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Russia and its Neighbors: Military Power, Security Politics, and Interstate Relations in the Post-Cold War Arctic

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Abstract: In recent years, and particularly after Russia's spectacular flag planting on the ocean floor at the North Pole on 2 August 2007, there has been much talk about "polar imperialism" and the danger of a "great game" in the Arctic. This article sheds light on the topic of interstate relations and the long-term conflict potential in the northernmost part of the globe. While recognizing the continued relevance of military power in the Arctic and the presence of a number of unresolved legal disputes, the article argues that Russia and its northern neighbors have a common interest in maintaining regional stability and avoiding a remilitarization of the region. The 1982 Law of the Sea Convention and regional co-operation arrangements such as the Arctic and Barents Councils are important tools towards this aim. On the other hand, there are many uncertainties regarding Russia's priorities and strategies for the region.

Keywords: Arctic, security, climate change, interstate relations, disputes.

1. Introduction

The effects of global climate change on the physical environment of the Arctic are already very much in evidence. The retreat of the polar ice cap is opening previously inaccessible parts of the Arctic to resource extraction and marine transportation. Ice conditions on the northern coasts of Russia and Canada may at some point allow for near year-round shipping through the Northeast and Northwest Passages. The feeding areas of commercially important fish stocks are gradually

moving north, due to increasing water temperatures. Technologies are being developed for the utilization of oil and gas resources on the Arctic continental shelf. As a result of these developments, the Arctic is re-emerging as a region of major significance, not only to Russia, but also to the four other Arctic coastal states – the United States, Canada, Denmark, and Norway – as well as parts of the outside world.

In this context, it is not only relevant but also necessary to discuss how state and private actors' increasingly active pursuit of oil, gas, fishery, and shipping interests in the Arctic may shape the region's future as an international security arena. To what extent does Russia's approach to the region differ from those of its northern neighbors? What are the potential sources of interstate disputes, and what are the security dynamics? How compatible are the economic interests of the Arctic coastal states with their long-term security interests? And what can they do to maintain political and military stability in the region?

By virtue of its size, geographical location, and the length of its northern coastline, Russia is destined to remain a key player in international Arctic affairs. In the Barents Sea, five hundred and forty kilometers off the coast of the Kola Peninsula lies one of the world's biggest proven offshore gas fields. The still undeveloped Shtokman field holds an estimated 3.7 trillion cubic meters of gas and 31 million metric tons of gas condensate – enough to supply most of the European Union for a period of seven years. However, recent developments such as the post-2007 global financial crisis and the discovery of vast natural gas reserves from shale rock formations in the US, Europe, and elsewhere have led to a fall in gas prices on the world market and the temporary postponement of costly offshore projects in the Arctic. The production start date for the Shtokman project was recently postponed by three years, until 2016-2017, and the investment decision is still pending.

During Vladimir Putin's two presidential terms (2000-2008), Russia experienced significant economic growth, fueled by high oil and gas prices. The country began to modernize its armed forces, including the nuclear arsenal on the Kola Peninsula, and resumed 24-hour patrols with long-range bombers in the international air space over the Barents, Norwegian and Greenland Seas. Russian nuclear submarines resumed operations under the Arctic ice, and the country started to test new weapon systems in the Arctic Ocean, the Barents Sea, and the White Sea. The increase in Russian military activity in the Arctic, and Russia's territorial claims in the region, were generally in line with the country's new assertiveness in international affairs, which has been evident also under Dmitry Medvedev.

In order to get a better understanding of the role of military power in the post-Cold War Arctic, and the interplay between economic and security interests, we need to take a look at some of the features that make the northern part of the globe

special. After a brief overview of some characteristic features of the Arctic region, the article goes on to discuss the Russian perspective, as well as the perspectives of the other Arctic coastal states. Thereafter follows a discussion of the interstate conflict potential in the region and how it may be affected by the process of climate change. The concluding section discusses how Arctic states and the international community can contribute to the process of turning the region into a zone of stability and prosperity, to the benefit of those who inhabit it, as well as the rest of the world.

2. Five Characteristic Features of the Circumpolar Arctic

2.1 Economic Significance

Discussing the conflict potential in the Arctic, a natural point of departure is the region's increasing economic significance, particularly in terms of hydrocarbon resources. The US Geological Survey[1] estimates that some 30 per cent of the world's undiscovered reserves of natural gas, and 13 per cent of the undiscovered reserves of oil, are located north of the Arctic Circle. There are many uncertainties associated with this estimate, particularly with regard to the resources on the East Greenland shelf. An assessment by the international consulting firm Wood Mackenzie[2] suggests that the Arctic petroleum reserves may be much smaller. Still, there is no doubt that the resource potential is significant. Russians, Americans, and Canadians have drilled in the Arctic for a long time, and the region contains two core areas for world oil and gas output – Siberia and Alaska. Apart from these areas, however, where operations have been pursued largely on land, the Arctic and its waters represent fairly virgin territory. But both Russia and Norway have signaled a desire to intensify offshore exploration. Among the areas specified for such expansion are north-western Russia and the continental shelf in the Barents and Kara Seas. In a more distant future, petroleum operations in shelf areas further north may become a reality.

