

Professor Basil Germond - DIS0042

“Defence in Scotland”, [Inquiry](#) by the Scottish Affairs Committee, House of Commons

Evidence by Professor Basil Germond

Information on the respondent

I am a Professor of International Security at Lancaster University, with over 15 years of experience as a researcher in naval and maritime affairs¹. I have published two books and in excess of 30 peer-reviewed journal articles and academic book chapters on maritime security, seapower, navies, and the maritime dimension of Global Britain. I participated in the consultation process for the drafting of the 2022 UK *National Strategy for Maritime Security* regarding the climate change-maritime security nexus. This evidence is based on my academic knowledge of the topic and is given in a personal capacity.

Executive summary

- In a period of **systemic challenges** characterised by climate change, Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine, and China’s international assertiveness, there is a **strategic acceleration in the High North**, and the waters north of Scotland will become more turbulent and more contested.
- Climate change-induced economic competition in the Arctic can result in further **tensions with Russia but also with China** whose presence in the region is likely to increase (unopposed by Russia).
- In the High North as well as in the waters closer to Scotland, **security of the maritime domain (including critical subsea infrastructures) and freedom of navigation are likely to be increasingly challenged**.
- In the short term, **‘below the threshold’ activities** can be expected in the region and priority shall be given to the defence of **critical subsea infrastructures**. In the longer term, the **strategic value of the High North** will increase, both in terms of **peacetime defence activities** and preparation for **potential military operations**.
- **HM Government has recognised these developments and the strategic importance of the High North for the UK’s national interests**, both in terms of defence (and security) and prosperity (and sustainability).
- However, HM Government should **commit to long-term investment to become a net provider of collective security** in the High North. This will increase the UK’s capacity to intervene and respond to crises in the region, reassure allies and partners, and deter competitors. This requires **investments in the Royal Navy** (e.g. capabilities to operate in extreme cold environments), which is a key actor of security and defence in the High North.

1. Introduction: Two systemic changes

¹ Lancaster University webpage for [Professor Basil Germond](#).

- 1.1. Two major systemic changes are impacting security and defence in the High North and in the waters north of Scotland. Both affect the UK's national interest:
- 1.1.1. **Climate change** and its effects on natural systems (in particular the melting of the polar ice cap and warming ocean temperatures) create economic and commercial opportunities (e.g. new sea routes) but also environmental, safety and security challenges as well as geopolitical tensions.
 - 1.1.2. The aggressive revisionism of the *status quo* of the post-Cold War European order by Putin's Russia and the assertiveness of the People's Republic of China indicates an **impending global leadership challenge by agents of authoritarianism**.
- 1.2. Both systemic changes have a strong **maritime dimension** and will impact on security and defence in the **High North** and waters north of Scotland.
- 1.3. Moreover, **these two systemic changes act synergistically**: the impacts of climate change in the High North require strengthened cooperative governance whereas Russia's rogue behaviour prevents efficient cooperation to tackle economic and environmental challenges and even creates risks of confrontation at sea.
- 1.4. In this context, **HM Government needs to carefully plan** for future challenges in the region, which requires long-term investments and commitment to **collective security** in order to improve the UK's capacity to intervene and respond to crises in the region, reassure allies and partners, and deter competitors. This also requires planning for **sustained operations in extreme cold environments**, including investments in the Royal Navy.

2. The impacts of climate change on the High North

2.1. Economic opportunities:

- 2.1.1. **New commercial routes** via the Northwest Passage (in Canadian and US waters) and the Northern Sea Route (mainly within Russian territorial waters and EEZs) are seen as alternatives to the Panama and Malacca-Suez routes with **potential for time and energy savings**. For the UK, which is not an Arctic riparian state, this is certainly the most relevant opportunity arising from the effects of climate change in the Arctic.
- 2.1.2. **New fishing zones and new areas for oil and gas exploitation** mainly concern Arctic riparian states. But the subsequent new challenges and rise in competitive behaviours also impact the UK and UK stakeholders (e.g. fishing industry that operates in the Arctic waters²) via the destabilization of the region.

2.2. Environmental and societal challenges:

- 2.2.1. These economic opportunities engender risks of pollution, over-exploitation of natural resources, and loss of biodiversity. In the future, this is likely to create **more pressures on an already fragile ecosystem³ and on the region's societal stability⁴**, although (like with many discussions of the future societal effects of climate change) this is based on projections more

² Defra (2022), "UK reaches deal with Norway to secure opportunities for UK fishing industry", *News Story*, 25 November 2022 (accessed [online](#)).

