

Russia's Security Perceptions and Arctic Governance

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Abstract

Russia's war in Ukraine further strained Russia's relations with the West and negatively influenced Arctic regional governance, especially after seven members of the Arctic Council paused cooperation with Russia. The rationale of the suspension was to express disapproval by seven Arctic states of Russia's aggression in Ukraine. However, the suspension of cooperation with Russia within the Arctic Council format prompted some observers to question the relevance and utility of the institution. Russia never expressed its wish to leave the Council and continues to express its desire for multilateral cooperation in the region. This raises the question: Can Russia's assertive stance in Ukraine coexist with peaceful cooperation in the Arctic? In order to answer this question, this article addresses the following questions: How does the geopolitical tension shape Russia's approach to Arctic governance? And what is the role of military and economic security in Russia's Arctic policy? The article uses a comparative method combined with discourse analysis to establish a change in Russia's view on Arctic governance before and after the war in Ukraine.

Keywords

Arctic Council; Arctic governance; economic security; militarization; military security; Northern Sea Route; Russia; security; threat perception

1. Introduction

For several years after the end of the Cold War, many authors described the Arctic as a region of security and cooperation, as Russia continued cooperation in the region even with the states with whom it had tense relations on other issues (Heininen et al., 2014; Rowe & Blakkisrud, 2014; Sergunin & Konyshv, 2014). However, the narratives on the Arctic as an exceptional place of peace and cooperation started changing in the mid-2000s when the attention to the Arctic as a potential place for future power competition was instigated by several studies. In 2007, reports on future ice-free summers in the Arctic by 2030 (National

Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2007) opened discussions on the possibilities of using the Arctic as a transport corridor. The reports in 2008 on the immense energy reserves of the Arctic (22% of the world's undiscovered oil and natural gas deposits) and the opening possibility of access to new resources spurred discussions around the Arctic as a new “great game” (Bird et al., 2008; Borgerson, 2009), warning of the coming competition for resources and transport corridors.

Russia's increased foreign policy assertiveness from 2008 (Borozna, 2022) prompted the prevailing Western narrative on Russia as a revisionist, neo-imperial state (Herpen, 2015; Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2016; Orban, 2008; Sagramoso, 2020). While international cooperation in the Arctic intensified, especially within the Arctic Council (AC) format, several studies emerged that see the Arctic as an area of a new Cold War, intense competition, or even confrontation. These studies tend to project Russia's assertiveness elsewhere to Moscow's future stance in the North (Aleksandrov, 2007; Blunden, 2009; Emmerson, 2010; Kraska, 2011; Mière & Mazo, 2013). However, there is a competing narrative among scholars who show that despite an increasingly assertive Russia, Moscow continued cooperating and observed international agreements related to the Arctic (Buchanan, 2023; Closson, 2017; Heininen, 2022; Laruelle, 2020; Roberts, 2021; Rottem, 2020).

In light of the new developments after Russia's war in Ukraine that started in February 2022, the seven members (Arctic Eight minus Russia) of the main forum for Arctic cooperation, the AC, decided to suspend their cooperation with Russia. This decision raises questions about the future of the Arctic governance and security in the region. In order to assess the effect of this pause in cooperation, this article addresses the following question: How does the geopolitical tension shape Russia's approach to Arctic governance? And who are the main actors in Russia's Arctic, and what are their motives and views on Arctic governance? To answer these questions, this article brings attention to the nexus of Russia's state's security perspectives and global governance. Specifically, the article focuses on Russia's military and economic security concerns in the context of global governance in the Arctic. The article uses the comparative method to establish a change in Russia's view on Arctic governance before and after the war in Ukraine.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 will provide a short overview of Russia's perspective on Arctic governance from 1987 until 2023. Section 3 draws attention to the role of the AC in Arctic governance and explores the consequences of the suspension of cooperation with Russia on Arctic governance. Section 4 will look at Russia's perspective on military security in the Arctic. Section 5 focuses on Russia's view of economic security pertaining to the Arctic. Section 6 draws a conclusion.