2.2 Harsh Climatic Conditions

The Arctic is also characterized by a harsh climate. This is the reason why this part of the world for a very long time used to be considered an almost inacces-

1. US Geological Survey, "90 Billion Barrels of Oil and 1,670 Trillion Cubic Feet of Natural Gas Assessed in the Arctic", press release, posted 23 July 2008 at http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=1980&from=rss_home.
2. Graff, James, "Fight for the Top of the World" in *Time Magazine*, (15) 2007 p. 34.

sible wasteland of limited economic and strategic value. The Arctic climate can be demanding enough on land, with cold, wind, permafrost and 24-hour winter darkness. Conditions are hardly any better at sea. As far as petroleum activities are concerned, the tough climate and challenging ice conditions place special demands on technology, equipment and routines. Petroleum exploration and production costs are far greater in the Arctic than in well-developed petroleum provinces further south. But the Arctic is not as cold at it used to be. For better or worse, global climate changes appear to be seriously affecting the region. The opening of seasonal sea lanes through formerly ice-locked parts of the Arctic may become a reality within a few years, and total summer disappearance of the ice cap could begin as early as in 2040, if not sooner[3] . This development is likely to have a serious impact on the accessibility of the Arctic, and the region's economic and military-strategic significance.

2.3 Unresolved Legal Issues

Another relevant feature of the Arctic is the existence of a number of *unresolved issues of international law*. Unlike Antarctica, the Arctic has not been, and is unlikely to become, the subject of a comprehensive regional legal regime. This is not to say that the unresolved legal issues in and around the Arctic Ocean outnumber those in other maritime areas, such as the South China Sea[4], or that the maritime disputes in the northern part of the globe are more serious or pressing than those in the south. But there are a number of complex, unresolved legal issues also in the Arctic, some of which may be of particular relevance to the future relationship between Russia and its northern neighbors. Among these are (1) claims by Arctic coastal states to extended continental shelves beyond 200 nautical miles; (2) the legal regime of the Northern Sea Route; (3) the Norwegian-Russian delimitation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean; and (4) the legal status of the Svalbard Fisheries Protection Zone.

Recognizing the potential economic significance of petroleum and mineral resources on the Arctic continental shelf, the Arctic coastal states have in recent years done extensive surveying of relevant areas. A Norwegian claim was submitted to the UN Continental Shelf Commission in 2006, and was recommended by the Commission in 2009, albeit with some exceptions. Russia, Canada, and Denmark, possibly also the US, if the country ratifies the Law of the Sea Convention, are

3. Arctic Council, *Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment*, 2009,pp 25, http://web.arcticportal.org/en/pame/amsa-2009-report.
4. Cf. Thao, Nguyen Hong & Ramses Amer, "A New Legal Arrangement for the South China Sea" in *Ocean Development and International Law*, (4) 2009 pp. 333–345.

expected to submit extended Arctic shelf claims in the coming years. There is reason to believe that some of the latter claims will be partially overlapping with each other.

When it comes to the situation surrounding the main northern waterway between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans – the Northern Sea Route – there are also a number of potentially problematic issues, such as the legal status of the straits along the route. Russia claims the straits between the mainland and its Arctic archipelagos as part of its internal waters. The US has protested against this interpretation and argues that the straits in question are "international" and can be used for international navigation.

In the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean, Norway and Russia have until recently had an unresolved bilateral delimitation issue related to the two countries' continental shelves and economic zones. However, during President Medvedev's state visit to Oslo on 26–27 April 2010, it was announced that "tentative agreement" had been reached between the two countries on the drawing of a permanent boundary line. A formal delimitation treaty was signed in Murmansk on 15 September 2010, after almost 40 years of bilateral negotiations. The treaty, which is yet to be ratified by the Norwegian parliament and the Russian Duma, makes it clear which state's jurisdiction is to apply in which parts of the currently disputed area[5]. This is essential for ensuring regional stability and predictable conditions under which commercial and other actors can operate.

Predictable conditions and responsible resource management are also major issues in the Svalbard Fisheries Protection Zone, established by Norway in 1977. Russia (and other parties to the Treaty) still contest Norway's claim to exclusive rights in areas beyond the territorial waters of the archipelago, and have questioned the legal basis of the Zone.

2.4 Military Significance

This brings us to the fourth feature of the Arctic – its military significance. When asked about the strategic significance of the Arctic in a 1995 interview with the *Ogonek* magazine, Chief Navigator of the Russian Navy, Admiral Valeriy Aleksin stated that "he who controls the Arctic, controls the world"[6]. Russian naval officers would probably say the same today. Even though the military activity level

5. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, "Treaty between the Kingdom of Norway and the Russian Federation concerning Maritime Delimitation and Cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean", signed in Murmansk 15 September 2010, http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/UD/Vedlegg/Folkerett/avtale_engelsk.pdf.

6. *Ogonek*, "Kakoi flot nuzhen Rossii?" ["What kind of Navy does Russia need?"], (29) 1995 p. 37.

in the region is significantly lower now than it was in the days of the Cold War, strategic considerations still play a role in the formation of Arctic policies.

In the case of Russia, the sea-based nuclear weapons on the Kola Peninsula are seen as an important part of the country's nuclear arsenal, and they contribute to upholding the country's status as a great power. In addition to the nuclear deterrence function, the Northern Fleet is also taking on a more prominent role in defending Russia's economic interests in the region[7]. This includes the protection of petroleum infrastructure such as oil rigs, pipelines, terminals, refineries, etc., generally believed to be vulnerable to sabotage and terrorist attacks. The Fleet's protection functions also apply to the increasing commercial ship traffic in the region, particularly the oil tanker traffic in and out of Murmansk. In a somewhat similar manner, Canada is in the process of increasing its military presence in the Arctic to protect its economic interests[8]. And in the Maritime Strategy of the United States, published in October 2007, there is an explicit reference to the conflict potential in the Arctic theater[9].

