

Russia in the Global Arctic: between cooperation and confrontation

Tjadina Herbert

S1569295

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Supervisor: Dr. Matthew Frear

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Introduction

The Arctic region finds itself increasingly in the international spotlight, especially since globalisation and melting ice coverage offer many new economic opportunities. New shipping routes are becoming more navigable and natural resource deposits can be more easily extracted, leading many nations – Arctic and non-Arctic alike – to pick up on the future strategic importance of one of Earth’s final frontiers. As the inevitability of a more accessible Arctic looms, there has been much debate about how these current and ongoing developments will affect Arctic politics.

Likely, it was the infamous 2007 flag incident - the planting of a titanium Russian flag on the Polar seabed under the guise of a research expedition - that gave rise to a more geopolitical understanding of Arctic with Russia identified as the main culprit (Dodds 2010, 43). Arguably the most discussed piece on the Arctic chessboard, the Russian Federation is a commanding presence in the Arctic. Almost 20 per cent of its territory is located above the Arctic circle and its northern territories are also most heavily industrialised and populated in comparison to its Arctic neighbours (Griffiths 2011, 12).

While all Arctic states have significant interests in the region, Russia has often been described as a “wild card”, based on international wariness about an increasingly assertive Russian leadership (Roberts 2015, 112). Apprehension about Russia’s Arctic ambitions is premised on Moscow investing heavily in expansion of its military capacities in the region and adopting a more securitised stance on economic development of its Arctic territories (Åtland 2014; Laruelle 2009; Blunden 2012). At the same time, Russia has been an active presence in Arctic regional cooperation and has adopted a collaborative stance regarding economic development, as it is reliant on external expertise for resource extraction (Exner-Pirot and Murray 2017; Staun 2017).

There thus exists a certain bipolarity in the way Russia behaves in the Arctic. This thesis aims to explore these seeming contradictions by paying special attention to the link between ideational and material motivations. Premised on the idea that the formation of national interests of a state is closely connected with the formation of its national identity (Clunan 2009, 3), the thesis identifies Russia's pursuit of great power status in the Arctic as a key driver of Russian Arctic policy. Borrowing from critical geopolitics, which suggests that territory and geography are subject of active formulation and reformulation by governments (Svarin 2016, 129), this thesis explores how the Kremlin conceptualises three different understandings of the Arctic region as guided by different interests. In order to reveal the linkages between Russia's quest for "greatness" and material incentives in each of these three conceptualisations, this thesis asks the following research question: How is the Arctic imagined by the Russian leadership, and how do these perceptions inform Russia's Arctic policy?

To answer this question, two steps have to be taken. First, it must be assessed how the Arctic is represented as an international, security or economic entity by the Russian government. In other words, how the Arctic region is imagined and projected by the Russian official narrative in different ways. Second, it must be explored how these imaginations of the Arctic correspond to Russia's material and ideational incentives in the Arctic. Or, in what ways does a particular construction of space correspond or deviate with the objectives outlined in Russian policy documents. These questions will be examined in three perspectives, pertaining to political, security and economic interests. As special attention is paid to Russia's self-identification as a great power, ideational motivations related to history and identity are present throughout.

- The first perspective is based on the conceptualisation of the Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation. This is exemplified by Russia's active involvement in a variety of

Arctic multilateral fora and insistence on international legal frameworks as basis of Arctic politics.

- The second perspective considers the Arctic as an essential component for ensuring Russian national security. The increased vulnerability of Russia's northernmost border, combined with a deterioration of external international relations, has triggered an expansion of Russian military capabilities in its Arctic territories.
- The third perspective presents the Arctic as a base for Russia's economic revival. The large untapped reserves of natural resources and the development of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) along the Siberian coast are considered vital assets in the Kremlin's quest towards national economic growth and local social-economic development.

This thesis thus examines how Russian varying perceptions on the Arctic might influence the Kremlin's Arctic policy and how this translates into Russia opting for cooperation or confrontation regarding its Arctic neighbours. To do so, this thesis will analyse Russia's policy discourse, policy strategies and activities concerning the Arctic. It will use critical geopolitics as a theoretical framework to help uncover the ways in which a certain discourse creates a certain political action, and employ a discourse analysis of Russian Arctic policy documents and official statements from Kremlin representatives to explore different perceptions on the Arctic.