2. Russia's Perspective on Arctic Governance

While there is no universally accepted definition of “Arctic governance,” a multitude of different governance arrangements is aptly described by Young (2005) as an “Arctic governance mosaic” since it describes a mosaic-like framework of global agreements pertinent to the Arctic: the AC, regional management mechanisms, public-private partnerships, informal venues, and all-hands gatherings (Young, 2016). Additionally, the cooperation in the Arctic is guided by a web of legally binding agreements, such as the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention, and several other treaties and forums—like the Polar Code governing shipping, the Arctic Fisheries Agreement, the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, and many bilateral agreements (Simpson, 2023).

Since the end of the Cold War, Russia has become a member of various international governance formats in the Arctic, among which the most important is the AC. Russia's membership in the AC was viewed in Russia as a symbol of prestige and great power status that the country lost after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia's participation in Arctic governance through international organizations and forums allowed Russia to restore its great power status (Kochtcheeva, 2022; Lagutina, 2019, p. 103; Laruelle, 2020, p. 5).

Russia's view of Arctic governance is fundamentally shaped by its status as the largest Arctic state (40% of the Arctic region is situated in Russia), by the history of Russia's presence in the region since the 12th century (Trenin, 2020), and the geographic reality that the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF) accounts for 18% of Russia's territory (Lagutina, 2019, p. 21). Russia's coastline accounts for 53% of the Arctic Ocean coastline and is home to 2.5 million Russian citizens, comprising 40 indigenous groups. Russia's Arctic territory stretches along 15,000 miles of coastline along the Arctic Ocean, waters above the Arctic Circle from the Barents Sea in the west at the border to Norway to the Bering Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk in the far east (AC, n.d.).

Russia became an AC member after its creation in Ottawa in 1996, and while its participation in the AC was initially low, Russia became more active in 1999 (Rowe, 2009, p. 145). This change happened as the role of the Arctic slowly moved in Russia's Arctic strategy from the realm of "low politics" (environmental and social problems) into the realm of "high politics," involving foreign affairs, defense and security policy, war and peace (Rowe, 2009, p. 149). The change in Russia's view of the Arctic coincided with Russia's turn to geoeconomics—using its strategic industries (energy and defense) as geopolitical tools (Borozna, 2022). Starting in 2008, when Russia's Arctic strategy announced its intention to control the Northern Sea Route (NSR), Moscow's attitude towards the region became more proactive. Before the Ukraine crisis in 2014, the official Moscow position toward the AC was to change it from an intergovernmental "discussion forum" to a "full-fledged international organization" (Sergunin, 2022, p. 123; Vasiliev, 2013).

The AC was essential in maintaining dialogue with Russia even during Russia–West tensions on other issues. Thus, following Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, the US imposed several rounds of sanctions, prohibiting US firms from investing in Russia's Arctic energy development. However, the US and Russia continued cooperating on sustainable development, health, well-being, and biodiversity issues. As Russia looked forward to its rotating presidency of the AC for 2021–2023, the official policy was to strengthen cooperation with the Arctic states in economic, scientific, cultural, and cross-border cooperation. Russian strategic documents at the time portrayed the AC as a leading institution of regional governance. Despite the continued crisis in Ukraine that started in 2014, the AC members had not objected to Russia's upcoming AC leadership at that time. However, one day after Russian troops crossed the border of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the Kremlin threatened the Arctic states of Finland and Sweden, warning of "serious military and political consequences" should they become members of NATO ("Explainer: Finland, Sweden weigh up pros and cons," 2022). The seven non-Russian members of the AC responded to Russia's aggression on March 3, 2022, by announcing a temporary halt to participation in all meetings of the Council (U.S. Department of State, 2022a). On June 8, 2022, the seven members of the AC released a joint statement, informing about a limited resumption of work in the AC in projects that do not involve the participation of the Russian Federation (U.S. Department of State, 2022b).

