griffiths 1979 proposal, and has enjoyed an increasing amount of academic commentary, especially in the wake of the 2014 collapse of the ASFR and ACDS meetings. The ANWFZ concept can immensely benefit from this work if it is harnessed, harmonized and orientated towards denuclearizing the Arctic region. There is undoubtedly still much work to be done, but the pieces are being assembled. While there has been little hard security cooperation between Arctic capable states as of yet, pursuing this 'menu' for arctic arms control and CBMs is the natural maturation of the Ilulissat Declaration and the first step in the formation of a comprehensive security architecture for the Arctic region.

Some of these measures, however, are susceptible to the identified shortcomings of ANWFZ proposals – to never break free from NGO advocacy circles and to be seriously considered by governments. It is fair to ask whether any of these suggested measures are capable of making that transition from the policy advocacy realm to the government policy formation realm. Arctic specific CBMs and arms control measures are beginning to receive attention from Governments, but their future remains uncertain especially given the heightened geo-political tensions associated with the war in Ukraine. These measures, and the way in which they have been framed, attempt to bridge the strategic void of historic ANWFZ proposals. The proposed measures are more attune to the strategic realities of the Arctic region. The proposed arms control measures are intentionally preceded by proposals for formalized military dialogue and CBMs, and the contingency of arms control on dialogue and confidence is fully realized.

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