2.5 Regional and International Co-operation

The fifth and last point that should be mentioned is the fact that the Arctic is an important arena of international and regional co-operation. In October 1987, during a visit to the Soviet polar capital of Murmansk, Mikhail Gorbachev launched a series of Arctic co-operation initiatives which tied together a wide array of security, economic, environmental, and other issues[10]. In the more than two decades that have passed since 1987, we have witnessed the creation of a wide range of transnational co-operation arrangements in the Arctic, many of which are related – directly or indirectly – to processes growing out of Gorbachev's speech in Murmansk. Good examples are the International Arctic Science Committee (1990), the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (1991), the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (1991), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (1993), the Arctic Military Environmental Cooperation (1996), and the Arctic Council (1996)[11]. These and

7. Åtland, Kristian, "Russia's Northern Fleet and the Oil Industry – Rivals or Partners?" in *Armed Forces & Society*, (1) 2009 pp. 362–384 (374).
8. *The Guardian*, "Canada uses military might in Arctic scramble", 11 August 2007, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/aug/11/oil.arctic.
9. United States Navy, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, 2007, p. 6. http://www.navy.mil/maritime/MaritimeStrategy.pdf.
10. Scrivener, David, *Gorbachev's Murmansk Speech: The Soviet Initiative and Western Response*, The Norwegian Atlantic Committee, Oslo 1989.
11. cf. Palosaari, Teemu & Frank Möller, "Security and Marginality: Arctic Europe after the Double Enlargement" in *Cooperation and Conflict*, (3) 2004 pp. 255–281.

other institutional arrangements have in different ways contributed to promoting co-operation among Arctic states and enhancing political stability in a region that during the Cold War was among the most heavily militarized parts of the world.

3. The Russian Perspective

3.1 Strategic military considerations

Much like the global security architecture, the security landscape in the northern part of the globe has in the past twenty years undergone a series of dramatic and profound changes. In the mid 1980s, the Arctic was divided in a "Western" and an "Eastern" sector, between which there was little or no interaction. The lack of state-to-state and people-to-people co-operation in and on the Arctic during the Cold War was largely a product of the nuclear stand-off and the apparent dominance of national security concerns in national perceptions and policies. The Arctic was seen as a sensitive military theater where political, cultural, and economic interests were subordinated to security interests. This seems to have changed, in the sense that economic interests today play a more important role in the formation of national policies.

In recent years, we have seen a remarkable degree of civil-military *rapprochement* in the Arctic. The interaction between the Russian petroleum industry and the Northern Fleet has reached a point where we can talk about an emerging strategic partnership between the two, rather than confrontation[12]. The oil and gas resources in the Barents Sea are seen as the key to an economic revival of the Russian north-west, and they may help the country to regain its economic, political and military strength. At the federal level, tax revenues from petroleum activities, particularly in Western Siberia, have given the Russian defense budget a much welcome boost. At the regional level, the Russian Navy has been able to improve its fuel supply situation by leasing strategically located port facilities to the petroleum industry.

Russia's military infrastructure in the Arctic is mainly concentrated on the Kola Peninsula, where the Northern Fleet has its home bases. It is important to emphasize that the high concentration of sea-, land- and air-defense forces in the northwestern corner of the country during the Cold War was not motivated by military or other threats in the region itself. Russia's security challenges in the country's southern and eastern regions have traditionally been far greater than the challenges in the north-west. The historical reason why one of the world's largest fleets was based on the remote Kola Peninsula was rather the favorable ice

12. Åtland, 2009

conditions in the southern Barents Sea, the easy access to the Atlantic and Arctic Oceans, and the geographical proximity to potential targets on other continents, above all the North American. These conditions made – and still make – the area well-suited for strategic naval operations.

The remaining 97.5 per cent of Russia's northern coastline, from the White Sea to Chukotka, is of relatively limited military utility[13]. The shallow and ice-infested waters of the Siberian coastline do not allow for large-scale naval operations. On land, the military infrastructure is limited to a number of poorly-maintained airfields, air defense systems, and missile warning radars, comparable to the DEW (Distant Early Warning) radars on the North American continent. The deep waters of the Central Arctic Basin are apparently much better suited for strategic submarine operations than the shallow waters off the Siberian coast. Nuclear submarines can operate autonomously under the cover of the Arctic ice canopy for long periods of time. They can rise to the surface, push their way through 12 feet of ice, and take up firing positions anywhere in the Arctic Basin, including the North Pole. Such scenarios, including the launch of missiles, are being rehearsed by the Russian Navy on a more or less regular basis. However, the Russian SSBN fleet has shrunk and is badly deteriorated, and the building of fourth-generation SSBNs (the "Borey" class) and a new missile system ("Bulava") has been significantly delayed[14]. As a result of this, the number of Arctic patrols is still fairly limited.