The West also responded to Russia's war in Ukraine with several rounds of sanctions that have hindered Russia's ability to purchase technology for Arctic development and exploration. Additionally, Russian oil

tankers lost insurance coverage from Western insurance companies. Thus, Russia's aggression in Ukraine resulted in Russia's isolation from cooperation with AC states. Consequently, the new Russian Arctic strategy eliminated any mentions of the AC, emphasizing the priority of Russia's national Arctic interests instead and calling for greater Russia's self-sufficiency in Arctic development and exploration (Kremlin, 2023).

The view among various Russian Arctic actors on the decision of the AC to pause its cooperation with Russia can be divided into five main narratives. The first group sees any decision by the AC without Russia's voice as illegitimate. The second view is that isolating Russia from the decision on Arctic issues will worsen security challenges between Russia and other states of the AC. The third view is that Russia should be open to creating an alternative to the AC format that would include non-Arctic states. The fourth view is that the attempts to marginalize Russia in Arctic governance will have a more detrimental effect on other Arctic states than on Russia. Finally, the fifth view is that the West will return to cooperation with Russia on Arctic governance (Sukhankin & Lackenbauer, 2023).

Additionally, Russia's official position on Arctic governance is influenced by the views and preferences of significant actors and stakeholders in the development of the Arctic region (Table 1).

Table 1. Arctic major stakeholders: Their motives and views on governance in the region.

Major stakeholder	Motives	Views on Arctic governance
Energy industry (Rosneft, Gazprom, Novatek, Lukoil, Gazprom Neft, Surgutneftegas)	Profit maximization, access to the latest technology for Arctic development, international investments, and removal of sanctions	Russia has to maintain the status of a reliable economic partner in order to continue viable economic cooperation
Defense industry (Ministry of Defense, the heads of Russian defense industry enterprises, the National Security Council, the Federal Security Service, and the Northern Fleet)	Russia's national interest, defense of Russia's sovereignty, and maintenance of military capabilities to match potential threats	The state's security interests come first, and the Arctic governance within international institutions is secondary
Regional governors	Socio-economic development of the region and environmental protection	The need for state support for regional development implies that regions are not independent actors in Arctic governance
Indigenous people	Preservation of culture and socio-economic and environmental security	The need for state support The AC was the most inclusive governance platform where Indigenous peoples' representatives could participate
Environmental groups	Preserving the environment	The need for state, private, and international funding
Scientific institutes	Research on climate, environment, geophysics, and marine life	The need for state, private, and international funding

While indigenous people, environmental groups, and the scientific community are deeply vested in the region, their voice on Arctic governance is not very strong in Russia, as the voice of energy and defense industries. Regional governors depend on energy and defense industries and receive state support. Thus, energy and defense industries are the most influential players in the region, influencing Russia's official stance on Arctic affairs.

3. The AC and Arctic Governance

Post-Cold-War Arctic governance has often been described as a regional environmental security complex since environmental issues are part of broader security concerns and often mediate or meliorate the severity of military or political issues (Chater et al., 2020). Consistent with the previous research on the role of institutions (Finnemore, 1996; Ruggie, 1992), the AC has had global ordering effects (Rowe et al., 2020). The institution contributed to the region's stability by uniting states and substate actors on various shared issues. The region has been described as "exceptional" since states' policies in the region were not the same as in other parts of the world (Young & Osherenko, 1992). Several authors maintain that Russia's interests and motivations in the region are not the same as its revisionism elsewhere (Lackenbauer & Dean, 2020). The Arctic's environmental threats and security challenges have global influence and cannot be solved by individual countries—They require global participation. The AC has been a platform for producing binding international agreements (Canova & Pic, 2023). Additionally, participation in the AC helped spread the values and norms of participating members. Several studies show the positive influence of institutions where most members are from democratic states. Conversely, some authors argue that in non-democratic regimes, government control of the media and manipulation of public opinion result in a general lack of awareness regarding international environmental discourse and their state's poor environmental practices. As a result, authoritarian regimes lack accountability to the national and international public. This lack of accountability finds expression in hollow statements, where "non-democratic leaders, and the international organizations they support might merely mimic climate rhetoric" (Nazarov & Obydenkova, 2022, p. 397; see also Ambrosio et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2021; Obydenkova, 2022a). Thus, participation in democratic institutions contributes to democratic norm diffusion, and Russia's participation in the AC, which is a democratic institution with democratic member states, had a positive influence on Russia and Russia-West cooperation. This brings us to the question: What happens after the exclusion of Russia from participation in the democratic institution? To answer this question, the following hypothesis will be tested:

