

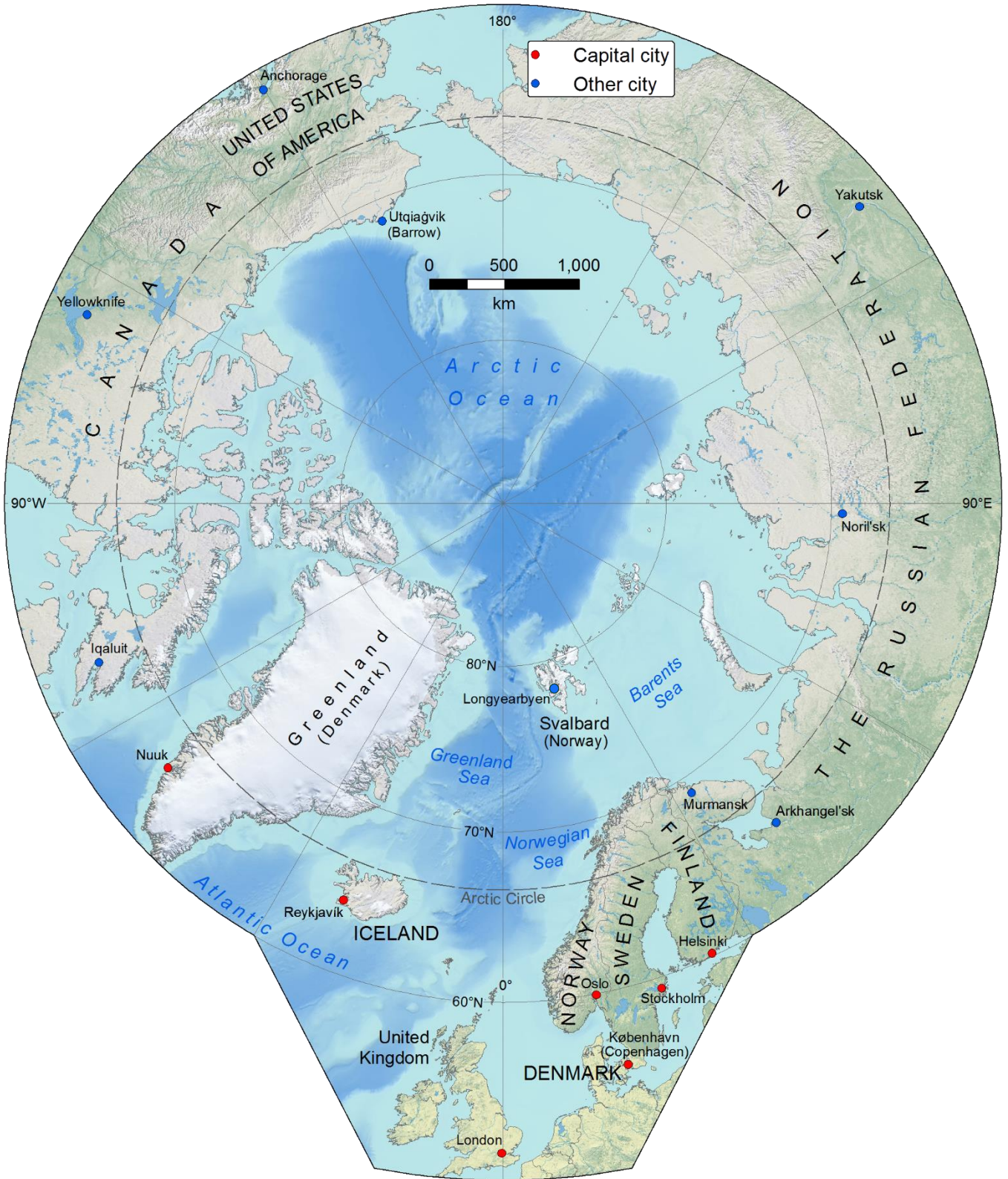


Ministry
of Defence



The UK's Defence Contribution in the High North

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Map provided by the British Antarctic Survey

Foreword

By the Secretary of State for
Defence



The High North, including the Arctic, matters to the UK and UK Defence. Developments impact upon our environment, prosperity, energy supply, and security. As the region's closest neighbour without territory within the Arctic Circle, the UK will continue to work with our Allies and partners to ensure that increasing access to the region and its resources is managed safely, sustainably, and responsibly.