³ S. Koenigstein (2020), "Arctic Marine Ecosystems, Climate Change Impacts, and Governance Responses: An Integrated Perspective from the Barents Sea", in E. Pongrácz, V. Pavlov and N. Hänninen (eds), *Arctic Marine Sustainability*, Springer Polar Sciences, Springer, Cham, pp.45-71.

⁴ B. Germond and A.D. Mazaris (2019), "Climate change and maritime security", *Marine Policy*, Vol.99, pp.262-266.

than observations⁵. It may also infringe on the livelihood of Indigenous peoples and other local communities via dispossession and ‘ocean grabbing’⁶. *Maritime 2050* highlights the opportunities created by the new trade routes but also acknowledges the need to address environmental challenges, which are exacerbated by climate change⁷.

2.2.2. **Navigation safety issues** will increase along with the quantity and density of traffic and given the inherent risks of navigating in the Arctic waters⁸. In turn, this will intensify the risk of pollution and require more constabulary presence and infrastructures in the High North, which will contribute to the cycle of environmental and societal pressures.

2.3. **Geopolitical and security challenges** (arising from 2.1. and 2.2.):

2.3.1. **Sovereignty claims:** Economic opportunities create incentives for sovereignty claims over maritime areas that are often disputed. For example, sovereignty over the Lomonosov Ridge extending to the North Pole is contested between Russia, Denmark (via Greenland) and Canada. The example of the South China Sea shows how lawfares could also develop in the High North, i.e. a synergistic process of sovereignty claims, *de facto* presence of civilian/economic stakeholders (e.g. fishing fleets) and the ‘defence’ of these actors using naval assets and other instruments of state power to create a *fait accompli*⁹. There is also a risk of imposition of national regulations not necessarily compliant with UNCLOS principles¹⁰.

2.3.2. **Fisheries conflicts:** The effects of climate change on natural systems (such as warming oceans and changes in currents) impact on fish migration and the distribution of fish stocks. In turn, this impacts on human systems (e.g. fisheries policies and fishing practices) paving the way for potential conflicts. The North Atlantic and High North have exhibited potential for such disputes. The ‘Mackerel War’, which started in 2007 between the EU, Norway, the Faroe Islands, and Iceland, albeit non-violent, demonstrates how the effects of climate change can impact on international cooperation¹¹. The ‘Cod Wars’ of the 1960s and 1970s (of which the UK and Iceland were the main protagonists) shows that such disputes can reach a relatively high level of hostility, even among allies¹². Thus, in the current context of tensions in the High North with Russia, further fisheries disputes can be expected, including potentially with the use of violence.

⁵ C. Southcott, F. Abele, D. Natcher and B. Parlee (eds) (2019), *Resources and Sustainable Development in the Arctic*, Routledge, Abingdon, p.17 and chapter 15.

⁶ On the impacts of economic activities on Arctic communities see K.S. Coates and C. Holroyd, C. (eds) (2020), *The Palgrave Handbook of Arctic Policy and Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham; On ‘ocean grabbing’ and other risks linked to Blue Economy, see N.J. Bennett et al. (2021), “Blue growth and blue justice: Ten risks and solutions for the ocean economy”, *Marine Policy*, Vol.125, 104387.

⁷ Department for Transport (2019), *Maritime 2050: Navigating the future*, DfT (accessed [online](#)).

⁸ Marsh Risk Management Research (2014), *Arctic Shipping: Navigating the Risks and Opportunities*, Marsh & McLennan Companies, August 2014 (accessed [online](#)).

⁹ On the practice of “fish, protect, contest, and occupy”, see A. Dupont and C.G. Baker (2014) East Asia's Maritime Disputes: Fishing in Troubled Waters, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.37, No.1, pp.79-98; see also H. Zhang and S. Bateman (2017), “Fishing militia, the securitization of fishery and the South China Sea dispute”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol.39, No.2, pp.288-314.

¹⁰ MoD (2022), *The UK's Defence Contribution in the High North* (accessed [online](#)), p.4.

¹¹ M.L. Pinsky et al. (2018), “Preparing ocean governance for species on the move”, *Science*, Vol.360, No.6394, pp.1189-1191; J. Spijkers and W.J. Boonstra (2017), “Environmental change and social conflict: the northeast Atlantic mackerel dispute”, *Regional Environmental Change*, Vol.17, No.6, pp.1835-1851.