3.2 Russia's economic interests

In the Cold War period, the Northern Sea Route was seen as being of high strategic value, as a link between the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans, as a potential stationing area for strategic missile submarines (SSBNs), and as an arena for land-based military surveillance activities[15]. But when subjected to a critical examination in the late 1980s, the defense-related arguments in favor of keeping the route closed to foreign vessels appeared to have lost much of their relevance. The route had limited potential as an arena for inter-theater maneuvers, and the "sensitive" information that could possibly be gathered by foreign vessels sailing through the passage would probably be of limited value compared to the data that could be

13. Mogilevkin, Ilya, *Arktika: Interesy Rossii i mezhdunarodnye usloviya ich realizatsii* [The Arctic: Russia's Interests and the International Conditions of their Realization], Nauka, Moscow 2002 p. 39.

14. Baev, Pavel, "Russia's Race for the Arctic and the New Geopolitics of the North Pole", Occasional Paper, Jamestown Foundation, October 2007, http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/Jamestown-BaevRussiaArctic_01.pdf. p. 9

15. Brubaker, Douglas & Willy Østreng, "The Northern Sea Route Regime: Exquisite Superpower Subterfuge?" in *Ocean Development & International Law*, (4) 1999 pp. 299–331.

derived from increasingly accurate satellite photos. The Route was officially opened to international ship traffic on 1 July 1991, and cargo flows are expected to grow in the coming decades. In the fall of 2009, two German cargo ships successfully navigated through the passage from East to West[16]. The possibility of oil and (in a more distant future) LNG shipments along the Russia's northern coastline is also being explored. The Russian state-owned shipping company Sovcomflot plans to send one of its 70,000-ton, ice-classed shuttle tankers eastwards through the Northern Sea Route already in the summer of 2010, from the Barents Sea terminal of Varandey to Japan[17].

Russia's strategic interests in the Arctic are closely related to the country's economic interests in the region. The current rearmament efforts are motivated not only by superpower nostalgia, but also by a widespread fear that other Arctic states may be tempted to take control over waterways and natural resources perceived to belong to Russia [18]. In Soviet times, the entire "sector" between the meridians 32° Eastern and 168° Western longitude was treated as Soviet internal waters, in reference to the so-called Sector decree from 1926. In the decree, all lands and islands located in the sector, discovered as well as undiscovered, were declared Soviet territory[19]. The applicability of the Soviet Sector decree to contemporary maritime law is highly contested. Nevertheless, the principle has a special place in Russian thinking with regard to the Arctic. The Russian sense of "ownership" applies not only to the coastal waters of the Russian north, but also maritime and shelf areas further from the coast.

The Arctic shelf claim that Russia is currently preparing, is slightly more modest than the 1926 sector claim, but not much. Russia intends to take control of a shelf area of some 1.2 million square kilometers between the outer limit of the country's 200-mile economic zone in Siberia and the North Pole. This is done in reference to the Lomonosov Ridge – a trans-Arctic underwater ridge which is said to be an extension of Russia's Siberian continental shelf. It remains to be seen whether Russia will succeed in convincing the UN Continental Shelf Commission that the claim is legitimate. And if it does, Russia will still not be in a position to hinder

16. Halpin, Tony, "Cargo ships navigate Northeast Passage for the first time", TimesOnline, 14 September 2009, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article6832885.ece.
17. Matthews, Steve, "SCF to test northern sea route", Lloyds List, 23 February 2010, http://www.lloydslist.com/ll/news/scf-to-test-northern-sea-route/20017751993.htm.
18. Smolovskiy, Andrei, "Voyenno-strategicheskaya obstanovka v Arktike" ["The Military-Strategic Situation in the Arctic"] in *Morskoi sbornik*, (11) 2006 pp. 57–65 (57).
19. Timchenko, Leonid, "The Russian Arctic Sectoral Concept: Past and Present" in *Arctic*, (1) 1997 pp. 29–35 (30).

foreign surface and subsurface vessels from navigating in its sector, since the shelf regime applies only to the sea bottom, and not to the water above.

Russia's North Pole claim is generally in line with the country's new assertiveness in international affairs and the on-going efforts to rebuild Russia as an economic, political and military great power. In the short term, the expectations of economic gains may turn out to be grossly overestimated, as the country does not yet have the technologies or financial means to develop offshore fields in the Arctic. But the policy is also inspired by traditions and emotions and the country's long history of exploration and activity in the Arctic.

4. The Perspectives of Russia's Arctic Neighbors

4.1 The United States

The United States is an Arctic nation by virtue of its 49th state – Alaska, which was purchased from tsarist Russia in 1867. Located in the far northwestern corner of the North American continent, Alaska is the largest US state and plays an important role both economically and strategically. The state contains some 25 military objects, whose activities include air and ocean surveillance as well as missile and air defense in the Arctic sector.

In the days of the Cold War, Americans feared a trans-Arctic attack by intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) launched from the Soviet mainland, missiles launched from Soviet nuclear submarines in the Barents Sea or the Arctic Ocean, or bombs dropped by long-range nuclear bomber planes. This led to the development of extensive air and missile defense systems in the Arctic. In 1961, a Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS) radar was constructed at the Thule Air Base in northwestern Greenland. At this time, Thule had a population of approximately 10,000 people and featured significant amounts of military hardware. The Thule air base has been downsized considerably since then, but is still in operation. After the end of the Cold War, the deployment of a new National Missile Defense (NMD) system has been a priority in US defense strategy. In the summer of 2001, the Bush Administration announced that it would seek funding to develop a new missile defense test bed, with interceptors located in Alaska. Compared to other alternative locations, such as North Dakota, Alaska was seen as closer to many of the threats of highest concern, such as China or North Korea. Thus, the emergence of new nuclear powers in non-Arctic parts of the world is a worrisome development also to those who live in the north. It generates security threats and fears that may potentially contribute to a remilitarization of the Arctic.