H1: The suspension of cooperation with Russia within the AC will have negative consequences for Arctic governance.

To test this hypothesis, the discourse analysis will be used to explore Russia's statements on Arctic governance. Since the pause in AC cooperation with Russia after 2022, there have been notable negative changes in Russia's official stance on Arctic governance. Thus, after the war in Ukraine, the Kremlin published amendments to its Arctic policy (Kremlin, 2023). The amendments placed a more oversized accent on Russian national interests in the Arctic and removed any mentions of the AC. While the focus of the previous version of the document was on cooperation within multilateral formats, the revised policy is more realistic in its orientation and calls for the protection of Russia's strategic interests (Humpert, 2023; Lipunov & Devyatkin, 2023). The change of discourse on the Arctic in Russia moved away from "strengthening good neighborly relations with the Arctic states," instead, the revised 2023 Russia's Arctic strategy speaks of

the “development of relations with foreign states on a bilateral basis within the framework of appropriate multilateral structures and mechanisms” (Kremlin, 2023, para. 16a). This change in the official discourse demonstrates support for H1, namely, the suspension of cooperation within the AC led to Russia’s change of emphasis from the multilateral format in its approach to Arctic governance to focus on domestic interests in Arctic development and bilateral cooperation, which will entail negative consequences for Arctic governance.

4. Military Security

The Arctic region played a crucial part in Soviet strategic thought during the Cold War, and it remains important today when the tension between Russia and the US intensified. To this day, the Arctic is a base for the key element of Russia’s strategic triad—the Northern Fleet, which is the largest Russian navy fleet. Two-thirds of Russia’s nuclear submarine fleet is stationed at Russia’s Kola Peninsula. The Northern Fleet is essential to Russia’s deterrence (it hosts strategic submarines and tactical nuclear weapons). The strategic positioning of the Northern Fleet in the AZRF provides access to the Atlantic Ocean and serves to protect Russia’s northern borders from NATO (Closson, 2017). The Arctic also stations border guard, air force, and army bases.

For almost two decades after the end of the Cold War, the Russian government neglected the Arctic (Godzimirski & Sergunin, 2020). In the 1990s, military units were withdrawn from Novaya Zemlya, the New Siberian Islands, and Franz Joseph Land, most fighter bomber aviation regiments were deactivated, military bases were abandoned, and the radar control and air defense system were liquidated (Lagutina, 2019, p. 68). The renewed interest in the region came in the early 2000s, with the release of a strategy for the Arctic in 2001. In August 2007, following the scientific expedition to the Arctic ridge, President Vladimir Putin ordered the resumption of regular air patrols over the Arctic Ocean (“Russian bombers on Arctic mission,” 2007). After 2008, Russia increased its operations in the Arctic, with the Russian Navy announcing a resumption of a warship presence in the region (“Four Russian strategic bombers patrol Arctic,” 2008). Since then, many observers characterized this increased military activity in the Arctic as a sign of Russia’s aggressive intentions (Folland, 2022), while others characterized Russia’s activism in the Arctic as a return to a more normal activity for a great power (Devyatkin, 2018). However, much of this activity is a part of the overdue modernization of Russia’s military that started in 2007. As a part of the modernization, Russia re-opened Soviet bases on the Arctic coast, spurred by the formation of the new Arctic Joint Strategic Command (Buchanan, 2023, p. 75). Moscow has resumed its activity in around 50 bases in the Arctic (Center for Strategic and International Studies, n.d.). Currently, Russia has 16 deep-water ports, 14 operational airfields, an ice-breaker fleet, and four new Arctic brigades (Anthony et al., 2021, p. 12).

