



## FRANCE AND THE NEW STRATEGIC CHALLENGES IN THE ARCTIC



©Jonathan Belenand/Marine nationale/Défense

The BSAM *Rhône* in the Norwegian fjords



© Richard Nicolas-Nelson/Armée de l'Air/Défense

Rafale C of the 30<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing deployed by the French Air Force in Bodø (Norway) as part of the 2019 *Arctic Challenge* exercise



© Armée de Terre / Défense

Group of mountain commandos in Greenland during the UPPICK exercise, 8-11 April 2019



# FOREWORD BY THE MINISTER FOR THE ARMED FORCES



**Few people know it: France's interest in the Arctic is far from being new.** France was the first country to settle in this area, when it built a scientific research base in the Svalbard archipelago in 1963. From this tradition of polar research have emerged some great explorers, in the footsteps of Paul-Emile Victor and Jean-Baptiste Charcot.

**Much more than just a research laboratory, the Arctic is today a highly strategic area.** The 2017 Strategic Review of the Ministry for the Armed Forces indicated that it "may one day become an area of confrontation". It is a fact: the new commercial, maritime and air routes in the Arctic, as well as the appetite of many actors for the exploitation of its resources herald increased competition between different States. Michel Rocard summarized these challenges as such: "The Arctic? It's a second Middle East!"

**These recent changes are not a mere coincidence.** The Arctic is one of the places on Earth where the effects of global warming are the most visible. From 2003 to 2011, the surface area of the ice pack shrank by 50%. Preserving the Arctic means preserving the planet, there is an emergency and we all know it.

**France wants to be a lucid voice against growing ambitions: the Arctic belongs to no one.** Only a smart cooperation between the countries concerned will lead to meaningful and indispensable results: protection of natural resources, freedom of navigation and the fight against climate change.

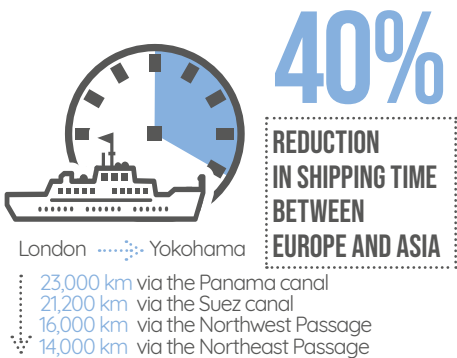
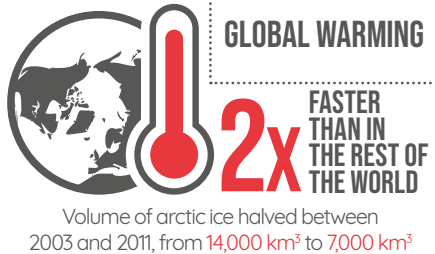
**The Ministry for the Armed Forces plays its full role in supporting the French strategy.** We recently demonstrated this when a ship of the French Navy crossed the North-East Passage: it was the first non-Russian military vessel to use this route in full autonomy.

Florence Parly

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "F. Parly". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned below the printed name.

# THE ARCTIC

## A REGION OF GROWING STRATEGIC INTEREST



The prospects for resource exploitation and the opening of new sea routes give the Arctic a new strategic importance.

The effects of global warming are causing unprecedented changes in the Arctic region in a uncertain time frame and a hardly predictable rate. **The temperature rise is 2°C (3,5°F) above the global average** (as illustrated by the heat waves of summer 2019, notably in Alaska).

**The Arctic sea ice extent shrank by 50% between 2003 and 2011.** New shipping routes have become accessible, especially during the summer months. The Northeast Passage (NEP), also known as the Northern Sea Route (NSR) in Russia, connects Europe to China along the Russian Northern and Eastern coastlines. Although shipping conditions remain highly constraining today, **the NEP would reduce the travel time between Rotterdam and Yokohama by nearly 40%** compared to the route

running through the Suez Canal and the Strait of Malacca. The Chinese *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) is already planning a sea route through the Arctic. Moscow has likewise undertaken **a major effort to modernise airport infrastructures.**

Since the early 2000, **airlines** connecting North America to Asia and the Middle East **increasingly exploit polar routes** thanks to technological progress.