The Arctic has historically been an area of low tension and we wish it to remain so. However, melting sea ice in the Arctic brings threats as well as opportunities: Russia is taking an increasingly militarised approach to the region; and China is supporting its proposed Polar Silk Road with a range of infrastructure and capabilities that have dual-use potential. As the region becomes increasingly accessible, threats from elsewhere around the globe could spill over into the Arctic.

We must be able to respond appropriately to the changing regional dynamic arising from the receding sea ice. As a leading European NATO Ally, the UK will defend our Arctic Allies should the need arise, and contest malign and destabilising behaviours and activity that threatens our interests, the interests of our Allies, and the stability of the region.

That is why the UK Armed Forces will be doing more with our close Arctic Allies and partners, as part of NATO, bilaterally, and through other multilateral groupings such as the Joint Expeditionary force. The Royal Navy, including our dedicated Littoral Response Group (North), will periodically operate in the High North alongside Allies and partners, the Army will expand its cold weather training, and the RAF will deploy P-8A Maritime Patrol Aircraft to the region and continue participating in Icelandic Air Policing.

The unique environment of the Arctic continues to present operational challenges, requiring new approaches and solutions. UK Defence will build on recent investments, including in our new P-8A Maritime Patrol Aircraft and our new Multi-Role Ocean Surveillance vessel, and identifying opportunities offered by space technologies.

This inaugural Strategy lays out Defence's approach to the region, in support of the wider cross-Government Arctic Policy Framework, and reflects the importance of the region for the years to come.

The Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP
Secretary of State for Defence



The High North

The High North region, including the Arctic¹ and parts of the North Atlantic, is important to the UK's environment, prosperity, energy supply, and security. This is reflected in the UK Government's approach to the region, as defined by the 2018 Arctic Policy Framework – *Beyond the Ice*² – and reaffirmed in the *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*³. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has an important role to play in helping to deliver UK Government objectives. This Strategy sets out the Defence objectives that support wider UK aims, and how we intend to deliver them. It will guide Defence efforts over a 10-year period, including long-term capability decisions. While its focus is on the High North, it notes that the region is contiguous with the North Atlantic and cannot be isolated from UK interests in adjacent regions, including Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea region, and the rest of the world.

The Arctic has, for many years, enjoyed constructive international co-operation and has been characterised by low tensions. While not immune from wider geopolitical tension, we will work constructively with all who share our aspirations for a peaceful and cooperative Arctic.

The region is changing as a consequence of climate change, with the Arctic warming three

times faster than the rest of the world⁴. Increased ice melt in the Arctic will open up shorter transit routes to Asia, provide easier access to proven substantial reserves of unexploited natural resources, and see a continued increase in tourism and visitor numbers. While offering economic benefits to the region, there will be a greater risk of accidents and environmental disasters such as oil spills, which will require close co-operation with all Arctic states and Arctic communities to ensure safety at sea.

The further opening-up of the Arctic region also brings with it heightened economic competition. Many of the natural resources in those areas of the Arctic Ocean that are currently inaccessible due to ice cover will fall under the clearly defined control of Arctic Coastal States⁵, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS)⁶. However, whilst there has been peaceful management of a number of overlapping competing territorial claims, some maritime boundaries and the delimitation of the Arctic continental shelf remain to be resolved, especially claims relating to the outer-continental shelf governed by Article 76 of UNCLOS. Through the Illulissat Declaration, the Arctic Coastal states have all committed to resolving maritime issues within the framework of UNCLOS, and there have been no serious problems arising from resource competition as yet.

Coastal State reactions to the expected gradual increase in maritime traffic, such as the adoption of national regulations, which

¹ In this instance, and all future instances within this Strategy, "The Arctic" comprises all territory within the Arctic Circle. The High North is less easily defined, but we take it to be the Greater Arctic, including parts of the North Atlantic, for the purposes of this Strategy.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/beyond-the-ice-uk-policy-towards-the-arctic>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-britain-in-a-competitive-age-the-integrated-review-of-security-defence-development-and-foreign-policy>

⁴ Arctic Climate Change Update 2021: Key Trends and Impacts. <https://www.amap.no/documents/doc/arctic-climate-change-update-2021-key-trends-and-impacts.-summary-for-policy-makers/3508>

⁵ Canada, Denmark (Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Norway, Russia, and the USA

⁶ http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf

are not in-keeping with UNCLOS, and which attempt to exert influence over both international and national waters, risk undermining UNCLOS in the region. The right to free and unfettered passage on the high seas must be safeguarded, as must the right of innocent passage and freedom of navigation through territorial seas and Exclusive Economic Zones, and transit passage through straits. The UK will not accept navigation terms which contravene UNCLOS and will remain vigilant to the undermining of UNCLOS by any actor, and is prepared to respond if needed.

