

# Britain and NATO Prepare for War on Russia in the Arctic

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Region: [Europe](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

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*On September 30 the UK's foreign minister, Jeremy Hunt, delivered an [astonishing tirade](#), saying "The EU was set up to protect freedom. It was the Soviet Union that stopped people leaving. The lesson from history is clear: if you turn the EU club into a prison, the desire to get out won't diminish, it will grow — and we won't be the only prisoner that will want to escape." His comparison of the EU to gulags of former years played well with many people in Britain, but was understandably regarded as totally inappropriate by the EU, whose spokesman's [polite observation was](#) "I would say respectfully that we would all benefit – and in particular foreign affairs ministers – from opening a history book from time to time."*

The lunacy didn't stop there. Not content with insulting the EU's 27 countries, the government in London decided to whip up even more patriotic fervour by again trying to portray Russia as a threat to the United Kingdom.

In June 2018 the UK's Sun newspaper [carried the headline](#) "Britain will send RAF Typhoon fighter jets to Iceland in bid to tackle Russian aggression" and since then Mr Williamson hasn't altered [his contention](#) that "the Kremlin continues to challenge us in every domain." (Williamson is the man [who declared](#) in March 2018 that "Frankly Russia should go away — it should shut up," which was one of the most juvenile public utterances of recent years.)

It was [reported](#) on September 29 that Williamson was concerned about "growing Russian aggression 'in our back yard'," and that the Government was drawing up a "defence Arctic strategy" with 800 commandos being deployed to a new base in Norway. In an [interview](#) "Mr Williamson highlighted Russia's re-opening of Soviet-era bases and 'increased tempo' of submarine activity as evidence that Britain needed to 'demonstrate we're there' and 'protect our interests'."

Mr Williamson has not indicated what "interests" the United Kingdom could have in the Arctic region, where it has no territory.

The eight countries with territory north of the Arctic Circle are Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States. They have legitimate interests in the region which [is twice the area](#) of the US and Canada combined. But Britain has not one single claim to the Arctic. Not even a tenuous one like Iceland's, which is [based on the fact that](#) although its mainland is not within the Arctic Circle, the Circle does pass through Grimsey Island, about 25 kilometres north of Iceland's north coast. Britain's Shetland Islands, its northernmost land, are 713 kilometres (443 miles) south of the Arctic Circle.

So why does the UK declare that it has “interests” in the Arctic and that the region is “in our back yard”? How can it possibly feel threatened?

The [Arctic Institute](#) observed in February 2018 that Russia’s “newer Arctic strategy papers focus on preventing smuggling, terrorism, and illegal immigration instead of balancing military power with NATO. These priorities suggest that Russia’s security aims in the Arctic have to do with safeguarding the Arctic as a strategic resource base... In general, the government-approved documents seem to have moved from an assertive tone that highlights Russia’s rivalry with NATO to a less abrasive tone based on securing economic development.”

And economic development is what it’s all about. On September 28 “[it was reported that](#) “a Danish-flagged cargo ship successfully passed through the Russian Arctic in a trial voyage showing that melting sea ice could potentially open a new trade route from Europe to east Asia.” It is obviously in the best economic interests of the European Union and Russia that the route be developed for commercial transit. To do this requires avoidance of conflict in the region.

So what’s your problem, Defence Minister Williamson?

In August Britain’s Parliamentary Defence Committee [published](#) *On Thin Ice: UK Defence in the Arctic* which concluded that “There is little doubt that the Arctic and the High North are seeing an increasing level of military activity. There is much greater divergence in the evidence we have taken on what the reasons behind this are, particularly in relation to Russia. One view is that there is no offensive intent behind Russia’s military build-up and that it is simply trying to regenerate military capacity in order to reassert sovereignty. The opposite view is that this is just one more part of Russia’s aggressive reassertion of great power competition.”

The Danish Government told the Committee that

“Presently, Denmark sees no need for an increased military engagement or enhanced operative role for NATO in the Arctic”,

and the Swedish Ambassador said

“The Swedish Arctic is a limited part of Swedish territory. We are more a Baltic Sea nation than an Arctic nation... Obviously, the whole area around the Arctic, in particular the Kola Peninsula, is of strategic importance to Russia and they have a serious military presence there. We see all of that. Is that reason to call it militarisation of the Arctic?”

In January [Reuters reported that](#) China had notified its Arctic strategy, “pledging to work more closely with Moscow in particular to create an Arctic maritime counterpart — a ‘Polar Silk Road’ — to its ‘one belt, one road’ overland trade route to Europe. Both the Kremlin and Beijing have repeatedly stated that their ambitions are primarily commercial and environmental, not military.” It couldn’t be plainer that Russia and China want the Arctic to be a profitable mercantile trade route, while Russia wants to [continue exploration](#) for oil, gas and mineral deposits, which are important for its economy.

To develop the Arctic requires peace and stability. It would be impossible to reap the benefits of the new sea-route and potentially enormous energy and mineral riches if there were to be conflict in the North. It is obviously in the best interests of Russia and China that there be tranquillity rather than military confrontation.

But Britain's Defence Minister [insists](#) there must be a military build-up by the UK in the Arctic "If we want to be protecting our interests in what is effectively our own back yard." He is [backed](#) by the Parliament's Defence Committee which states that

"NATO's renewed focus on the North Atlantic is welcome and the Government should be congratulated on the leadership the UK has shown on this issue."

NATO is always on the lookout for excuses to indulge in military action (such as its nine-month blitz that [destroyed Libya](#)), and [has announced](#) it will conduct Arctic-focussed Exercise *Trident Juncture* in November, which [Naval Today noted](#) will be "one of the largest ever with 40,000 personnel, around 120 aircraft and as many as 70 ships converging in Norway."

The NATO military alliance is preparing for war in the Arctic, and deliberately confronting Russia by conducting manoeuvres ever-closer to its borders. It had better be very careful.

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