**As far as energy is concerned,** the Arctic is estimated to hold to 30% and 20% of the world's undiscovered gas and oil reserves, respectively. The concentration of rare earths, particularly in Russia and Greenland (which may account to 25% of the world's reserves), offers exploitation opportunities that attract a rising number of players in the region, primarily China.

The interest sparked by the economic prospects of the Arctic, Russia's remilitarisation of its northern coast, as well as China's investment

policies are conducive to a **growing assertion of sovereignty from the riparian states.** The region is thus of increasing strategic and military importance, particularly for Europe which is directly concerned by the evolutions in the area.

The European Union (EU) and several European countries (Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) have each issued an **Arctic strategy paper**, like the United States, Canada, Russia and China. **France** similarly adopted a National Roadmap for the Arctic in June 2016.



**The Arctic, a region of growing interest**

- Sea ice cover in september 2018
- Average sea ice cover in 1979

- Resources**
- Oil and gas resources basins
  - Liquefied natural gas terminal
  - Rare earths and other strategic mining resources

- Traffic**
- Strategic crossing point
  - Sea routes
  - Main air traffic flows
  - Port infrastructure modernisation
  - Airport infrastructure modernisation
  - Search and rescue centers



**A EUROPEAN MATTER**

**50%** of the Arctic inhabitants **ARE EUROPEANS**

**24%** **HYDROCARBONS** consumed by the EU originate from the Arctic

**200 MILLION €** spent by the EU since 2002 on Arctic research



# AN INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE TO WHICH FRANCE CONTRIBUTES

The main forum for intergovernmental cooperation among Arctic countries is the **Arctic Council (AC)**, established by the Ottawa Declaration of 1996. **Since 2000, France stands among the eight European observer states** (alongside Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) having gained this status thanks to their Arctic-related scientific research activities.

## 2 MAJOR INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENTS CONCLUDED UNDER THE AC

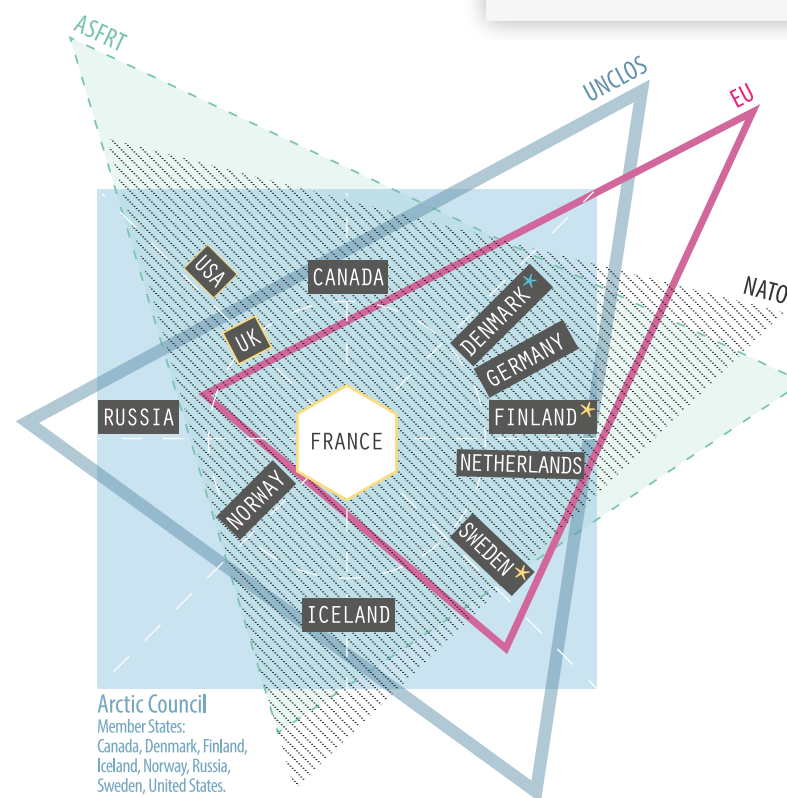
**2011** Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic

**2013** Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic

France is also involved in the **Arctic Security Forces Round Table (ASFRT)**, one of the rare bodies for military dialogue in the area. Created in 2011 by Norway and the United States, the ASFRT brings together NATO partners sharing security interests in the Arctic. It provides a discussion forum wherein non-member states like Russia may be invited.