Russia views the Arctic as strategically important, and is sensitive to the risks associated with reduced sea ice cover on its northern flank. The UK recognises that, as an Arctic state, Russia has a significant presence and rights in the region; accordingly, we expect Russia to comply with international law. Over the last fifteen years, Russia has increasingly militarised its Arctic

territory: it has steadily increased military activity in the region and invested in military infrastructure there, establishing a new Northern Joint Strategic Command, reopening Cold War-era bases above the Arctic Circle and investing further in Arctic-capable equipment. Russian submarine activity in the North Atlantic has reached Cold War levels. While this activity is not, in and of itself, a breach of international law, it presents challenges which impact upon the interests of the UK, our Allies and partners, and the inhabitants of the Arctic, and to which we must be vigilant and prepared to respond.

China is also increasing investment and activity in the region. In 2013, China gained observer status on the Arctic Council; and in 2018 it published an Arctic Policy. It is now pursuing a Polar Silk Road as an extension of the Belt and Road Initiative, reaffirmed in its 14th Five Year Plan in 2021. This is supported by a proposed range of Arctic infrastructure and capabilities, including investing in ports in Arctic nations, undersea cables, and a nuclear-powered icebreaker, as well as a commitment to increasing “practical co-operation” with the Arctic states.

The further opening-up of the Arctic also raises the potential for defence and security concerns not just emanating from the region itself but spreading into it from state competition and conflict elsewhere around the globe. The *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* set out our expectation that the international environment will become more competitive and fluid in the coming years, with heightened competition between both state and non-state actors across the Euro-Atlantic and beyond. While a number of potential threats exist within the Arctic, this deteriorating global security environment poses the greatest threat to the security of the region. The era of Arctic exceptionalism is ending.







The UK Role

The UK has strong relationships with almost all Arctic states and has a responsibility to support our Allies and partners to preserve the stability and security of the region; we have been operating there for many years. We will continue to support the existing legal framework and constructive international co-operation in the region. 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. As a leading European NATO Ally, the UK is prepared to defend our Arctic Allies and respond to aggression. We will contest malign and destabilising behaviours and activity in the region which threaten our interests, the safety of the inhabitants of the Arctic, and the stability of the region. 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.

UK Government Policy

The Defence Contribution in the High North sits as part of the broader UK Government approach to the region, as defined by the 2018 Arctic Policy Framework – Beyond the Ice. Beyond the Ice highlights the wide array of interests the UK has in the Arctic region, including economic interests, and an important role in the international science and environmental communities, working alongside Arctic states, local communities, and the region's indigenous peoples. Beyond the Ice also affirms the UK's "commitment to preserving the stability and security of the Arctic region". The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy reaffirms this commitment to maintaining the region as one of high co-operation and low tension, and to working with our partners to ensure increasing access to the Arctic and its resources is managed safely, sustainably, and responsibly. The UK Government will be reviewing its broader approach to the Arctic and will publish a new Arctic Policy Framework later in 2022.

The UK's Defence Contribution to the High North

As the 2021 Defence Command Paper made clear, "the High North and maintaining security in the defence of the North Atlantic

remains of great importance”⁷. The MOD will ensure that it remains capable of protecting the UK's interests as the region opens up in the coming years.

In support of the UK Government aim to **preserve the stability and security of the Arctic region**, the MOD will pursue the following objectives for the High North:

- ***Protect our Critical National Infrastructure and our other national interests, and those of our Allies.***
- ***Ensure our freedom to navigate and operate across the wider region.***
- ***Reinforce the rules-based international system, particularly UNCLOS.***
- ***Contest malign and destabilising behaviours.***

To deliver these objectives, we will work in the following ways:

- a. Improve our understanding of the region, how it is changing, and the activities of state and non-state actors within it.
- b. Work with regional Allies and partners, including through NATO, the Northern Group, and the Joint Expeditionary Force, aligning policy, activity, and capability where possible and across all domains.
- c. Maintain a coherent Defence posture, presence, and profile in the region, including training, partnering, and operating from and in the Arctic.
- d. Develop sustainable, modernised, and proportionate Defence capability for the region, including through investment in Research and Development.



⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-defence-command-paper-sets-out-the-future-for-our-armed-forces>



Approach

Improving our Understanding

Comprehensive understanding of the region's environment is key to enabling access and supporting our freedom of manoeuvre. Through our specialist geospatial centres, we will develop and maintain our understanding of the High North environment, in conjunction with close Allies and partners in the region. This includes the collection, processing, analysis, exploitation, and dissemination of underwater, above-water and space environmental data.

