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[Arctic: Toward the End of the Exception? Strategic, Nuclear and Maritime Issues in the Region](#)

Under the effect of global warming, the region is undergoing a transformation. Today Russia is the main actor. The dynamism of Russia – which could nevertheless be largely hampered by recent Western economic sanctions – is illustrated by the exploitation of fossil fuels or minerals necessary for the energy transition, the construction of port or energy infrastructures necessary for this transition, the development of the NSR with, in particular, the construction of a fleet of modern nuclear-powered icebreakers, and the laying of submarine cables. It should be noted that Russia will take the lead in SMRs with the development of several floating or land-based power plants equipped with this type of reactor. The exploitation of natural resources — to varying extents, however, depending on the degree of determination of governments to protect the environment — is also supported by the other riparian States. Nevertheless, the image sometimes circulated of States ready to fight over the resources of the North Pole is false. The absence of serious disputes between the Arctic States over land and maritime boundaries and the willingness of the States involved to settle disputes over the extension of their continental shelf within the framework of the CLPC and by seeking amicable agreements, eliminate the grounds for confrontation. Above all, the interest of the players, starting with Russia, in taking advantage of the development of the region and the resulting financial benefits reduces tensions to a minimum.

As a major power in the Arctic, betting on the economic development of its Far North,

Russia enjoys the position of a status quo power. The militarization observed has therefore primarily a defensive purpose. Nevertheless, as Russia is behaving more and more like a revisionist power in other regions, particularly in Europe as evidenced by the invasion of Ukraine, this militarization is clearly a matter of concern for the other riparian States, which are reacting by reinvesting in their defense. This concern is even manifested in renewed debates in Sweden and Finland on the advisability of joining the Atlantic Alliance. Moreover, the deployment in large numbers, and with increasing frequency, of modern submarines from the bases of the Kola peninsula towards the Atlantic, with offensive intent and potentially threatening maritime lines of communication, as well as the implementation of oceanic deterrence by the three Western navies possessing these capabilities, can only lead to the deployment of antisubmarine warfare systems in the Barents Sea and Norwegian Sea.

China, a revisionist power aiming for world leadership by mid-century, is increasingly present in the Arctic. Its power is today exercised primarily in the political sphere, with the implementation of influence, financial and economic operations. Its military presence, weak today, will also inevitably be reinforced. As soon as it has the means to do so, it is likely that it will support its Polar Silk Road with military vessels transiting from the Pacific to northern Europe. Depending on the evolution of the relation between Russia on one hand and the United States and Europe on the other hand, that could translate into an increased dependency of Russia relative to China, an acceleration of Chinese presence could be observed.

Despite this strong growth in armaments and antagonisms, a confrontation remains unlikely. The various protagonists are either nuclear powers, members of a nuclear alliance

or allies of nuclear States, thus preventing extreme reactions and the outbreak of an armed confrontation. However, the renewed competition between the powers could lead to an acceleration of contestation and friction. As in other regions of the world, in the Arctic it will be necessary to win the war before the war. France must be prepared for this. In the diplomatic sphere, it must continue to show firm support for our Nordic allies against hostile influence operations. It must also firmly defend the law of the sea, as it does elsewhere in the world. Militarily, it must continue to strengthen its position in the field of "invisible" operations, whether in the cyber domain or beneath the waves, including seabed operations. In the field of underwater warfare, it will inevitably have to review the format of its dedicated assets, given the sharp increase in activity of submarines based around Murmansk.