Finally, France contributes to the governance of the area as a member of **NATO** and of the **EU**, which is itself a member of several regional cooperation organisations (Barents Euro-Arctic Council, Council of Baltic Sea States). **Out of the eight Arctic Council member states, five are also part of NATO** (Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway and the United States), **and three of the EU** (Denmark, Finland, Sweden).

Several territorial disputes concern the Arctic, as illustrated by the claims over the Lomonosov Ridge (an undersea mountain range), or the status of the straits bordering the Northeast and Northwest sea routes.





# FRENCH ACTIVITIES IN THE ARCTIC

Security issues are partly linked to the **development of tourism and commercial activities** in the Arctic. **Several French companies operate there** such as the cruise line operator Ponant, or Total which owns 20% of *Yamal LNG* and 10% of the *Arctic LNG 2* project, two major liquefied gas plants in northern Siberia. New innovative projects, particularly in the **space domain**, could also be initiated.

France's **cutting-edge scientific research on the Arctic** translates into an observer status in the Arctic Council. Several institutes, such as the CNRS and the French Polar Institute Paul-Émile Victor (IPEV) based in Svalbard, carry out polar scientific research, the latter being the driving force behind many projects in the region.

The **French National Arctic Roadmap (FNAR)** publicly affirms France's interest in the region for the first time. It includes a defence section that recalls the **objective of developing a comprehensive knowledge of the Arctic environment**, with regard to issues related to **resource exploitation, the environment, and maritime security**.

In that increasingly competitive and unpredictable environment, the Ministry for the Armed Forces is involved in the Arctic to both **take into account its strategic dimension** and protect our national and European interests, as well as to **expand bilateral relations** with our regional partners.



**16,5** MILLION TONNES PER YEAR  
**YAMAL**  
OF LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS

**19,8** MILLION TONNES PER YEAR\*  
**ARCTIC 2**  
OF LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS

\*Forecast figures




# THE ACTION OF THE MINISTRY FOR THE ARMED FORCES IN ARCTIC



## Armed forces operating in the Arctic

-  Passage of the BSAM Rhône
-  Regular stopover point
-  Air Policing Missions
-  Joint exercises
-  "Extreme cold" training
-  Ice diving exercises
-  Army training in Greenland

## Strengthening partnerships in the region

-  Strategic dialogue
-  French Defence Attaché
-  Non-residency



As the only state actor with the technical capacities to deploy to the Arctic, the Ministry for the Armed Forces may be called upon to provide assistance to the civilian sector (search and rescue, remediation), in addition to operating in the region as part of its primary missions. The Ministry's main priorities are to preserve its freedom of action, increase its knowledge of the Arctic environment, and secure energy supply routes to Europe, to be better prepared if necessary.

France maintains close partnerships with countries bordering the Arctic Ocean. The France-Finland relation, structured by a framework paper signed in October 2018, is thus experiencing a new dynamic in the strategic, operational and capability domains. The relationship with Denmark is deepening both in the operational and scientific fields, notably in Greenland and the Faroe Islands. It is articulated through a letter of intent signed in June 2014, and a statement on European security by the French President and the Danish Prime Minister (August 2018). France and Sweden likewise adopted on 7 June 2019 a joint statement, comprising a specific European section defining common priorities in security and defence. Norway is also a privileged partner in

the area, with which France maintains a dynamic maritime cooperation. Iceland is a key projection point in the high north for the French Navy and Air Force, which make several stopovers a year (for example, during the visit of the *Patrouille de France* to the United States in 2017). Finally, France and Canada are planning to strengthen their cooperation in the region, both strategically and militarily.

French armed forces deploy in the area during joint exercises and training missions in polar environment. The French Air Force regularly participates in the *Arctic Challenge* exercise, organised every two years by Finland, Norway and Sweden. In addition, France deployed a contingent of 300 military personnel to Finland in May 2019 for the third edition of the *Bold Quest 19.1* exercise, ranking third among participating countries in terms of personnel. The Air Force is also engaged in air policing missions in Iceland and Finland.

The French Navy has sailed through the Northeast Passage in full autonomy for the first time in September 2018. As the first non-Russian military vessel to use this passage without the support of icebreakers, the BSAM *Rhône* helped increase knowledge of the Arctic

environment, and cooperation with the navies of the regional countries (Canada, Denmark, Norway, and the United States).