When it comes to the issue of possible US shelf claims in the Arctic Ocean, outside the 200 nautical miles line, these are still pending, since the US has not

yet ratified the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The need for US UNCLOS ratification was highlighted in National Security Presidential Directive No. 66, signed in January 2009. This directive outlines the main elements of America's new Arctic Region Policy and states that "the United States has broad and fundamental national security interests in the Arctic region and is prepared to operate either independently or in conjunction with other states to safeguard these interests"[20]. The directive also highlights the region's potential as an arena for offshore petroleum activities and shipping. In the North Slope of Alaska, petroleum activities have long been an important part of the US economy. In the future, expansion of activities into the offshore domain north of Alaska may become a reality.

4.2 Canada

Canada controls the second largest part of the Arctic. The political entities of the Canadian North – Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut (which includes the Hudson Bay islands) – all have a harsh climate and are relatively sparsely-populated. This is particularly the case in the Canadian "far North", which refers to that part of the country located north of the Arctic Circle. As in the case of Russia, the sector principle has a certain merit in Canadian thinking with regard to the Arctic. Canada claimed the sector between 60°W and 141°W longitude, extending all the way north to the North Pole, as early as in 1925. All islands in this region, and the waters surrounding them, were claimed to be Canadian (Government of Canada, 2009). In 1985, Canada drew straight baselines around the outer limits of the islands constituting the Canadian archipelago, claiming the waters between them as "historic internal waters"[21]. This made the sector claim redundant, but Canada's position with regard to the legal status of the waters surrounding the country's Arctic islands is still highly contested. The US is one of the countries which does not recognize Canada's Arctic water claims, and has allegedly sent nuclear submarines under the ice near Canadian islands without obtaining permission from, or even notifying, the Canadian government.

As the Arctic ice cap retreats, new conflicts may arise between Canada and other Arctic nations, most notably the US. over the legal status of the straits along the Northwest Passage, as well as the inlet to the Bay of Fundy, where the Canadians

20. President of the United States, *Arctic Region Policy*, National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD-66) and Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD-25), 9 January 2009, http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nspd/nspd-66.htm

21. Verma, Surinder Kaur, *An Introduction to Public International Law*, Prentice-Hall of India, New Delhi 2004 p 123.

are planning to put a ban on supertanker traffic. Conflicts may also arise between Russia, Canada and Denmark over parts of the Arctic shelf, as it may be argued that the Lomonosov Ridge is an extension not only of Russia's Siberian Shelf, but also the Canadian shelf north of Ellesmere Island, or the Danish shelf north of Greenland. The protection of Canada's economic interests in the Arctic figures highly on the agenda of the country's current government.

In 2007, Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced that "six to eight" ice-strengthened Arctic offshore patrol ships would be purchased for the Canadian Navy, and that that Canada would acquire a powerful new icebreaker for its Coast Guard. At present, the fate of these projects is still uncertain. Harper also announced an expansion of the Canadian Ranger program to 5,000 personnel, and enhanced Arctic training for the regular Canadian Forces, making them able to conduct "sovereignty ops" in the far North[22]. In December 2009, the Canadian parliament voted almost unanimously in favor of a bid to rename the country's Arctic seaway "the *Canadian* Northwest Passage". Thus, there are many similarities between Canada's Arctic policies and those of Russia.

4.3 Denmark

Denmark has in recent years, much like Canada and Russia, taken steps to strengthen its military presence in the Arctic. The plans involve the establishment of a regional joint-service command in the Faroe Islands, and the expansion of an existing military base in Greenland[23]. Like fellow EU members Sweden and Finland, Denmark attaches great importance to the EU's "Northern Dimension", which includes not only the Union's land areas north of the Arctic Circle, but also areas as far south as the southern coast of the Baltic Sea. The world's largest island, Greenland, is a Danish territory, but unlike mainland Denmark it is not a member of the EU, and largely self-governed. In contrast to the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard, Greenland has a number of American military installations and plays an important role as a strategic outpost in the northeastern corner of the North American continent. As far as the central Arctic shelf is concerned, Denmark is, as an Arctic *coastal* state, the only EU country in a position to file a claim to shelf areas beyond the 200 nautical mile zone. A Danish claim to shelf areas north of Greenland, perhaps including the North Pole, is likely to be partly overlapping with Canadian and Russian claims. Denmark also has a territorial dispute with

22. Byers, Michael, *Who Owns the Arctic*? Douglas & McIntyre, Vancouver 2009 p 63-66.
23. Green, Niall, "Denmark to open Arctic military command", WSWS, 22 July 2009, http://www.wsws.org/articles/2009/jul2009/arct-j22.shtml.

Canada over the tiny Hans Island, located in the Nares Strait, a waterway that runs between Ellesmere Island and Greenland.

4.4 Norway

Norway is the fifth Arctic coastal state and another important state actor, particularly in the European Arctic. The country has a long tradition of arctic expeditions and commercial activities north of the Arctic Circle. Today, Norway is one of the world's leading petroleum nations and has jurisdiction over a maritime area more than six times the size of its land territory. The High North has been singled out as Norway's most important strategic priority area, and considerable resources are being devoted to the day-to-day enforcement of Norwegian sovereignty and authority in northern waters. This includes the management of the Barents Sea's living marine resources – a task which is being undertaken in co-operation with Russia.