¹² In fact, Iceland's threat to withdraw from NATO played an important role in its ‘winning’ the dispute: see G.J. Guðmundsson (2006), “The Cod and the Cold War”, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, Vol.31, No.2, pp.97-118; V. Ingimundarson (2003), “Fighting the Cod Wars in the Cold War: Iceland's challenge to the Western Alliance in the 1970s”, *The RUSI Journal*, Vol.148, No.3, pp.88-94.

- 2.3.3. **Other maritime insecurities:** Increased maritime traffic and commercial operations can also increase the risk of maritime crime, from piracy to terrorism to all forms of smuggling and trafficking¹³.
- 2.3.4. **Extra-regional presence:** China obtained in 2013 an observer status on the Arctic Council due to its economic and shipping ‘interests’ in the region. Russia is unlikely to oppose China’s endeavour in the Arctic areas under its jurisdiction due to Moscow’s willingness to accommodate their so-called ‘no-limits’ partnership (which is unequal with China being in the “dominant position”¹⁴) even though Russia might be wary of China’s growing interest and ability to operate in the Arctic¹⁵. This is likely to increase pressures on environmental resources and further securitize the Arctic maritime routes.
- 2.3.5. **Connection to strategic/naval issues:** In the current context, heightened sovereignty claims and strategic competition implicating Russia entail the risk of disruptions of freedom of navigation or even confrontation at sea, as illustrated by the example of the South China Sea¹⁶.

2.4. The cooperation dilemma:

- 2.4.1. Climate change has increased the need for good governance in the Arctic. Fisheries and SLOCs need to be monitored and controlled. For example, cooperation is necessary to make the new sea routes safe and sustainable¹⁷. Yet, **governing maritime spaces can hardly be done in isolation** due to the liquid and fluid nature of the milieu as well as the multiplicity of stakeholders and interests¹⁸. In other words, the effects of climate change on the oceans are global, ‘fish cross borders’ (as do fishing fleets), the maritime economy is transnational, and the sea cannot easily be controlled/occupied like the land.
- 2.4.2. However, **the political context does not currently facilitate international cooperation**; the current absence of a constructive dialogue with Russia means that, in practice, governance of the Arctic will not be smooth. This will be further **exacerbated by Russia’s war in Ukraine** and its aftermath in terms of global strategic opposition. The work of the Arctic Council has been put on hold due to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. And even if cooperation that does not involve Russia has now resumed, scientists do not get enough climate data from half of the Arctic (i.e. Russia)¹⁹, which further jeopardizes the prospects for a sustainable governance of the Arctic.

3. The securitization and (re)-militarization of the High North

¹³ T.-G. Myhrer (2020), “Legal Possibilities to Police the Arctic Ocean”, in N. Andreassen and O.J. Borch (eds), *Crisis and Emergency Management in the Arctic*, Routledge, Abingdon, pp.70-88; on the impacts of climate change on maritime crime, see Germond and Mazaris (2019), *op.cit.*

¹⁴ Professor Matthew Sussex (2022), Interview for CNBC, 16 September 2022 (accessed [online](#)).

¹⁵ M. Boulègue (2022), “The militarization of Russian polar politics”, *Chatham House Research Paper*, 6 June 2022 (accessed [online](#)).

¹⁶ See B. Germond’s written evidence submitted to the House of Lords’ International Relations and Defence Committee (accessed [online](#)) and cited in the Committee’s Report: House of Lords, International Relations and Defence Committee (2023), 1st Report of Session 2022-23, *UK defence policy: from aspiration to reality?* Ordered to be printed 21 December 2022 and published 12 January 2023, HL Paper 124 (accessed [online](#)), para 76.

¹⁷ MoD (2022), *op.cit.*, p.4.

¹⁸ B. Germond (2018), “Clear skies or troubled waters: The future of European ocean governance”, *European View*, Vol.17, No.1, pp.89-96.

¹⁹ L. Valigra (2022), “Arctic researchers forced to modify projects amid geopolitical tensions with Russia”, *Science Business*, 21 Novembre 2022 (accessed [online](#)).