The thesis will be structured as followed. The first chapter will provide an overview of the main scholarly debate on Arctic politics and Russia's role within it. Finding that material factors alone cannot fully account for the duality in Russia's Arctic policy, it considers the symbolic foundations of the Arctic for Russian identity by discussing the Arctic component to Russia's great power ambitions. The second chapter elaborates on the used analytical and theoretical frameworks. Here, I will discuss critical geopolitics as a theoretical framework, explain how discourse analysis is used as a method and present the sources that

will be examined. In the third I will provide a discourse analysis of Russian Arctic policy guided by the three different perspectives, identifying the main ideational and material drivers and establishing how these inform Russia's stance in the Arctic. The final chapter argues the material considerations that drive Arctic policy are often premised on ideational notions of Russia's great power status. In doing so, the thesis confirms the significance of identity for construction of geopolitical reality, and in turn the formation of policy.

1 Literature review

The following review discusses relevant bodies of literature that support this thesis. It begins with a review of the main academic debates explaining Russia's Arctic policy based on Russia's geopolitical and economic considerations. Although it acknowledges how these approaches are successful in explaining some aspects of Russia's Arctic policy, this thesis argues they alone cannot fully account for all policy decisions as they rarely identify the ideational underpinnings of policy-making. The second and third sections therefore consider the symbolic foundations of Russia's Arctic policy, detailing how the Arctic became intertwined with notions of Russia's great power status.

1.1 Situating Russia in the Arctic

At present, a vast literature exists on Arctic politics and the interstate dynamics of Arctic states, particularly on Russia's activities in the region. For analytical purposes, examinations of contemporary international relations in the Arctic can be classified into two groups; one informed by (neo)Realism and one informed by Liberalism.

On the one hand are (neo)realist interpretations that predict the physiological changes of the Arctic introducing economic and geopolitical opportunities will push states to abandon multilateralism in order to claim as much territory as possible. These analyses assume that a states' primary occupation is to ensure its own survival, to which end they are considered to always act in their own interest first. Assuming resources to be scarce and finite, realist thought predicts states to have mutually incompatible interests. In permanent rivalry with each other, states will seek to acquire dominance over other states, if given the chance, as to prevent challenges to their own sovereignty (Keil 2014, 164-165). Taken all together, it follows that a state's behaviour is determined by their relative power position, which is conditioned by the magnitude of available resources and the number of competing states and

their respective resources. If so, it follows that in the Arctic, with its finite resources and conflicting interests, the possibility for tensions or even conflict would loom large (Blunden 2009; Scopelliti and Conde Pérez 2016).

In this conception, Russia's behaviour in the Arctic is explained as fuelled by need to protect its national security as well as a desire to accumulate power. Some scholars point to the expansion of Russia's military presence (Åtland 2014, Blunden 2009), while others focus on the extraction of natural resources or the creation of other economic opportunities (Laruelle 2009; Blunden 2012). The interrelation of these two factors should not be overlooked: the increasing economic interest in the Arctic incentivises additional military presence and activities (Brutschin and Schubert 2016), whose primary goal is "to ascertain Moscow's sovereignty" in the region and "protect [its's] economic interests" (Sergunin and Konyshv 2017, 176).

On the other hand are neoliberal institutionalist conceptions that point to the persistence of international cooperation in the Arctic. While the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 has put pressure on the Arctic, since Arctic states have tried to maintain the status quo in the region while introducing economic sanctions against Russia elsewhere, it has not stopped cooperation altogether (Heininen 2012). These analyses are based on the assumption that an actor behaves rationally in an effort to maximize output. In other words, an actor chooses to embark on a particular action only if its costs do not exceed its expected benefits. In this conception, the general cooperative practice in the region is explained by the greater benefits Arctic states hopes to obtain from maintaining good ties with each other in comparison to the potential deterioration of their respective power status. As long as states can collect substantial economic profit from their cooperation in the Arctic, they are expected to refrain from adopting a more assertive stance in the region (Keil 2014, 165-166).