Since 2013, Russia has started conducting long-range air patrols and resumed various military exercises within the Arctic, including large-scale military exercises. The Ukrainian crisis in 2014 accelerated the planned modernization and organization of Russia’s conventional forces in the AZRF into the Arctic Group of Forces. The Arctic brigade was created in 2015 and deployed in Alakurtti, near the Finnish border. In response to growing tensions between Russia and the West after the annexation of Crimea, Russia created the Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command, which was upgraded to the status of the 50th military district in 2021 (Kremlin, 2020b; Sergunin & Konyshev, 2017; Sergunin & Shibata, 2022, p. 49). A new Northern strategic command was established three years before schedule, in December 2014 (Sergunin & Konyshev, 2016, pp. 152–153). The increased perception of threat from NATO prompted Russia to merge

the air-defense force units into a joint task force in October 2014. A new air defense and the air-force army was created, equipped with S-400, Mig-31 interceptor aircraft, and radar units (Sergunin, 2020, pp. 133–134). After 2014, 14 Russian air bases abandoned after the end of the Cold War were re-opened (Laruelle, 2020). Russian strategic bombers resumed patrol of the Arctic borders.

Russia's activism in the Arctic is also driven by a real vulnerability due to the melting of ice, which decreases the ability of Russian submarines to hide under the ice, which would leave them vulnerable to anti-submarine warfare and satellite observation (Boulègue, 2019). This development presents a threat to Russian Submarine-launched Ballistic Missile Nuclear Submarines (SSBNs) and the sea-based nuclear deterrent. In order to protect its Northern Fleet, Russia is attempting to improve its anti-access/area-denial systems and monitoring and surveillance capabilities, increasing number of military exercises and patrols of long-range bombers and anti-submarine warfare aircraft (Rumer et al., 2021). Russia continues the modernization of its military infrastructure to support these operations.

To evaluate the claim promoted by some analysts that Russia's assertiveness in Ukraine will spill over into the Arctic, the following hypothesis will be tested:

H2: Russia's aggression in Ukraine will result in Russia's more assertive Arctic policy.

To test this hypothesis, this section will analyze Russia's military exercises in the Arctic before and after 2022. The data on military exercises is collected from open sources and compares the number of Western and Russian military drills before and after Russia's war in Ukraine. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Military exercises and drills in the Arctic region.

Year	Western military drills	Russia's military drills
2021	22	12
2022	10	7
2023	13	10

Sources: Based on data from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (n.d.), NATO (2023), and news articles published between 2021–2023 by Russian TV network RT (<https://russian.rt.com/tag/ucheniya>).

The review of the data on military exercises shows that Russia conducted 12 military exercises in the Arctic in 2021. This number decreased to seven in 2022 and 10 in 2023 (based on data from Center for Strategic and International Studies, n.d., and articles by the RT network). If the number of military drills is taken as an indicator of assertiveness in the Arctic, we can conclude that Russia is less assertive in the region compared to 2021, the year preceding the war in Ukraine. While the decreased number of drills might be explained by the pulling of personnel and military equipment to the war in Ukraine, it also can demonstrate that aggressiveness in Ukraine does not automatically spill into the Arctic. Western military training in the Arctic also decreased from 22 in 2021 to 10 in 2022 and 13 in 2023.

