

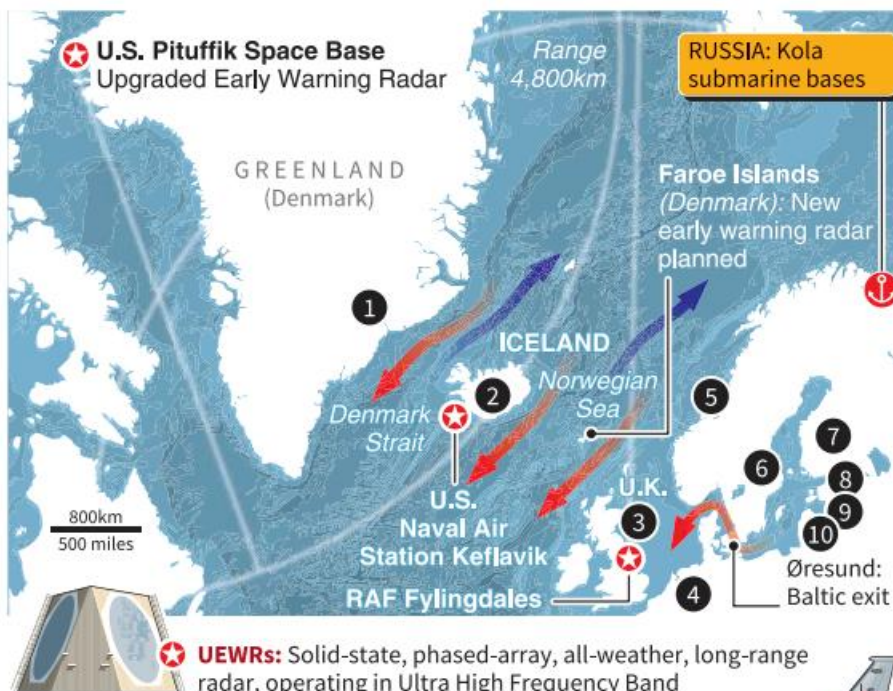
Why are tensions high in the Arctic?

Who are the members of the Arctic Council? Why has the Arctic region become an area of interest now? What is the convict around the Northwest Passage? How has Russia made its presence known in the region?

The Arctic, once a **remote and isolated region**, is rapidly becoming **hotspot of geopolitical tension** due to climate change, resource competition, and shifting global trade routes. As nations vie for control over these **emerging opportunities**, the risk of conflict in the region continues to grow.

Ice cold war

The melting of Arctic sea ice has prompted renewed interest in the region. The U.K. has repeatedly emphasised the strategic importance of the Greenland-Iceland-U.K. (GIUK) gap, a critical choke point for NATO's naval defences



UEWRs: Solid-state, phased-array, all-weather, long-range radar, operating in Ultra High Frequency Band

Boeing P-8A Poseidon: Maritime patrol and reconnaissance for Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), based out of Keflavik



Jan 2025: Russian spy vessel Yantar in U.K. waters



NORDIC WARDEN NATO Joint Expeditionary Force	
1 Denmark	6 Sweden
2 Iceland	7 Finland
3 U.K.	8 Estonia
4 Netherlands	9 Latvia
5 Norway	10 Lithuania

Sources: IISS, Geopolitical Monitor

Picture: army-news.ru

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- **Melting Ice and New Opportunities:**
 - Climate change is accelerating the **melting of Arctic ice**, revealing **untapped natural resources** such as **fossil fuels, rare earth elements, phosphates, and copper**.
 - Previously inaccessible resources and trade routes are now becoming viable, leading to **increased competition and territorial claims**.
- **Lack of Legal Safeguards:**
 - Unlike Antarctica, the Arctic lacks a **comprehensive international treaty** to safeguard it, leading to **overlapping claims** and military posturing by nations.
 - The **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** allows countries to extend their claims to the **seabed** if they prove **natural prolongation** of their **continental shelf**, creating potential for **territorial disputes**.
- **Territorial Control and Economic Zones:**
 - **The Arctic** is controlled by **eight countries: Canada, Denmark (via Greenland), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the U.S.**, forming the Arctic Council.
 - These countries **exercise sovereignty** over **Arctic land and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)**, which extend **200 nautical miles from their coastlines**.
 - There are territorial disputes over the seabed and maritime claims, with Russia, Canada, and Denmark submitting overlapping claims.
- **Russia's Strategic Military Presence:**
 - Russia is the **only Arctic Council member** with a **significant fleet of icebreakers**, including a nuclear-powered one, to navigate the challenging Arctic sea ice.
 - Russia has built and maintained **several military bases in the region**, reinforcing its influence and asserting its presence in Arctic affairs.

Why has the Arctic region become an area of interest now?

- **Strategic Resources:**
 - The Arctic holds a significant portion of the **world's undiscovered oil (13%) and untapped natural gas reserves (30%)**, as highlighted by a **2009 U.S. Geological Survey report**.
 - It also contains deposits of **rare earth elements**, critical for technology and green energy industries, attracting investment, particularly from China.
- **New Trade Routes:**
 - Melting ice has made **new shipping routes accessible**, such as the **Northeast Passage along Russia's coast**, offering shorter travel distances between East Asia and Europe, saving billions in transport costs.

- The **Northwest Passage** is a key potential **Arctic shipping route**, creating tension over its control, especially between Canada and the U.S.
- **Growing Geopolitical Rivalry:**
 - The Arctic has become a **focal point** for **global powers**, with **Russia, NATO countries, and China** showing increasing interest in asserting their presence and claims.
 - NATO's growing military presence, particularly after **Sweden and Finland** joined the alliance following **Russia's invasion of Ukraine**, has heightened tensions in the region.

Conflict Around the Northwest Passage:

- **Canada vs. U.S.:**
 - Canada claims the **Northwest Passage** as part of its **internal waters**, granting it control over navigation.
 - The U.S. views it as an **international waterway**, asserting freedom of navigation for all nations, which **creates tensions with Canada**.
- **Strategic Importance:**
 - The passage is critical for **global trade and military navigation**, especially with Russia's increasing military activities and the U.S.'s interest in the region.
 - The U.S. has **long questioned the legitimacy of Denmark's sovereignty over Greenland**, further complicating the status of Arctic territories.

Russia's Presence in the Arctic:

- **Military Expansion:**
 - Russia has made significant investments in **Arctic military infrastructure**, including **building military bases and conducting joint exercises with China**.
 - Russia's strategic focus on the region includes maintaining control **over critical choke points**, such as the **Greenland-Iceland-UK gap**, which is important for NATO's naval defenses.
- **Symbolic Acts:**
 - **Russia's 2007 MIR-1 submarine expedition** to plant a Russian flag on the Arctic seabed symbolized its claim to the region, underscoring its ambitions.
- **Environmental and Economic Strategies:**
 - Russia is cautious about **granting access to the Polar Silk Road to China**, despite the latter's interest in utilizing Arctic trade routes.
 - The region's natural resources and **potential shipping lanes** are critical to Russia's economic and geopolitical strategy.