In this conception, Russia's Arctic policy is described as generally cooperative, based on the assumption that the primacy of economic interests determines its policy. Because non-assertive behaviour will allow Russia to approximate its economic goals most efficiently, the gains from (economic) partnership with the other Arctic nations are considered to outweigh those generated by a more isolationist stance. To illustrate, Jørgen Staun (2017) argues that Arctic policy is primarily driven by economic objectives, as the main motive is to transform the Arctic into the main resource base of the Russian economy. The active presence Russia occupies in Arctic international cooperation further supports this argument (Øverland 2010).

More often, however, scholars describe Russia's current behaviour in the Arctic as inconsistent. Economic gains are usually favoured by the pragmatic nature of decision making process, but they do not always outweigh security considerations. Russia's approach to the Arctic thus seems inherently conflicted, torn between variants of internationalism and isolationism (Griffiths 2011), between cooperation with Western neighbours with commitment to building up its own strength (Baev 2018). Indeed, as Elana Wilson Rowe (2009, 1) describes, the Kremlin's approach to the Arctic seems to be caught in "tensions between an 'open' and the 'closed' North", indicating that its policies often try to encompass both outward-oriented tendencies of economic cooperation and inclinations towards isolation and militarisation of its northern territories.

The pragmatic frameworks described above seem limited in their ability to provide a comprehensive explanation of inconsistencies in Russia's Arctic policy. Instead of focussing excessively on power or assets, this study aims to examine Russia's Arctic policy by linking these interests to Russian identity. It is thus premised on the idea that the definition of national interests of a state is closely connected with the formation of its national identity (Clunan 2009, 3). In order to employ this throughout the thesis, the next sections describe

Russia's preoccupation with great power status and examine what place the Arctic occupies within notions of Russian identity and national greatness.

1.2 Russia's quest for great power status

One of the primary goals of the Kremlin is to re-establish Russia as a great power. This aspiration is derived from historical legacies of Russia's "great" predecessors Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, whose great power statuses are solid part of Russian collective memory (Khrushcheva and Poberezhskaya 2016, 549). The quest to regain its great power status is driven by Russia's struggle to define its identity since the 1990s. The collapse of the Soviet Union upended existing notions of Russian identity, as Russia found itself deeply affected by the loss in its relative power and prestige.

As suggested by Anne Clunan (2009, 203-204), political elites attempt to construct a national identity based on "sets of ideas about the correct international status and political purpose of their country". Among Russian political elites of the 1990s, the consensus emerged that the correct international status for Russia was to be a strong, well-respected and influential country in the international community (ibid., 55). Russia's quest for *derzhavnost'* ("Great Powerness") is by no means novel. As Fiona Hill (1998, 227) finds, the central idea that "Russia was, is, and shall remain a great power" has dominated debates about Russia's identity in both old and new Russia alike.

It is thus a misconception that Russia's search for great power status emerged with the accession of Vladimir Putin to presidency in 2000. Instead, various understandings existed throughout the 1990s on how Russia could regain its great power status, varying from the maintenance of military power and economic development at home and the empowerment of multilateral international institutions abroad (Hopf 2005). President Putin was able to consolidate various existing understandings about the Russian nation and its place in the

world into one clear foreign policy vision (Svarin 2016, 131). The resulting notion of great power identity bases Russia's return to global significance through means the Kremlin associates with other great powers, specifically military and economic prowess.

The first component of Russia's conception of great power relates to the ability to project military power (Neumann 2008b, 129). The Russian government came this understanding after losing much of its military capabilities following the collapse of the USSR, which led to the belief that a strong military presence was vital for restoring Russia's status among other great powers (Hopf 2005, 235). In particular, its nuclear arsenal has continually been considered as a source of power and a guarantee of international status (Cimbala 2007, 186; Loukianova Fink and Oliker 2020).