- 3.1. In line with the region's increased strategic value, there is a growing securitization and **(re)-militarization of the Arctic region and waters north of Scotland**, which entails the risk of witnessing in the short-to-medium term a rise in **'below the threshold' disruptive activities and tensions at sea** as well as the need to **plan for future naval operations** in this strategic but disputed region.
- 3.2. **Undersea cables and critical infrastructures:** The recent sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines in the Baltic Sea has demonstrated the difficulty to trace responsibility back to the perpetrator. Responding to sabotage without escalating tensions is arduous and states might be reluctant to claim jurisdiction²⁰. The distinction between "what is peaceful and what is hostile" is also not always straightforward²¹. Energy security is an important 'peacetime' weapon as demonstrated by the current energy crisis. But security of our communication network (which mainly relies on undersea cables) is also crucial both for economic and defence purposes.
- 3.2.1. The waters north of Scotland host many undersea cables connecting Europe, the UK and America. This includes communication cables and energy interconnectors²², which constitute **critical infrastructures of Western Allies (for communication and energy security)**. Oil rigs and related infrastructures in the North Sea and in the waters north of Scotland could be at risk of sabotage²³. Communication cables can also be sabotaged and there is an additional risk of espionage of communication including sensitive financial/commercial data as well as classified/defence intelligence²⁴.
- 3.3. **The Arctic is of strategic importance to the Russian Navy** in general (in terms of naval bases and maritime approaches) and its nuclear strategic forces in particular; it is thus in Russia's interest to control and limit who access the Arctic waters and especially its Kola bastion²⁵. That the Russian 'Bastion defence' strategy might extend to the Shetlands or even the Orkneys has raised concerns and highlighted the importance of Scotland for British (and NATO) defence²⁶. The waters north of Scotland are also used by Russian submarines transiting from their Arctic bases *en route* to the Atlantic.
- 3.4. **Assertive naval activities:** With a renewed Cold War-like opposition between NATO and Russia, the High North will growingly be the theatre of ostensible naval exercises and assertive naval diplomacy such as naval presence in contested areas, assertion/contestation of freedom of navigation or innocent passage as well as an increase in shadowing patrols in a 'cat and mouse' way reminiscent of the Cold War. The Royal Navy tracking and shadowing Russian warships and submarines is crucial in the current context to demonstrate NATO's resolve²⁷.

²⁰ J. Raine (2019), "War or peace? Understanding the grey zone", *IISS Analysis Blog*, 03.04.2019 (accessed [online](#)).

²¹ C. Beckett (2021), "Getting to grips with grey zone conflict", *Blog Strategic Command*, MoD, 26.04.2021 (accessed [online](#)).

²² European Marine Observation and Data Network (2019), *Map of the week – Submarine telecommunication cables* (accessed [online](#)); Interreg North Sea Region – North SEE (n.d.), *Existing offshore linear energy infrastructure and grid connections* (accessed [online](#)); North Sea Transition Authority (n.d.), *Offshore Oil and Gas Activity Map* (accessed [online](#)).

²³ A. Lawson (2022), "UK energy firms to assess oil rig security after Nord Stream pipeline leak", *The Guardian*, 29 September 2022 (accessed [online](#)); D. Sheppard, R. Milne and A. Kazmin (2022), "Europe increases defence of energy assets after Baltic Sea 'sabotage'", *Financial Times*, 30 September 2022 (accessed [online](#)).

²⁴ C. Bueger and T. Liebetau (2021), "Protecting hidden infrastructure: The security politics of the global submarine data cable network", *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol.42., No.3, pp.391-413.

²⁵ Boulègue (2022), *op.cit.*

²⁶ D. Depledge and A. Østhagen (2021), "Scotland: A Touchstone for Security in the High North?", *The RUSI Journal*, Vol.166, No.6-7, pp.46-62.