Norway is the first country to start large-scale petroleum operations in the Barents Sea, at the Snøhvit gas field located 140 kilometers off the coast of Finnmark. At water depths between 250 and 350 meters, natural gas is being extracted by remote-controlled seabed installations, piped to the shore, liquefied, and shipped on LNG tankers to European and American markets. This is truly a pioneer project. The Norwegian west coast is also trafficked by Russian oil tankers transporting crude oil from Western Siberia to European and American markets. For obvious reasons, environmental concerns related to the extraction and transit of petroleum in and through the Barents Sea, as well as the handling of defense-related radioactive waste on the Kola Peninsula, figure high on the Norwegian-Russian agenda.

In addition to Norway's "soft security" challenges in the Euro-Arctic region, there are also a number of potential "hard security" challenges related to the increasing Russian military activity in the region.

4.5 Similarities and differences

The perspectives of Russia's northern neighbors show many similarities with that of Russia, but there are also important differences. Two of the countries may be regarded as "sector nations" or Arctic "great powers" (Russia and Canada). They control, respectively, the Northeast and Northwest Passage. Four of the countries are NATO members (the US, Canada, Denmark, and Norway), and Denmark is the only EU member. Two are nuclear powers (the US and Russia), and all but one (the US) have ratified the Law of the Sea Convention. As for other commonalities, all of the Arctic coastal states seem to devote increasing attention to Arctic sover-

eignty and jurisdiction issues, and the protection of their economic and security interests in the region.

5. Climate Change as a "Threat Multiplier"

When looking into the threat perceptions and security strategies of Russia, one soon discovers that the perceived presence of "Cold War-like" threats continues to leave its mark on military doctrines and practices. Nuclear weapons, many of which are located in the Euro-Arctic region, still play an important role in the country's defense strategy. Russia does not trust the United States, NATO, or the West in general, and the West is uncertain how to interpret Russia's military muscle-flexing in the Arctic. In addition to the traditional Russian fear of a NATO aggression against the Russian mainland, there is a widespread fear that Russia's neighbors will try to expropriate the country's Arctic natural resources[24]. In this sense, Russia is not very different from other Arctic states, whose policy agendas also seem to be dominated by issues of national sovereignty and authority, rather than by pan-Arctic security concerns and issues of societal, environmental, and human security.

Interstate relations in the post-Cold War Arctic are marked by the region's slow and gradual emergence from what may be described as a 'dual frost'. First, the political frost of the Cold War period, which turned the region into a military domain and brought East-West interaction and co-operation on important non-military issues to a halt, is already a thing of the past. The political 'thaw' in international Arctic relations started with Mikhail Gorbachev's Murmansk speech in October 1987, and continued throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Second, as we have become increasingly aware of in recent years, the Arctic is also emerging from the frost in the sense of global climate changes leading to a contraction of the polar ice cap.

The picture of an increasingly accessible Arctic is, however, far from unambiguous. There are also developments that threaten to make the region *less* accessible, not only to indigenous groups but also to industrial entrepreneurs. Permafrost thawing, for instance, represents a formidable challenge to traditional as well as modern human activities. It changes the ecology in regions populated by subsistence communities, occasionally forcing them to move or give up traditional livelihoods. It also causes damage to northern housing, industrial facilities, and transport infrastructure such as ports, airports, roads, railroads, and pipelines. And at sea, ice conditions may become more unpredictable than they have been in the past, despite the overall shrinkage in the extent of the Arctic ice cover. The

24. Smolovskiy, 2006 p. 57

tendency towards more frequent and severe storms may also become a source of concern for northern communities, seafarers (merchant and naval), and industrial enterprises conducting operations in the Arctic.

In March 2008, the European Union published a report entitled *Climate Change and International Security*, which, *inter alia*, touches on the topic of climate-induced resource conflicts in the Arctic. In the report, the European Commission and its High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy argue that "the increased accessibility of the enormous hydrocarbon resources in the Arctic is changing the geo-strategic dynamics of the region with potential consequences for international stability and European security interests". This development is, in the words of the Commission, "illustrated by the recent planting of the Russian flag under the North Pole". The report calls attention to "the intensified competition over access to, and control over, energy resources", and maintains that "there is an increasing need to address the growing debate over territorial claims"[25].

The United States, on its part, has used the potential for resource-related conflicts in the Arctic as an argument in favor of strengthening the US Navy. In the "Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower", published in October 2007, it is argued that "climate change is gradually opening up the waters of the Arctic, not only to new resource development, but also to new shipping routes that may reshape the global transport system". These developments may offer new opportunities for economic growth, but they are also, in the words of the Strategy, "potential sources of competition and conflict for access and natural resources"[26].

Concerns that rivalry over access to Arctic petroleum resources may lead to increasing interstate tensions are also common in the Russian political discourse. For instance, in July 2007, shortly before the Russian North Pole expedition, the former director of a Moscow-based foreign policy think tank, Dr. Vladimir Frolov, published an article in the *Russia Profile* magazine entitled "The Coming Conflict in the Arctic". In this article, he argues that "Russia needs to find new sources of fuel" and that "the Arctic seems like the only place to go". The fact that international law does not recognize Russia's right to the entire Arctic seabed north of the Russian coastline is described as a "problem", and the United Nations' non-acceptance of previous Russian claims in the region is largely blamed on the United States. The United States is, in Frolov's terminology, "jealous of Russia's attempts to

25. European Commission, "The European Union and the Arctic Region", Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, 20 November 2008, http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/arctic_region/docs/com_08_763_en.pdf.