The UK is a leading provider of hydrographic, meteorological, and oceanographic data and services. We will further develop our strong bilateral defence relationships with the majority of Arctic states, including on increasing holdings of geospatial data in the region and its effective exploitation.

Noting that the region has the potential for heightened economic competition and tensions between states, we will continue to monitor closely and assess the approach adopted by both Arctic and non-Arctic states, including Russia, not least their military postures and any activity that violates international norms and agreements such as UNCLOS.

Working with Allies and Partners

Arctic Allies and partners have been consulted during the development of this Strategy. UK defence will continue to work in support of its Allies and partners, through

both bilateral partnerships and multilateral forums to preserve the stability and security of the region.

A number of NATO Allies⁸ have sovereign territory in the Arctic, and NATO must be able to defend that territory if the need arises. The UK will advocate for NATO to take a more proactive approach to the High North, acknowledging the leadership and expertise of the five Arctic Allies, building on the success of Exercise TRIDENT JUNCTURE and the COLD RESPONSE series of exercises⁹. The NATO approach should be calibrated and proportionate, reflecting low levels of tension. But there must be an acknowledgement of the region's importance within a 360-degree approach to collective deterrence and defence, and a recognition of its crucial importance in helping to enable reinforcement across the North Atlantic.

Five of the ten members of the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force are Arctic states¹⁰. Through engaging regularly, developing common plans, improving interoperability, and conducting activity, the Joint Expeditionary Force will ensure it maintains an ability to operate in the High North, in support of its Participating Nations' goals and priorities. The Northern Group¹¹ (also a UK-led initiative) will continue to provide a valuable forum for information-sharing and the discussion of defence and security issues relevant to the region.

The UK remains committed to supporting Arctic Allies and partners through regional forums, including as a member of the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR)¹². We will utilise the opportunity to share information on the changing environment, improve collective awareness of and de-

⁸ Canada, Denmark (Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Iceland, Norway, and the USA)

⁹ Exercise Trident Juncture involved NATO and partner nations training and operating together in an Article 5 scenario in Norway. Exercise Cold Response is a Norwegian national defence and cold weather exercise in Northern Norway with NATO Allies and partners.

¹⁰ Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden.

¹¹ The Northern Group membership includes five Arctic States: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.

¹² ASFR membership: Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. While Russia remains part of the ASFR framework, it has not participated since 2014.

conflict activity in the Arctic, and identify opportunities for further co-operation.

The UK has close relationships with the majority of Arctic states, which provide a strong basis for working together to reinforce international rights to freedom of access and navigation in the High North. The UK has agreements with Canada, the USA and Norway on enhancing co-operation in the Arctic and High North. The MOD will bolster its bilateral relationships in the region and identify further opportunities for co-operation.

The UK will explore co-operation with key non-Arctic Allies and partners that share a role in the security and stability of the High North region, including on developing amphibious capability with the Netherlands, and issues of freedom of navigation and economic security with France, Germany, and Japan, among others. The UK will explore further opportunities for co-operation in the region with Arctic and non-Arctic states. This includes with Russia, to honour our shared history in the Arctic Convoys, and to ensure safe and professional behaviours

in accordance with our bilateral Incidents at Sea Treaty.

Maintaining a coherent Posture, Presence and Profile

In 2020, the UK recommenced routine naval operations in the High North alongside key Arctic Allies, including Denmark, Norway, and the USA. We will maintain a periodic Royal Navy presence in the High North, alongside Arctic Allies and partners, to demonstrate our commitment to freedom of access and navigation in the region. In investing in a new generation of Anti-Submarine Warfare frigates, we will focus on deep interoperability with Arctic Allies such as the USA, Canada, Denmark, and Norway, as well as non-Arctic Allies such as France and the Netherlands.

Key to our ability to deliver persistent effect in the region is the commitment outlined in the Defence Command Paper to establish a standing response force built around the Littoral Response Group (North). This will





build on the Mountain and Cold Weather Warfare expertise of our Commando Forces and comprise dedicated Commando Forces, ships, and helicopters optimised for operations in the High North. This Group will be able to operate alongside NATO and JEF Arctic partners in the High North, with the ability to partner, operate, and fight wherever needed.