- 3.5. **Assertive legal claims over contested maritime areas:** In the current tense international context, Russia is likely to be more assertive in its sovereignty claims over jurisdictions, motivated by economic considerations (as mentioned in para 2.3) but also by strategic imperatives mentioned above (para 3.3.).
- 3.6. **Planning for the defence of NATO’s northern flank:** Although there is no indication of an imminent military confrontation, the situation nevertheless requires long-term military planning to prevent and anticipate all eventualities. The strategic importance of the High North cannot be downplayed, both as a key strategic area for Russia and a potential theatre of naval confrontation reminiscent of the Cold War scenarios. The lacklustre performance of the Russian Navy in the Black Sea shall not give the false impression that NATO’s northern flank is not vulnerable; “NATO must continue to devote great effort and resources to [its defence]”²⁸, including monitoring Russian sea and air activities in the vicinity or within the UK’s territorial waters.
- 3.7. **Scotland:** Scotland holds a strategic position in regard to the above. According to observers, HM Naval Base Clyde in Scotland could be a primary target in case of war²⁹. Scotland is also located at the southernmost end of the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) Gap whose strategic importance has increased in light of Russian submarine activities³⁰. Overall, Scotland is strategically important from a maritime security, deterrence, and naval perspective as the site of a crucial naval base, ship-building industry, and its position commanding the GIUK gap, the North Sea and the access to and from Russia’s Bastion. Scottish waters are also the theatre of ‘innocent passage’ by Russian ships.
- 3.8. **From cooperation to cohabitation:** In the current context and given the securitization of the Arctic, the Arctic Council (which does not address defence questions anyway) is not sufficient anymore to assure stability and peaceful relations in the Arctic. With the planned accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, Russia will be the only non-NATO Arctic state, which will increase the defence and geopolitical dimension of Arctic politics. In the absence of institutional mechanisms to address security issues in the Arctic, it is crucial that the ‘rules of the game’ are followed, so as to avoid escalation (e.g. ‘Prevention of Incidents at Sea Beyond the Territorial Sea’ (INCSEA) that is essential to avoid incidents when shadowing foreign warships³¹).

4. **HM Government’s High North strategy**

- 4.1. HM Government has been one of the first Western governments to acknowledge the strategic importance of the Arctic in 2014³². Since 2019, HM Government has published five high-level documents that account for the strategic importance of the High North: *Maritime 2050* (January

²⁷ Royal Navy (2022), “Royal Navy tracks movements of Russian submarines into the North Sea”, News, 22 July 2022 (accessed [online](#)).

²⁸ -- (2022), “No additional resources for the Royal Navy’s contribution to the ‘High North strategy’”, *Navy Lookout*, Analysis, 26 April 2022 (accessed [online](#)).

²⁹ M. McLaughlin (2022), “Scotland a ‘high priority target’ for Russian attack”, *The Times*, 26 March 2022 (accessed [online](#)).

³⁰ Boulègue (2022), *op.cit.*; see also -- (2019), “The GIUK Gap’s strategic significance”, *Strategic Comments*, Vol.25, No.8, pp.i-iii.

³¹ UK/Russian Federation (2021), *Protocol of Amendments to the Agreement concerning the Prevention of Incidents at Sea beyond the Territorial Sea 15 July 1986*, Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs by Command of Her Majesty, June 2021, CP 451 (accessed [online](#)).

³² HM Government (2014), *The UK National Strategy for Maritime Security*, Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Defence by Command of Her Majesty, May 2014, Cm 8829 (accessed [online](#)).

2019)³³, the *Integrated Review* (March 2021)³⁴, the *Defence Command Paper* (March 2021)³⁵, the *UK's Defence Contribution in the High North* (i.e. *Arctic Paper*) (March 2022)³⁶ and the *National Strategy for Maritime Security* (NSMS) (August 2022)³⁷.

4.2. **Acknowledgement of the security/strategic importance of the High North:** The security implications of the new economic opportunities in the Arctic are acknowledged in passing in *Maritime 2050*³⁸, and the *Integrated Review* only mentions that NATO and collective security has an important High North dimension³⁹. However, the *Command Paper* is more detailed regarding the strategic importance of the High North/Arctic. It stresses the importance of Scotland from a naval perspective (in particular but not limited to shipbuilding and the base for strategic submarines and for surveillance aircrafts in the North Atlantic)⁴⁰. The *Arctic Paper* explains that for Russia the region is strategically very important; it has ramped up military presence, including submarine operations in the North Atlantic and China has also developed an interest in the Arctic and intends to develop its presence and reach there⁴¹.

4.2.1. Published at the start of the Ukraine war, the *Arctic Paper* expresses **HM Government's resolve to defend the UK's and its Allies' interests in the region** and to oppose those who disrespect freedom of navigation and threaten the stability of the Arctic⁴². Finally, the *NSMS* (released later in 2022) recognises that climate change creates opportunities and risks, in particular opening up new sea trade routes in a geopolitically tense context and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUUF)⁴³. The critical importance of defending/securing subsea infrastructures is also recognised⁴⁴.