One of Russia's main military concerns is NATO's military buildup in the Arctic. The National Security Strategy of Russia endorsed in 2021 highlighted the augmentation of NATO's military infrastructure near Russian borders, NATO military exercises simulating the deployment of nuclear weapons against Russia, and the ongoing development of global missile defense systems by the United States as potential threats to

Russia's security (Kremlin, 2021). Consistent with Russia's view of security threats to the state, Moscow pursues several military objectives in the Arctic. First, Russia's seven (out of 11) ballistic missile submarines stationed on the Kola Peninsula ensure the second-strike capability for Russia. Second, Russia strives to protect access for its Northern Fleet to the North Atlantic and the European Arctic, which would be essential in a scenario of potential conflict with NATO. Third, Russia's long northern borders require military bases in the Arctic in order to be able to deploy military capabilities rapidly (Rumer et al., 2021, p. 6). The melting of the ice in the Arctic makes the Russian flank towards the US more vulnerable (Bye, 2020). Traditionally, the Russian military regarded the main threat in the North as coming from American air power. Accordingly, Russia is primarily focused on strengthening its air defense. However, the thick ice that served as the natural protection of Russia's North is now melting, making Russia more vulnerable, leading some military analysts to conclude that Russia's increased attention to its northern flank is mainly of a defensive nature (Boulègue, 2019; Buchanan, 2023; Roberts, 2021).

Russia's perception of these new threats and increased tensions in Russia–West relations is driving Russia closer to China in military cooperation. Russia–China military drills and joint border guards' patrols in the Arctic increase security concerns from other Arctic states and NATO members (Homeland Security Committee Events, 2023; Nilsen, 2023; Wicker, 2023). The possibility of a future military alliance between China and Russia raises particular alarm in the West (Blank, 2022). Russia's aggression in Ukraine has become the most compelling factor in Finland and Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership. The accession of Finland into NATO on April 4, 2023, and the eventual accession of Sweden into the alliance will alter the region's security architecture and provide NATO with an increased range of actions and capabilities. Finland's accession doubled the Russia–NATO border, extending it by 830 miles (Crowley, 2023; Kirby & Beale, 2023). Including Finland and Sweden in NATO will have additional implications for Russia's Arctic security since Russia will be the only non-NATO state among Arctic states.

5. Economic Security

Distinguishing Russia's economic security from its military security actions is problematic since military capabilities and infrastructure have dual uses in the Russian Arctic, fulfilling both the state's hard security and socioeconomic security requirements. Thus, the opening of the NSR necessitated a refurbishment of forward bases and outposts along the AZRF, with Moscow upgrading the neglected Soviet infrastructure and building new military bases along the NSR (Boulègue & Kertysova, 2020). Among the civilian goals of the bases are search and rescue in the event of natural or industrial incidents, scientific and meteorological research, border monitoring, and control. Among the military goals are ensuring the safety of the NSR and expanding the reach of the Northern Fleet. At the same time, the protection of Russia's economic interests in the north and safety along the NSR is assured by the Northern Fleet, highlighting the interdependence of economic and military objectives.

The Arctic is important for Russian economic security, as it accounts for around 10% of GDP and almost 20% of Russian exports. The region is a key to Russia's energy security, as 80% of its natural gas and 17% of its oil production comes from the Arctic (Anthony et al., 2021, p. 3; Duncombe, 2021). Additionally, the Arctic is estimated to contain roughly 13% of the world's oil reserves and nearly 30% of its natural gas reserves, much of which resides in Russian territory (Perez, 2022). 65% of Russia's territory is located in the permafrost zone (Staalesen, 2021).