The second component emphasises the centrality of economic power as route to greatness, particularly in terms of energy (Rutland 2008). Energy sales were a large contributor to the revival of the Russian state in the 2000s, which enabled the Kremlin to consolidate its power domestically and re-establish Russia's international status. Ever since, the Russian government has used energy prosperity to shape notions of national greatness (Kuteleva 2020). The resulting conviction presents energy as a vital component of Russia's healthy national development and as a foundation for its global position and national destiny (Bouzarovski and Bassin 2011).

In short, the preoccupation of Russia's status and its historical foundations has been a defining factor in Russian identity-building. Russia's post-Soviet national identity and national interest formation is thus premised on historical notions of Russia's natural power status, rather than on objective assessment of its place in international relations or material circumstances (Clunan 2009, 206).

1.3 The Arctic component to Russian greatness

The significance of the Arctic for Russian identity is well recognised by academic literature (Laruelle 2014; Medvedev 2018). Among various political and economic drivers, Russia's current return to the Arctic is premised on national myths and memories (Medvedev 2018, 207). In particular, the Arctic is connected to notions of Russian identity and power, based on geographical imaginations and historical legacies.

Geography has emerged as an important component of Russian national identity. The construction of the Arctic as intrinsic part of Russian identity is achieved through creating a sense of belonging. As put forward by Anthony Smith, collective memories must be connected to specific territories so that they can become "ethnic homelands" and eventually "historical homelands". This "territorialisation of memory", as he calls it, is an essential component in the construction of the nation and understanding of its place in the world (Smith 1996, 453-454). In the case of Russia, notions about the geographical exceptionalism of the Arctic connects territory to national identity, which can act to legitimise its great power aspirations.

For one, the geographical size of the Arctic contributed to it long occupying a unique place in Russian identity (Medvedev 2018, 208). Geography continues to be a shaping factor of Russian national identity, since the sheer size of the country has historically been used as an indicator for Russia's international standing (Hill 1998, 229). Indeed, Putin has referred to the direct connection between Russia's return to greatness and geography, arguing "when there is no size, there is no influence, no meaning" (Laruelle 2014, 24). Following this notion, territoriality has played such an important role in the construction of Russian political community and statehood that it transformed into a marker for power and sovereignty (Medvedev 2018, 208). The geographical dimensions of Russia's Arctic territories thus make it a flagship for demonstrating Russia's statehood.

Before the current emergence of the Arctic as an economic and strategic focal point for Russia, the region could long count on its symbolic importance. Indeed, as Medvedev (2018, 208) contends, “the Arctic’s symbolic significance and promise tend to prevail over any practical aspects”. This refers to the fact that for a long time, the Arctic was considered to offer little in terms of resources that could benefit Russia on a national scale. The relative emptiness of the Arctic thus made the region more of “a promise and a symbolic project for Russia, rather than a material possession” (ibid.).

The first attempt to turn the pure symbolic resource into an asset of more practical significance came in the 1920s, when the Soviet Union took an active interest in development of the region and exploitation of its resources (Medvedev 2018, 209). The exploration and conquering of the vast and inhospitable Arctic quickly were quickly utilised in Soviet propaganda to signal the country’s victory over nature (Laruelle 2014). With these northern exploits, the “Red Arctic” emerged as a central myth of Soviet culture. An active media narrative described the Arctic as an empty and undefiled space, making it the perfect space to build socialism. A true cultural product of its time, the myth of the “Red Arctic” allowed for celebration of patriotism, technological prowess and heroism of the Soviet people (McCannon 1998, 9).

A military component to Russia’s Arctic policy emerged during the Cold War. Against the background of a Russo-American geopolitical rivalry, the Arctic became an important space for the defence and protection of the more central parts of the Soviet Union and an important strategic deterrence asset against the American nuclear threat. Consequently, the Soviet Union established a significant military presence in the Arctic (Klimenko 2016, 17). In particular, the Kola Peninsula was fortified as a strategic bastion, as its access to the ice-free Barents Sea throughout the year both made it vulnerable to potential

foreign aggression and suitable as a base for Russian forward military presence (Huitfeldt 1974).