26. United States Navy, 2007

project its dominance in the energy sector", and potentially disposed "to intrude on Russia's home turf"[27].

Statements such as these may indicate that there is a tendency among several of the Arctic states to regard their northern neighbors as potential "rivals" and "competitors" in the quest for oil and gas resources on the Arctic continental shelf. It is also possible that current legal disputes in the region may acquire increasing significance, possibly leading to an increase in the coastal states' military presence in the region. But to suggest that interstate "resource wars" are looming in the background seems somewhat far-fetched. In all of the states concerned, the use of military force is seen as a last-resort option, and even though the stakes are high, most international powers would prefer to play by the rules of international law, since failure to do so would alienate the sympathy of foreign investors[28].

As Barry Zellen points out in his latest book, military power will continue to have its place in the region also in the 21st century. But, in the most likely scenario, "it is science that will define the new boundaries"[29]. Uncertainty and disagreements over borders and jurisdiction on the continental shelf may be gradually replaced by certainty and agreement, as the outer limits of each Arctic state's offshore domain are clarified through undersea mapping, agreed-upon legal procedures, and bilateral negotiations. Some of the disputes may be more difficult to resolve than others, or take a longer time to settle, but there seems to be more patience among the involved stake-holders than is generally recognized.

One of the reasons for this is that most of the currently known and, in theory, extractable oil and gas resources on the Arctic continental shelf, such as the Shtokman field in the Barents Sea, are located in areas of unchallenged national jurisdiction. Economically as well as politically, it would make little sense for a country that has access to unexploited fields on land or in undisputed waters relatively close to the shore to embark on costly offshore projects in disputed, and possibly ice-infested, waters further from the coast. The Arctic coastal states' commitment to finding peaceful solutions to outstanding issues through diplomacy and negotiations, in accordance with the Law of the Sea framework, has been reiterated on a number of occasions, for instance in the joint declaration signed at the

27. Frolov, Vladimir, «The Coming Conflict in the Arctic», Russia Profile, 10 July 2007, http://www.russiaprofile.org/page.php?pageid=International&articleid=a1184076124.

28. Howard, Roger, *The Arctic Gold Rush: The New Race for Tomorrow's Natural Resources*, Continuum, London 2009 p 19.

29. Zellen, Barry Scott, *Arctic Doom, Arctic Boom: The Geopolitics of Climate Change in the Arctic*, Praeger, Santa Barbara, CA 2009 p 113.

Arctic Ocean Conference in Ilulissat, Greenland, in May 2008[30]. Their collective "stewardship" responsibilities in the region are also well recognized.

However, when discussing the long-term conflict potential in the Arctic, one should also be aware of the potential for disagreements between the "Arctic five" (the Arctic coastal states) and the remaining three members of the Arctic Council (Iceland, Sweden, and Finland), and, perhaps more problematically, between Arctic and non-Arctic states. Should an "outside" actor such as China suddenly establish a temporary or permanent presence in the region, for commercial or other purposes, this could potentially lead to frictions with the established community of Arctic states. The involvement of third-party actors in resource-related activities in disputed areas could also have a destabilizing effect on interstate relationships.

The state-level conflict potential in the post-Cold War Arctic is different from that of the Cold War Arctic in the sense that patterns of amity and enmity are no longer decided by which military block you belong to. Today, more than ever before, Arctic politics center on the access to natural resources and sailing routes. The security interests of Arctic nations are closely related to their economic interests in the region. And their economic interests are often seen as potentially conflicting, rather than shared. A "zone of peace," in the sense of an Arctic security community,[31] cannot be said to have developed. No special arrangements for security co-operation in the circumpolar north have emerged, or are expected to emerge in the near future. Co-operation between Arctic states in the post-Cold War period has so far centered mainly on non-military issues, and this is likely to remain the situation in the years to come.

6. Meeting the New Security Challenges

Today, more than two decades after the end of the Cold War, the Arctic stands out as one of the most peaceful parts of the world, located far away from political hot spots further south. Nonetheless, the time when the northern part of the globe could be considered an inaccessible wasteland of limited interest to the rest of the world, is over. Arctic as well as non-Arctic states are increasingly looking towards the top of the world as they try to find ways to meet their long-term energy needs. Previously non-pressing issues relating to sovereignty and jurisdiction in north-

30. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, "The Ilulissat Declaration", 28 May 2008, http://www.oceanlaw.org/downloads/arctic/Ilulissat_Declaration.pdf.

31. The concept of a "security community", coined by Karl Deutsch in the 1950s, describes a community of states between which there is "real assurance that the members of that community will not fight each other physically, but will settle their disputes in some other way." (Deutsch et al., 1957 p. 5). See also Adler & Barnett, 1998.

ern waters are gradually coming to the surface as the Arctic ice cover shrinks and is replaced by open water. And all of the Arctic coastal states – Russia, the US, Canada, Denmark, and Norway – have taken measures to strengthen their military and/or coast guard presence in the region in order to protect their security and economic interests.

