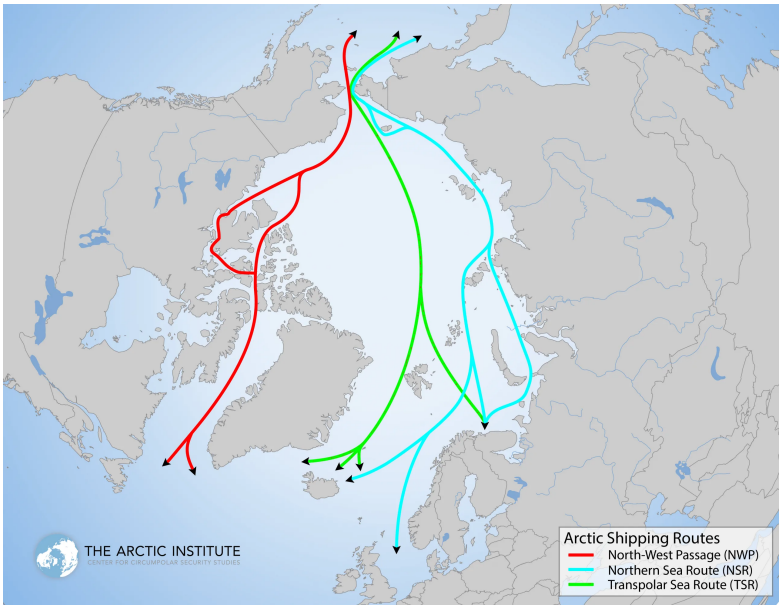

The Arctic, a New Exposed Nerve of the Planet

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The major maneuvers around the **Arctic and its future** are at the center of attention for governments, military apparatuses, analysts, and the scientific community. The progressive melting of ice, the opening of new trade routes, and the presence of enormous energy and mineral resources have transformed the "Great North" from a remote region into a global strategic crossroads. The **melting of the Arctic ice cap will increasingly make maritime corridors connecting the Atlantic and Pacific** more directly navigable compared to the Suez and Panama passages. This promises **shorter navigation times and lower transportation costs** for goods, but at the same time increases vulnerabilities. Maritime traffic will intensify near sensitive coasts and military bases, surface and submarine fleets will have new movement possibilities, and **infrastructures like pipelines, gas pipelines, and data cables** will become even more delicate targets. To control this scenario, states employ military ships, satellites, sensors, drones, and advanced surveillance systems, as already happens in the Mediterranean and major strategic straits, from Aden to Hormuz.

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Powers at Play, Contested Routes, and NATO's Role

In the Arctic theater, Canada, Denmark with Greenland, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Russia, and the United States are particularly engaged. If the current climate trend continues, in the coming decades the Arctic routes will remain ice-free for increasingly longer periods. These routes will favor trade but will also fuel political and legal disputes. Russia aims to exert strong control over the Northern Sea Route, setting its own rules that are not shared by the United States, historically aligned in defense of the freedom of the seas. **Canada, for its part, supports a protectionist stance on the Northwest Passage**, which it partly considers internal waters. Against this backdrop, there is also the **competition for energy, mineral, and fishing resources**, while after the invasion of Ukraine, the West has increased its military presence in the area, confirming the strategic value of the Arctic.

China also looks to the Great North as a possible alternative route for trade and as a “polar” section connected to the corridors of the New Silk Road. **Beijing invests in ships and infrastructure suitable for operating among the ice**, while seeking cooperation with Moscow in resource exploitation and fishing. This axis between Russia and China fuels the fear that the Arctic will shift from a space regulated by international law to an area effectively controlled by a few powers. In response, **NATO has refocused attention on the Great North** : after a long period during which the Alliance's center of gravity had shifted southward, the war in Ukraine has revived the centrality of the corridor between Greenland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom, a key point for access to polar routes. Naval presence has been strengthened, and

training programs in extreme conditions have been resumed, aware that the Arctic dimension has returned to being an essential piece of Euro-Atlantic security.

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Italy in the Arctic and the Defense Committee

Italy, despite being a Mediterranean country, has developed a significant presence in polar regions over time. It is an observer at the Arctic Council, has a scientific base in Svalbard, and participates with the Navy in campaigns in the North Sea, Atlantic, and sub-Arctic areas. Research activities provide fundamental data on climate, ice, currents, seabeds, and sound propagation in the marine environment, information essential for both environmental policies and military planning and the protection of routes and underwater infrastructures.

To coherently manage security interests in polar environments, the **Ministry of Defense has established an interforce committee dedicated to the Arctic, sub-Arctic, and Antarctica**. This body coordinates the needs of the **Navy, Army, Air Force, and Carabinieri**, defining common objectives, training programs, and requirements for equipment suitable for extreme climates. The committee helps outline a true strategy for polar environments, identifying priorities in terms of operational capabilities, high-latitude communications, and the protection of marine and underwater infrastructures. In parallel, it works closely with national Arctic research bodies, enhancing sea campaigns that generate knowledge useful to both the scientific community and maritime security. Through studies, simulations, and specific exercises, it supports the training of personnel skilled in the peculiarities of the Great North and collaborates with other ministries to update Italy's Arctic strategy and develop a national hub

dedicated to polar regions. In this way, Italy's presence in the Arctic becomes more coordinated and aware, recognizing that **dynamics among the ice have direct impacts on the Mediterranean, the economy, and the country's security**.

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