Several Russian official documents recognize the importance of the Arctic and its natural resources to Russia's economic security (Kremlin, 2015, 2021). Already in 2009, Russia's National Security Strategy (Kremlin, 2009, para. 12) warned that amid competitive struggle for resources, attempts to use military force to solve emerging problems cannot be excluded. Russia's National Security Strategy (Kremlin, 2015) once again brought attention to a global competition for natural resources and pointed to the importance for Russia of ensuring a leading role in exploiting the resources of the Arctic; and *Russia's Arctic Policy*, published in 2020, name the Arctic a "strategic resource base" and an integral part of the Russian national interest (Kremlin, 2020a). At the same time, the Arctic was identified as an essential transport corridor, and the document called for equal and mutually beneficial international cooperation in the region (Kremlin, 2020a).

The melting of permafrost and the scientific predictions of ice-free summers by 2035 opened opportunities for using the NSR for shipments from Asia to Europe (Borunda, 2020). The NSR provides the shortest route from Yamal to Asia and is an alternative to the US-controlled maritime routes (Henderson, 2019, pp. 23–24). As Moscow is planning to increase the region's role in oil production, the control over the NSR is treated by Moscow as Russia's strategic concern. The cargo traffic on the NSR had already increased from four million tons in 2014 to 34 million tons in 2022, making the NSR the key Russian transport corridor ("Year-round navigation," 2023). On September 15, 2023, Russia made the first delivery of liquefied natural gas to China via the Arctic NSR ("Gazprom delivers LNG," 2023). State company Rosatom is heading the development and functioning of the NSR.

In the last 10 years, Russia introduced several legislation that tightened shipping regulations through the NSR (Anthony et al., 2021, p. 11). While the Russian national law regulating navigation in the NSR is recognized and followed by many countries, the US refuses to recognize it. Therefore, the legal debates among international lawyers on the NSR and its regulation continue (Todorov, 2023). Being the largest Arctic state, Russia has been the most outspoken actor in claiming sovereign rights over major parts of the Arctic Ocean floor and having control over the NSR. However, the US and the EU uphold that the Northeast and Northwest Passages should be defined as international waters and transit passages. After the breakdown in Russia–West relations in the wake of the war in Ukraine, legal controversies around the NSR only intensified.

Increased foreign military presence in the Arctic Ocean, and especially an increase in NATO military exercises, led to Russia's revision of *The Maritime Doctrine* in July 2022, which called for increasing control and more stringent regulations over the navigation of foreign warships entering the NSR (Kremlin, 2022). One of the latest changes in Russia's strategy related to the Arctic came with the publication of the Russian foreign policy concept in 2023 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023), which states that among Russia's priorities in the Arctic is a legal consolidation of the external borders of Russia's continental shelf and protection of Russia's sovereign rights on the continental shelf, as well as standing up against the militarization of the region.

After the start of the war in Ukraine and the imposition of sanctions on Russia, the cooperation between Russian and Western companies on geological exploration and the development of Arctic resources has been halted. One of the affected industries related to the Arctic is the shipbuilding industry. As a result, Moscow called for Russia's greater independence from Western imports in its shipbuilding industry to counteract the sanctions. This is reflected in the amended version of *Russia's Arctic Policy till 2035* (Kremlin, 2023).

The tensions in Russia–West relations pushed Russia to closer economic cooperation with China. While the two countries have different approaches and priorities in the Arctic, both are placed to benefit from cooperation in the region. Russia needs China’s market to sell its energy, while China is a major investor and a supplier of capital to Russia. Partnering with Russia in the NSR allows China to save significantly on shipping costs to Europe. In 2018, Beijing issued the Polar Silk Road strategy, envisioning an extension of the Belt and Road Initiative to the Arctic (“China unveils vision,” 2018). China also made significant investments in Russian natural gas and port facilities, including a \$400 billion natural gas project initiated in 2014 and a 30-year natural gas project signed in 2022 (Perez, 2022). China became essential in Russia’s resistance to Western sanctions, further cementing bilateral relations and helping Russia continue developing the NSR and energy projects.