Typhoon exercises and air policing operations, along with air mobility and rotary wing support to Defence activity, will further demonstrate UK commitment in the region. In 2019 we participated in Icelandic Air Policing with Typhoon aircraft as part of our visible commitment to the security of the Greenland-Iceland-UK region. To further our contribution to regional security, we can deploy the RC-135W Rivet Joint aircraft and continue to support Icelandic air policing on an opportune basis, alongside our other NATO air policing commitments.

The RAF has a fleet of nine new P-8A Maritime Patrol Aircraft. We will seek opportunities for periodic P-8A deployments and participation in exercises within the region, working alongside Allies such as Norway, Iceland, and the USA. Co-operation with Allies on P-8A deployments will also improve our situational awareness in the High North. Our operation of F35 Lightning II alongside Denmark, Finland, Norway, and the USA, offers further opportunities for interoperability with Allies and close partners in the region.

Developing Capability

Developing Commando Forces and Joint Helicopter Command cold weather warfare interoperability with Norwegian and United States units in Norway is an important High North-focused partnership. It is underpinned by a 10-year plan that generates, prepares, and develops environmental capabilities to operate in the region and support Norwegian crisis planning (Project HEIMDALL). Royal Marines co-operation with Dutch counterparts has the potential to expand the number of participating forces to four. In addition to cold weather warfare training in Norway, the UK will seek to take advantage of further invitations and conduct cold weather training in Canada, Finland, and the United States on a regular basis. In support of these capabilities, UK Defence will examine options to bolster its cold weather capability to ensure that Arctic-appropriate equipment, activity, environmental support, and infrastructure are all developed and maintained.

The Royal Navy has the capability to project force using a variety of assets in the High North, dependent on the location, season, and threat, including Littoral capabilities. The Defence Command Paper announced major investments in a new generation of Anti-Submarine Warfare frigates and support shipping, enabling us to project UK force into the High North, and ensuring our freedom to operate in the North Atlantic. Additionally, the UK will maintain an ability to operate under

the Arctic ice. The Royal Navy is investing heavily in military data gathering capabilities for use in all environments, to better understand the High North underwater environment, protect our underwater critical national infrastructure and improve our ability to detect threats in the High North. These include the purpose-built Ice Patrol Ship HMS Protector, and the new Multi-Role Ocean Surveillance capability announced in the 2021 Defence Command Paper.

The Army has increased its cold weather training, including as part of its enhanced Forward Presence deployment in Estonia, where Army cold weather doctrine has been tested and refined alongside the Estonian Defence Forces. Army exercising with JEF partners, including Finland, Norway, and Sweden, enhances its cold weather capabilities, building on Royal Marine and Joint Helicopter Command expertise in the High North.

The Royal Air Force has the capacity to rapidly deploy and operate in the High North. The Royal Air Force's fleet of nine P-8A Maritime Patrol Aircraft, as well as F35 Lightning II, including aboard HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales, will contribute to the UK's capabilities in the region. New opportunities exist following the procurement of three E7 Wedgetail aircraft and the Protector RG Mk1, which enters service in 2024. Both will further contribute to the UK's capabilities and support our

enhanced situational awareness in the region.

Longer-term, MOD will exploit the current and future opportunities offered by space technologies and UK industrial strength to meet Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) requirements, as well as identifying opportunities for collaboration with industry and international partners where appropriate. We will leverage the additional 10-year, £1.4Bn investment in the Defence Space Portfolio to address our National requirements, including for the High North. Especially pertinent is the £970M additional investment in cutting edge space-based ISR. This has the potential for a 'Responsive Space Launch' capability, which would enable launch from the UK and British Overseas Territories.

The UK will ensure that our investments in science and technology (S&T) help develop the right cold weather capabilities now and in the future. With the additional £6.6Bn investment in Defence Research and Development we will continue to invest in Mobile Troposcatter technology as part of a suite of communications technologies being explored. Troposcatter technology uses the Earth's atmosphere to enable high bandwidth, secure long-range communication that can be used in environments where satellite communications are not available and long



ranges are required, such as operations in the High North.

The MOD will look to establish closer co-operation with non-government partners, such as the UK research community, and track external innovations in technologies that could support future Arctic capability, including power, new materials, unmanned systems, novel logistics solutions, and others. We will ensure that cold weather requirements drive S&T and capability planning so that our future equipment and personnel can operate in the High North.

Summary

The MOD recognises the growing importance of the High North to our defence and security, the opportunities it presents, and the potential for growing competition resulting from the changing environment. We are determined to play our part in a Government-wide integrated approach, alongside our Allies, partners, and the Arctic communities, to achieve our objectives. This strategy sets out our commitment. It is planned to endure for ten years but will be reviewed on a regular basis.