Highly relevant in this context is the question of whether, how, how much, and how soon security dynamics, security politics, and interstate relations in the Arctic will be affected by the process of climate change. Apocalyptic predictions about the future nature of Arctic interstate relations may at worst turn into self-fulfilling prophecies, and should therefore be avoided. The same goes for Cold War stereotypes labeling Russia as a "predatory power"[32]. What is clear, however, is that changes in the Arctic region's physical environment – the exact tempo of which is still uncertain – are likely to present policy planners and political decision-makers with a wide array of challenges that will require extraordinary measures at the national as well as at the regional and international levels.

The *direct* effects of climate change on the Arctic environment may be severe, but not necessarily more severe than its *indirect* effects as a potential "multiplier" of existing or latent intra- and interstate disputes. Seen from a security perspective, the two types of challenges are inherently different, and will require different countermeasures undertaken by different actors. Military planners are, for obvious reasons, most preoccupied with the second type of concerns. Environmental security challenges, in the Arctic or elsewhere, cannot be averted by the threat, display, or use of military force, and they are typically dealt with in other fora than state security challenges. At the same time, it should be recognized that efforts to address the underlying causes of the problem (e.g., limiting greenhouse gas emissions) and, to the extent possible, reduce the pace of anthropogenic change, may lower the risk of secondary effects such as conflicts over access to increasingly scarce natural resources and/or emerging marine transport routes.

The apparent interconnectedness between the direct and the indirect effects of climate change is, however, neither fixed nor total. It is, at least in theory, fully possible to imagine climate change without political destabilization and conflict. Central intervening variables in the relationship between climate change and conflict are the roles played by governments, political institutions, and regional and international organizations in managing the process of environmental change, mitigating resource pressures, and containing interstate tensions. Under some conditions, the adverse impacts of climate change may even lead to increased dialogue

32. Vorontsov, Lev, "Russia is No Longer a Predatory Soviet Power", Atlantic-Community.org, 17 March 2010, http://www.atlantic-community.org/index/ott_type/Your_Opinion/3.

and co-operation between states that are facing the same or similar challenges, and facilitate the settlement of long-standing disputes such as the ones that exist in the circumpolar Arctic. Contributions towards this aim can be made at several levels.

At the *national level*, all of the states that surround the Arctic Ocean will work to secure their short-, medium- and long-term strategic and economic interests in the region. The region's new role as a potential energy province and transport corridor implies that the stakes are high for all of the involved parties, and none of the Arctic states can be expected to offer substantial concessions to their neighbors in the name of regional stability. This may point towards an increase in the level of interstate tension. On the other hand, all of the Arctic states recognize the crucial role of international law, including UNCLOS, in the settlement of interstate disputes over access to maritime and shelf areas in the region. Unlike other and more conflict-prone regions, the Arctic is a region of economically developed and politically stable countries, which have an institutionalized co-operation on a host of non-military (especially environmental) matters, and a long tradition of peaceful coexistence. Thus, even though the effects of climate change on ecosystems are likely to be more extensive in the Arctic than in many other places, the consequences for regional peace and stability may turn out to be less severe here than in many other parts of the world, such as sub-Saharan Africa.

At the *regional level*, institutionalized co-operation arrangements such as the Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council can play an important role in the maintenance of regional stability. These and other components of the multifaceted system of Arctic governance do not have the authority to make formally binding decisions on legal or other matters, but they are important arenas for interaction and co-operation among Arctic states on issues of common concern. For instance, by initiating regionally oriented academic studies such as the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (2005) and the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (2009), the Arctic Council has drawn the attention of its member states and the outside world to emerging security and other concerns in the region, and created common understandings of possible ways to meet them. Central in this regard is the Council's role as a "soft law" institution, as illustrated by the process leading up to the adoption of the updated Arctic Offshore Oil and Gas Guidelines in 2009.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the issue of climate change, and its security implications for the Arctic region, are to be dealt with also at the *international level*. The observed increases in air and water temperature in the Arctic and the melting of sea and glacial ice are not only regional, but also global security concerns. Processes taking place in the northern part of the globe are likely to affect the rest of the world in a number of ways, most notably through sea-level rise. The driving forces behind the process of global climate change will have to be ad-

dressed in a collective manner, and few organs are better equipped to coordinate the effort than the United Nations. In addition to coordinating global processes addressing the source of the problem, the UN system can assist the Arctic states in settling disputes. Most importantly, the Arctic states can draw on tools such as the Law of the Sea Convention, and increasingly relevant UN organs such as the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The settlement of legal disputes and establishment of robust "rules of the road" for shipping and offshore petroleum activities can improve the prospects for a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Arctic.

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В последние годы, и особенно после зрелищного установления флага Россией на дне океана в районе Северного полюса 2 августа 2007 года, появилось много разговоров о «полярном империализме» и угрозе «большой игры» в Арктике. Предложенная статья посвящена теме межгосударственных отношений, и вероятности долгосрочных конфликтов в самой северной части мира. Признавая сохраняющуюся значимость военного присутствия в Арктике, и наличие нескольких неразрешенных юридических споров, в статье утверждается, что Россия и ее северные соседи заинтересованы в достижении стабильности региона и избегают ремилитаризации в регионе. Конвенция ООН по морскому праву 1982 года и региональные программы сотрудничества, такие как Арктический Совет и Совет Баренцева/Евроарктического региона являются важными способами достижения этой цели. С другой стороны, необходимо отметить наличие множества неопределенностей касательно приоритетов России и региональных стратегий.