Since Arctic economic security is intertwined with social and environmental security it often requires multilateral efforts and substantial investment in maintaining the infrastructure in the region. Rising temperatures lead to the melting of permafrost, causing the sinking of the ground and endangering the natural gas pipelines. It is estimated that repairing the pipelines damaged by permafrost slumps can reach a cumulative cost of \$110 billion over 20 years by 2040, rivaling the natural gas revenue gained in one year (Duncombe, 2021). After the suspension of cooperation with the AC, Russia is left with China as a main foreign investor and partner in the Arctic. Russia’s increased activity in the Arctic to mitigate the foreseeable economic and environmental damage is often misinterpreted in the West as a sign of increased military assertiveness in the Arctic. However, Russia is careful to keep the tension down and follow the letter of the law in the Arctic since it is one of the main beneficiaries of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (Zysk, 2020). To ensure its economic security in the region, Russia needs investment and access to Western technology, all of which require cooperation, not confrontation.

6. Conclusion

The findings in this article demonstrate that despite claims of some researchers and politicians that Russia’s aggression in Ukraine might spill over into the Arctic region, Russia’s posture in the region has not changed significantly. Russia’s main driver of its Arctic policy is related to protecting its economic security. Increased Russia’s activism in the Arctic from 2008 is driven by climatic change, increased vulnerability of Russia’s northern flank, and the need to protect the navigation along the NSR. As international competition in the Arctic intensified, Russia’s traditional security concerns became more pronounced in Russia’s Arctic strategy. However, as many researchers observe, this is a sign of Russia’s vulnerabilities, not aggressiveness.

The pause in cooperation with Russia within the AC after the war in Ukraine and the increasing tensions between Russia and the West negatively affect Arctic governance, especially cooperation on climate change, environmental problems, and scientific research. Important climate change research in the Arctic was put on hold, which means that crucial scientific data will be lost as a result of the pause in the AC cooperation with Russia (Collins, 2022). More than 130 circumpolar projects suffered as a result of the suspension of cooperation within the AC format (Simpson, 2023). Since many projects related to scientific data collection were funded by the West, after the suspension of cooperation, some Russian researchers either stopped collecting the data or continued doing so without pay.

Among the main losers of the pause in cooperation with Russia within the AC are the most vulnerable group in the Arctic—the Indigenous peoples, since their representatives had lost a vital platform to express their needs and make their voices heard. While indigenous people in the Russian Arctic zone and residents of the AZRF are the ones who directly feel the effect of the development in the region, their voices are not as powerful as representatives of big business or representatives of various government agencies.

As the previous decade showed, despite Russia's tense relations with the West, the state can cooperate on some issues of mutual interest, such as search and rescue, environment, and science-related projects, while disagreeing on other issues. An example is Russia's continued cooperation in the Arctic after the annexation of Crimea (Buchanan, 2023; Closson, 2017; Heininen, 2022; Laruelle, 2020; Roberts, 2021; Rottem, 2020). Research shows that international cooperation in the Arctic on scientific and environmental issues contributed to improving inter-state relations (Zaika et al., 2023). Additionally, international organizations, such as the AC, can have a positive influence as a disseminator of democratic values and norms (Lavelle, 2022; Obydenkova, 2022b). Cooperation between countries-champions of climate policy and Russia in the past had positive effects on Russia's increased attention to environmental issues. Thus, climate policy can provide an opening for future cooperation with Russia once the country seeks to break out of isolation (Overland, 2022). At the same time, the halting of cooperation with Russia in the AC opens the door for other international organizations and actors interested in Arctic development that might challenge the interests of Arctic states.

Even during the tense period of the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the West found common ground while cooperating on Arctic issues, including the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears and the 1987 Murmansk Initiative. Thus, cooperation in the Arctic is possible and beneficial not only for Arctic states but for a larger global community since what happens in the region has consequences for all. The Arctic has to remain a territory of peace and cooperation, and the best way to achieve it is through inclusiveness.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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