4.3. **The need to foster cooperation** with like-minded states: The *Integrated Review* recognises the UK's proximity to the Arctic and the importance of climate change and the need to work towards sustainable development in the region. It also stresses the need to cooperate and avoid tensions (the Arctic Council is mentioned as a key actor)⁴⁵. Indeed, the *Arctic Paper* explains that the Arctic region has enjoyed a low level of tensions and that the UK would like that to continue with peaceful cooperation⁴⁶. Yet, given ongoing strategic issues, "within the Alliance, UK Defence plays a particular role in protecting underwater critical national infrastructure and ensuring freedom to operate in the North Atlantic, especially in the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) Gap"⁴⁷.

4.3.1. Although not expressed in those words, **becoming a net provider of security in the High North** is important to reassure allies of the UK's commitment to the defence of NATO's

³³ Department for Transport (2019), *op.cit.*

³⁴ HM Government (2021), *Global Britain in a competitive age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, Presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister by Command of Her Majesty, CP 403 (accessed [online](#)).

³⁵ MoD (2021), *Defence in a competitive age*, Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Defence by Command of Her Majesty, March 2021, CP 411 (accessed [online](#)).

³⁶ MoD (2022), *op.cit.*

³⁷ HM Government (2022), *National Strategy for Maritime Security*, Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Transport by Command of Her Majesty, August 2022, CP 724 (accessed [online](#)).

³⁸ Department for Transport (2019), *op.cit.*, section 11.4.

³⁹ HM Government (2021), *op.cit.*, p.72.

⁴⁰ MoD (2021), *op.cit.*, pp.50; 58.

⁴¹ MoD (2022), *op.cit.*, p.5.

⁴² *Ibid*, p.7.

⁴³ HM Government (2022), *op.cit.*, para 20, p.26.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pp.66-67.

⁴⁵ HM Government (2021), *op.cit.*, p.64.

⁴⁶ MoD (2022), *op.cit.*, p.4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.7.

northern flank. This fits with the navy's soft power capabilities and its role in terms of coalition building⁴⁸.

4.4. The need to develop relevant capabilities for intervention: The *Command Paper* acknowledges that it is key for the UK to invest enough in order to be able to project into this crucial NATO flank along with allies⁴⁹. The *Arctic Paper* openly recognises the strategic importance of the High North (economic opportunities, critical infrastructures, freedom of navigation, disruptive actors) and the need for HM Government and the MoD to plan for increasing presence and operations there⁵⁰. Such a commitment requires a procurement strategy and investments in antisubmarine warfare capabilities, maritime patrol aircrafts, surveillance means, and cold weather equipment⁵¹. Similarly, the *NSMS* stresses that "these new routes will require government action, taken in accordance with UNCLOS, to provide security, alleviate SOLAS concerns, ensure navigational rights are upheld, and address risks to the fragile marine environment"⁵².

4.4.1. Whereas the Royal Navy trains for operations in extreme cold weather⁵³, **neither the *Arctic Paper* nor the *NSMS* mentions icebreakers** whose importance has otherwise been identified; something that Russia, Canada and even China have endorsed⁵⁴.

4.5. Naval presence in the High North: The Royal Navy has stepped up its presence in the High North, exercising with allies, especially Norway⁵⁵ and, in October 2022, conducting a survey operation deep into the Arctic circle⁵⁶. Operational presence to protect offshore infrastructures has been ramped up⁵⁷, which has positive effects not only in terms of defence but also in terms of deterring competitors and reassuring allies. Referring to the March-April 2022 large naval exercise in the High North, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said that "the Arctic is becoming an area of increasing military competition and the security of the region is directly linked to our national security"⁵⁸. Commenting on the British presence in the High North, the Chief of the Norwegian Joint Headquarters, Lieutenant General Odlo, said that "military operations in the High North can be challenging. If allies are to have the ability to operate successfully here, it is important to train in these areas regularly"⁵⁹. This increased allied presence in the High North is considered by Norway as "part of the new normal"⁶⁰.

⁴⁸ B. Germond (2021), "Global Britain and the Search for Collective Seapower", *The National Interest*, 8 November 2021 (accessed [online](#)); B. Germond (2022), "The Solidaristic Society of Maritime Nations", *Australian Naval Review*, 2022, No.1, pp.72-85.

⁴⁹ MoD (2021), *op.cit.*, p.19.

⁵⁰ MoD (2022), *op.cit.*, p.8.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp.12-13.

⁵² HM Government (2022), *op.cit.*, para 23, p.63,

⁵³ Royal Navy (n.d.), Cold Weather Training (accessed [online](#)).

