# UK and Iceland partner to deploy AI in Arctic naval security amid rising Russian threat



The United Kingdom is poised to enhance its security measures in the Arctic by integrating artificial intelligence into its naval operations. This initiative comes in response to an increasing adversarial presence in the region, particularly from Russia, which has intensified its activities amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. The Arctic is not only a critical security frontier for Europe and the UK, but also home to vital undersea infrastructure, including cables that connect the UK to Europe, making the stakes particularly high.

During a recent visit to Iceland, Foreign Secretary David Lammy announced a collaborative effort with Iceland that will leverage advanced AI technology to monitor state activities in the High North. He underscored the importance of international partnerships in this endeavour, stating, “It’s more important than ever that we work with our allies in the High North, like Norway and Iceland, to enhance our ability to patrol and protect these waters.” This initiative is set against the backdrop of climate change, which is melting polar ice caps and opening previously inaccessible maritime routes, thus exacerbating the security challenges in the region.

The strategic importance of the Arctic has been underscored by rising tensions with Russia, which has been deploying nuclear-powered icebreakers to navigate these newly opened routes. These vessels are critical to supporting Russian operations, including transferring oil, gas, and potentially stolen Ukrainian grain to circumvent Western sanctions. In a proactive measure, the UK government has disrupted plans for a floating repair dock that Russia intended to establish in the Arctic, which would have serviced these icebreakers.

The new joint initiative between the UK and Iceland involves significant financial investment—over half a million pounds allocated from the UK Integrated Security Fund, specifically for research and development at the Alan Turing Institute. This funding seeks to explore how AI can bolster the monitoring and detection capabilities of naval forces, an area where the Royal Navy has already begun integrating AI technologies. Notably, during exercises conducted off the coast of Scotland, the Royal Navy tested AI systems to enhance threat detection and engagement timelines aboard its vessels, demonstrating a commitment to adopting cutting-edge technology in safeguarding maritime security.

Given the concurrent global military landscape, including the recent real-time AI trials conducted by AUKUS members—Australia, the UK, and the US—involving AI-enabled drones, the implications of this initiative stretch beyond mere observation. It suggests a broader strategic pivot towards autonomous systems in military operations, reflecting a recognition of the transformative impact AI can have on modern warfare and security.

Moreover, the importance of collaborative security efforts is being reinforced through renewed agreements, such as the recent enhanced security pact between Norway and the UK aimed at protecting subsea infrastructure against Russian hybrid tactics. This growing emphasis on coordinated maritime security is vital as both nations confront the escalating threats posed by a militarising Russia in the Arctic domain.

This comprehensive strategy signals a significant commitment to ensuring the security and sustainability of the Arctic region, a critical area for European and British defence, well beyond mere territorial concerns. With AI now at the forefront of military strategy, the UK is clearly positioning itself to navigate both the current challenges and the rapidly evolving future of warfare in the high northern latitudes.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/ai-russia-ukraine-war-arctic-b2758037.html), [[5]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uks-defence-contribution-in-the-high-north/fd0cd780-a9a1-46a2-b716-47519c610213)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/ai-russia-ukraine-war-arctic-b2758037.html), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/aukus-takes-another-step-forward-with-real-time-ai-trials)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ai-used-at-sea-for-first-time-off-coast-of-scotland), [[6]](https://www.thebarentsobserver.com/security/norway-uk-team-up-to-protect-subsea-infrastructure-against-russian-hybrid-attacksnbsp-nbsp/425193)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategic-competition-in-the-age-of-ai-emerging-risks-and-opportunities-from-military-use-of-artificial-intelligence), [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/proving-the-value-of-the-royal-navys-ai-roadmap)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/ai-russia-ukraine-war-arctic-b2758037.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ai-used-at-sea-for-first-time-off-coast-of-scotland> - In June 2021, the Royal Navy conducted its first at-sea trial of artificial intelligence (AI) during Exercise Formidable Shield off the coast of Scotland. The AI applications, Startle and Sycoiea, were tested on the Type 45 Destroyer HMS Dragon and Type 23 Frigate HMS Lancaster to enhance early detection of threats and accelerate engagement timelines. This initiative aimed to improve the Royal Navy's readiness to tackle emerging threats using advanced technology.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategic-competition-in-the-age-of-ai-emerging-risks-and-opportunities-from-military-use-of-artificial-intelligence> - Published in October 2024, this report by the UK Ministry of Defence explores the strategic risks and opportunities arising from the military use of artificial intelligence (AI). It discusses the potential transformative changes AI could bring to defence and security, highlighting the need for the UK to understand and mitigate emerging risks while exploiting opportunities in the responsible development of defence AI.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/aukus-takes-another-step-forward-with-real-time-ai-trials> - In August 2024, the AUKUS nations—Australia, the UK, and the US—conducted real-time AI trials involving AI-enabled uncrewed aerial vehicles. These trials allowed human operators to locate, disable, and destroy ground targets, marking a significant advancement in integrating autonomy and AI in military operations. The exercise demonstrated the viability of AI and autonomy sensing systems in real-time military environments.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uks-defence-contribution-in-the-high-north/fd0cd780-a9a1-46a2-b716-47519c610213> - This UK Ministry of Defence publication outlines the UK's defence strategy in the High North, emphasizing the importance of the Arctic region for European and British security. It details the UK's commitment to working with allies to ensure the safe, sustainable, and responsible management of the Arctic, addressing challenges posed by melting sea ice and increased Russian militarization in the area.
6. <https://www.thebarentsobserver.com/security/norway-uk-team-up-to-protect-subsea-infrastructure-against-russian-hybrid-attacksnbsp-nbsp/425193> - In February 2025, Norway and the UK announced a deeper defence agreement to protect subsea infrastructure against Russian hybrid attacks. The agreement focuses on enhancing naval capabilities to address increasing threats in the Arctic region, aiming to ensure the security and stability of critical underwater infrastructure.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/proving-the-value-of-the-royal-navys-ai-roadmap> - This case study highlights the Royal Navy's efforts to integrate artificial intelligence (AI) into its operations. The Naval AI Cell is working to embrace AI's transformative potential, focusing on areas such as predictive maintenance and counter-uncrewed air systems. The study demonstrates the value and impact of an aligned transformative roadmap for AI within the Royal Navy.