With the gradual demise and eventual collapse of the USSR, the Arctic lost its prominent position in Russian policy (Khrushcheva and Poberezhskaya 2016, 550). The end of the Cold War rivalry with the United States (US) brought an abrupt end to the strategic significance of the Arctic nuclear stronghold. Drastic cuts in funding quickly turned Arctic military bases and mining settlements in ghost towns, a true testament of the “frozen development” of the Russian Arctic (Medvedev 2018, 209). Yet, Soviet narratives of the Red Arctic had successfully territorialised national identity components in the Arctic. When the Russian government returned the Arctic region to its political agenda after a fifteen year hiatus, it found notions of Soviet Arctic identity simmering below the surface. The legacy of the Arctic myth was quickly revived by the Kremlin (Laruelle 2014, 27).

The resurgence of the Arctic myth was largely driven by Russia’s identity crisis of the 1990s and 2000s. In this time period, the Arctic slowly but surely emerged as a basic element of various nationalist movements, whether as practical component for Russia to regain its great power status or more spiritual element in the construction of a new Russian identity. Either way, the Arctic became understood as a symbolic opportunity to correct history (Laruelle 2019, 47-48). The notion that Russian expansion into the Arctic would be a rightful compensation for the territories and influence lost with the collapse of the Soviet Union emerged as a common theme, and effectively linked the Arctic to Russia’s post-Soviet identity crisis (Blunden 2009, 125; Laruelle 2019, 48).

In the last fifteen years, melting ice coverage and globalisation processes restored the Arctic’s economic and strategic significance on a material level. These developments returned international attention to the region and revived Russia’s ambitions of being perceived as a great Arctic power among domestic and international audiences (Khrushcheva

and Poberezhskaya 2016, 550). Indeed, Blunden notes that the Arctic appears to have become “widely associated with an ambition to re-assert Russia’s great-power status” (Blunden 2009, 125). Besides appealing to international audiences, it is key for the Kremlin to convince the Russian public of the nation’s Arctic identity. The inhospitable Arctic climate makes the realisation of Russia’s economic and political ambitions a costly endeavour. In order to gain domestic support for its expensive and long-term northern exploits, the Kremlin introduced notions of *pokorenie* (“conquering”) and *vladenie* (“owning”) to mainstream discourse (Baev 2018, 411).

To summarise, the Arctic has long occupied a prominent position in Russian identity and identity-building efforts. The overview above demonstrated how Russia’s current interest in the Arctic region might have been invigorated by current developments of climate change and globalisation, but finds its origin in longstanding geographical and historical imaginations of Russian identity. This connection between identity and geography is the principle focus of this thesis. To further assess how social constructions of spaces and identities can inform policy, this thesis now turns to critical geopolitics.

2. Analytical Framework and method

2.1 Critical geopolitics: challenging simplicity

As a theoretical framework, critical geopolitics is concerned with the geographical assumptions and designations that underlie the making of world politics, offering - as the name suggests - a critical perspective on classical geopolitics. Rather than accepting geopolitics as a neutral and objective concept, critical geopolitical thinkers argue that geopolitics is constructed, contextual and implicated in production of power. The usage of discourse is recognised as an important component of this practice (Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1998).

As a counterreaction to classical geopolitics, critical geopolitics appeared in the 1990s to investigate geopolitics as a social, cultural and political practice (Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1998; Power and Campbell 2010). Critical geopolitical scholars sought to re-examine the politics of identity and the geographical consequences of conflict, motivated to address the link between ideas and the political practices of spatial expansionism and domination of geographic locations (Dodds 2001). Geopolitics was thus reconceptualised, revealing its problematic usage of discourses, representations and practices to advance certain objectives (Power and Campbell 2010).

While classical geopolitics assumes the objectivity and neutrality of its practice and leaves existing power structures, and how these might have informed the particular understanding of geography, unchallenged, critical geopolitics defies this seductive simplicity. As Ó Tuathail and Dalby (1998, 12) write, “we begin from the premise that geopolitics is itself a form of geography and politics, that it has a con-textuality, and that it is implicated in the ongoing social reproduction of power and political economy.” In other words, critical geopolitics realises its own constructed, context-inspired nature and questions

its place in existing structures of power and knowledge by exposing the hidden power relations behind them (Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1998; Power and Campbell 2010).