⁵⁴ Defence Committee (House of Commons), Oral evidence 'Defence and Climate Change, HC 179' by Lieutenant General Richard Nugee, (Retired), Lead, Ministry of Defence's 2021 Climate Change and Sustainability Review, 22 November 2022 (accessible [online](#)) Q49.

⁵⁵ Royal Navy (2022), "Royal Navy completes largest Arctic defence exercise since the Cold War", *News*, 11 April 2022 (accessed [online](#)).

⁵⁶ Royal Navy (2022), "HMS Enterprise boldly goes into Arctic on scientific mission", *News*, 21 October 2022 (accessed [online](#)).

⁵⁷ MoD (2022), "Joint statement by Ministers of the Joint Expeditionary Force", *Press release*, 3 October 2022 (accessed [here](#)); D. Frazer (2022), "Navy steps up North Sea energy patrols", *BBC*, 5 October 2022 (accessed [here](#)).

⁵⁸ HM Government (2022), "UK Armed Forces join largest Arctic exercise in 30 years", *News Story*, 15 March 2022 (accessed [online](#)).

⁵⁹ Chief of the Norwegian Joint Headquarters, Lieutenant General Yngve Odlo, quoted in A. Edvardsen (2022), "The Norwegian Navy Followed Russian Frigate's Voyage North", *High North News*, 9 December 2022 (accessed [online](#)).

5. Conclusions

- 5.1. There is a **strategic acceleration in the High North** as a result of two systemic changes: climate change and Russia's aggressive revisionism of the *status quo*.
- 5.2. **The maritime dimension of security in the Arctic and waters north of Scotland is key:** from conflicting **sovereignty claims** over maritime areas to the **protection of undersea cables** and infrastructures to upholding **freedom of navigation**. Additionally, from a naval and strategic planning perspective, the waters north of Scotland are crucial for the **defence of NATO's northern flank**.
- 5.3. **The resilience of the Arctic ecosystem is at risk** due to the decreasing level of environmental management cooperation between Russia and other state and non-state stakeholders.
- 5.4. The 2022 *Arctic Paper* is clear about the **UK's intent to commit to Arctic Security**: "we will protect and, where appropriate, assert our rights against those who wish to challenge the rules-based international system and freedom of navigation or threaten the stability of the region in other ways [...] The UK is prepared to defend our Arctic Allies and respond to aggression"⁶¹. This is corroborated by the recent increased **operational presence in the High North**.
- 5.5. However, if HM Government wants to secure the UK's interests and those of our allies in the region, **the objectives set up in the Arctic Paper needs to translate into long-term budgetary commitments**, including concrete investments in the Royal Navy.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1. **Priority should be put on assets and capabilities which will enable the UK to sustain its presence in the Arctic and enduringly contribute to collective security in the High North in support of national, NATO and partners' interests.** These interests include economic stability, environmental sustainability, and command of the waters north of Scotland in the context of growing geopolitical tensions.
- 6.2. Such a commitment to expand capabilities will be key to **increasing the UK's capacity to intervene and respond to crises in the region, reassure allies and partners, and deter competitors**.
- 6.3. Such a long-term strategy requires **further investments in the Royal Navy's** capacity to operate in extreme cold weather, and more generally in naval procurement. As stressed by the Defence Committee in December 2021, the Royal Navy's resources are already stretched and an increase in funding is necessary⁶².

7. Question for HM Government

- 7.1. What are HM Government's plans for the UK to be a net contributor to Arctic security in the long-term given 1) the current risks and threats and 2) the limited resources at disposal of the Navy?

⁶⁰ Commander Pål Gudbrandsen, Acting Commander of the Royal Norwegian Navy, quoted in T. Nilsen (2022), "NATO frigates shadowed outside Russia's Arctic submarine bases", *Barents Observer*, 25 October 2022 (accessed [online](#)).

⁶¹ MoD (2022), *op.cit.*, p.7.

⁶² House of Commons, Defence Committee (2021), "We're going to need a bigger Navy", Third Report of Session 2021–22, Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 7 December 2021, HC 168 (accessed [online](#)).

- 7.2. Does HM Government recognise the need to increase the Royal Navy's capabilities for operations in the High North and in extreme cold environments (e.g. icebreakers)?
- 7.3. Is HM Government planning to translate the objectives set up in the 2022 *Arctic Paper* into budgetary commitment for the Navy/naval procurement?