



# Toward a “System of Regional Security in the Arctic”: A Russian Perspective

**OE Watch Commentary:** In a recent article from the Russian Ministry of Defense’s journal, *Military Thought*, on the subject of military security in the Arctic, one Russian General Staff analyst noted a paradox: There were many nations and organizations with Arctic development interests but no “functioning...regional security system.” The article’s main purposes are to outline the “disintegrated...and artificially muddled” nature of the various entities’ relationships and to spotlight the existing Arctic Council as the premier institution to develop a cooperative regime, which the author, Colonel O. Gavrilov, labels a “System of Regional Security in the Arctic” (abbreviated from Russian language as “ASRS”).

The article helpfully lists various leading organizations, including five Arctic states, three sub-Arctic states, EU countries (that border on Arctic regions), NATO member states (that border on Arctic regions), the Arctic Council (which are the eight Arctic and sub-Arctic states), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers, Nordic Defense Cooperation, and the Asia Forum of Polar Research. The article also notes but does not fully list that there are 20 other nongovernmental organizations associated with the Arctic.



Complex expedition to the North Pole, organized by the Expedition Centre of the Russian Defence Ministry, 20 April 2017.

Source: Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, [https://eng.mil.ru/en/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12119454@egNews, CCA 4.0](https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12119454@egNews, CCA 4.0)

Gavrilov describes a contradiction between this large cast of Arctic-interested parties to the collective “muddle” in terms of Arctic security and security policy. Besides a litany of anti-Russian positions and actions that he catalogs from the various actors, he particularly offers the criticism that the Arctic Council—one of only two that Russia belongs to—currently “does not take up issues of military security.” However, he sees in that organization, comprised of Russia, USA, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, and Finland, a less-muddled deficiency that if corrected with an ASRS could “act as a regulator of international relations and reduce the level of dangers and threats” and would benefit Russia in terms of its military-political policies. He breaks down the ASRS into 24 “manifestations of regularities,” or establishing principles. These are not detailed requirements of what the ASRS would look like or should do, rather the list is a seemingly esoterically range principles of an ASRS designed to “unite existing views” of the participating entities and save them “from serious errors.” These foundational concepts include such things as “Communicativeness” to “Historicity” to “Tolerance” to “Goal-setting.” The “forms and methods”—a signaling term of the Russian General Staff—states that the ASRS’s objectives should “stay within the international law field.”

While this article does not develop the details of the ASRS enough for outside predictive insight into specific Russian General Staff plans for the Arctic, it, nevertheless, shows one likely approach that will be explored through their military science. And this is not unexpected. The way the General Staff sees it at this point, the current status quo favors the Russian military in the Arctic and an ASRS would promote Russian national interest and a more calculable way for Russia to maintain its leading position in the militarization of the Arctic region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm)**

***“One has to admit with regret that at the moment this kind of universally recognized system [Arctic regional security system] does not exist, and this is the main problem of the Arctic region.”***

**Source:** EO. Gavrilov, “The Condition and Development Prospects of a Regional Security System in the Arctic, *Military Thought* (in English), Vol. 28, No. 3 (2019), pp. 1-19.

*“...many contradictions between Arctic and sub-Arctic countries nowadays fail to be properly settled. In this context, it appears expedient to outline the principle political mechanisms of uncovering dangers and threats in the Arctic...”*

*Above all, it is necessary to point out that the Arctic region now boasts a fairly well formed system of international relations...*

*...The presence of so large a number of international organizations on the Arctic suggests that the region is of special interest to many states, and even more importantly, that the system of relationships among them is intricate, disintegrated, and artificially muddled.”*