Finally, France deployed 2,700 military personnel during the NATO exercise *Trident Juncture 18* in Norway, Iceland and the North Atlantic from 25 October to 7 November 2018. It brought together 51,000 military personnel from 31 nations, making it the largest military drill of the Alliance since the end of the Cold War. France has been the second largest contributing nation in terms of the diversity of capabilities deployed.

## DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND STRATEGY

AIMS AT STRENGTHENING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE COUNTRIES OF THE REGION

6 ARCTIC COUNTRIES

The DGRIS holds regular strategic dialogues with six states of the area. These dialogues encourage exchange of views and identify opportunities for cooperation.

7 DEFENCE ATTACHE IN THE ARCTIC REGION

SUPPORT STRATEGIC RESEARCH

1 ARCTIC OBSERVATORY

The Foundation for Strategic Research (FRS) follows-up Arctic-related issues. This observatory organizes annual seminars gathering scholars, institutional and corporate actors. This Arctic community offers in-depth thinking on the challenges the region is facing.

# THE ACTION OF THE MINISTRY FOR THE ARMED FORCES

## IN ARCTIC IN FIGURES

### AN INCREASING CONTRIBUTION TO THE ARCTIC CHALLENGE EXERCISE

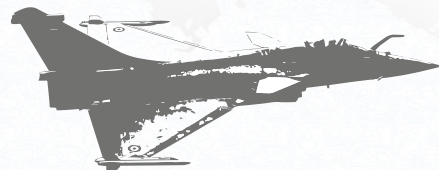
France has tripled its capabilities in 4 years

**2015** 5 Mirage 2000, 110 military personnel deployed in Rovaniemi (Finland)

**2017** 3 Rafale, 6 Mirage 2000, 230 military personnel deployed in Rovaniemi (Finland)

**2019** 10 Rafale, 4 Mirage 2000-5 and 1 AWACS (E-3C), 300 military personnel deployed in Bodø (Norway), 3 weeks

Outside the host countries, France is the second largest contributor to the Arctic Challenge 2019 exercise.



### AIR POLICING

France, a key actor in securing airspace

### ICELAND



Participation in the Air Policing mission in 2008

Regular stopovers of aircraft transiting between France and North America

### STRENGTHENING THE EXPERTISE IN POLAR ENVIRONMENT COMBAT

- 1** Annual raid in Greenland
  - 5** Exercises with the Arctic countries in extreme cold conditions
  - 13** Courses in extreme cold conditions in the Arctic region
- 2019

### FRENCH PARTICIPATION IN THE TRIDENT JUNCTURE 18 EXERCISE

- Engaging units from each service branch in a multinational environment and in extreme cold conditions
- **2,700 French military personnel involved**
- **The second most diverse contribution in terms of deployed capabilities**
- One on-board staff, French navy capabilities with five major naval ships (1 helicopter carrier, 2 frigates, 1 attack submarine, 1 supply vessel), 6 helicopters and 1 maritime patrol aircraft, **French Air Force** capabilities with 4 Mirage 2000 and 1 helicopter, **French Army** capabilities with 1 battalion, two combat companies, and 4 helicopters, plus support means.

### NAVAL AND MARITIME AVIATION ACTIVITIES

France, a recognised maritime stakeholder in the Arctic

- **Deployment of air and naval assets** on a regular basis in the area
- **2019** : the Offshore Support and Assistance Vessel **Rhône** has sailed through the Northeast passage

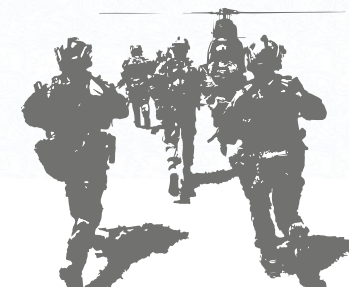
**17** days totally independant without the support of a Russian ice-breaker

**4 800** nautical miles

**13** time zones crossed

**8** seas crossed

... and **1** day **48** hours long, care of crossing the international dateline.







The BSAM *Rhône* beneath the northern lights



Rafale B of the 4<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing deployed by the French Air Force in Bodø (Norway) as part of the 2019 *Arctic Challenge* exercise



“Chevalier Tricolore” exercise, in cooperation with the 12<sup>th</sup> armoured regiment of Canada and the 4<sup>th</sup> Alpine regiment from Gap, Québec region

