

Arctic. New classes of ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) are being designed deliberately for under-ice operations, and many observers have speculated that the Soviets will extend their Arctic deployments to the further reaches of the Polar Basin.

Trends in doctrine on the Western side have also increased the salience of the Arctic. With the resurgence of damage-limiting strategies by the United States, as reflected in the SDI and the relaxation of inhibitions on the discussion of "strategic" anti-submarine warfare (ASW), the Soviet SSBN fleet is no longer viewed, if it ever was, as a relatively benign instrument to be accorded some kind of sanctuary status. Quite the contrary, US naval strategy has evolved to the point where attacks, or threatened attacks, on Soviet SSBNs in their own Arctic waters, even during the conventional phase of a major East-West conflict, are considered to merit a high priority, as a means of both altering the correlation of strategic nuclear forces, and diverting Soviet defensive forces away from possible attacks on the North Atlantic sea lanes. Thus, increased American submarine and ASW activity in the Polar Basin has been justified on both defensive and offensive grounds — as a counter-reaction to increased Soviet deployments in the region, and as part of a new forward naval strategy designed to put at risk some of the Soviet Union's most dearly-held assets, in their own "backyard."

One result of the renewed attention paid by strategic analysts to the Arctic has been a parallel growth in calls for some kind of arms control regime in the area. On the one hand, peace movements throughout the circumpolar states, including indigenous peoples' organizations, have called for a demilitarization, or at least denuclearization, of the widest possible area of the Arctic. On the other hand, many strategic analysts have drawn attention to what they consider to be the dangerous escalatory potential of the new American "Maritime Strategy" in lowering the threshold of nuclear war. Proposals for exclusion zones (restricting the activities of submarines or ASW forces) and other kinds of confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) appear to find favour with some analysts, but have only begun to be developed.