As such, critical geopolitics does not only concern itself with *why questions*, by looking which material factors determine policies, but also asking *how questions*, by examining how actors imagine and define their power and interests (Omelicheva 2016). Critical geopolitics is heavily informed by constructivism, in the sense that it perceives knowledge not as a passive representation of reality but rather something that is created through active construction, and postmodernism, in that it rejects the notion of an objective truth.

Critical geopolitics denotes a varied body of scholarship, that - all together - advances a handful of general arguments (Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1998; Ó Tuathail 1999), two of which have to be discussed in more detail.

First, critical geopolitics emphasize the scope of geopolitics, which concerns not just how “wise men” decide policy but first and foremost the *practice of statecraft itself*. As Ó Tuathail and Dalby (1998, 3) write, “the critical study of geopolitics must be grounded in the particular cultural mythologies of the state.” In other words, critical geopolitics considers the creation of a state as a national entity a geopolitical act, during which the making of a shared national identity and history are especially important. Therefore, critical geopolitics seeks to investigate the particular geopolitical imagination of a state, its foundational myths and sense of national exceptionalism. The geopolitical creation of a state manifests itself in how states project their visual imagination of space - i.e. what land belongs to the state and what does not - as well as how the boundaries of community and citizenship are understood.

The second argument of critical geopolitics is recognition of the plurality of space and the constructionality of borders. Rather than its classical counterpart, critical geopolitics investigate both the material borders - the geographic boundaries of a state - as well as

conceptual borders - the imaginative boundary between “a secure inside and an anarchic outside” (ibid). As such, critical geopolitics is concerned with the practice of drawing boundaries, both actual and imaginary, and how they are used to define statehood.

These arguments allow critical geopolitical thinkers to critically engage with the geopolitical practice. Effectively, the basic idea behind critical geopolitics is that places are not defined by geographical realities, but rather are constructed by ideas and perceptions. Geographical locations are thus recognised as ideas - rather than objective realities - that are purposefully created by intellectuals of statecraft to support certain policy goals. These perceptions influence and reinforce political behaviours and policy choices, and ultimately affect how notions of places and politics are processed by the public. As constructions, they do not form a backdrop for international politics, but rather are an active component of it (Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992).

To summarise, critical geopolitics investigates the interrelationship between discourse and policy, and how this is informed by geography. It can reveal how geographic perceptions can be constructed to evoke and realise an idea of statehood, which consequently can be used to create a certain discourse that can inform the tactics and actions of a state. To illustrate how territorial space can be reimagined using critical geopolitics, the various ways to define the Arctic will be addressed.

2.2 The Arctic: one among many

In the most practical terms, the Arctic region can be defined a variety of ways. The geographic delineation of the Arctic Circle (latitude 66 degrees, 32 minutes North) is most commonly used, as it was adopted by all Arctic states with the establishment of the Arctic Council in 1996, although other definitions based on climatological or biological characteristics also exist (Dodds and Nutall 2016, 3-7). It should be noted that the Arctic

Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF) extends beyond the Arctic Circle, based on yet other considerations defined by a 2014 Presidential Decree.¹ This thesis uses the Arctic Circle definition when referring to the global Arctic region and uses the terms “Russian Arctic” and “AZRF” interchangeably to refer to Russian Arctic territories.

Critical geopolitics looks beyond these “simple” classifications of what is or is not Arctic territory. Instead, it acknowledges that the term “Arctic” does not necessarily convey a geographic area, but rather is “a contested space open to competing definitions.” (Dittmer et al. 2011, 210). As the region has been subject to various competing imaginaries, Arctic states have engaged in state-building practices to “make the Arctic legible”. Efforts to delimit their continental shelves, or indeed planting flags on the Polar seabed, are thus driven by a desire to gain certainty and recognition of their territorial imaginaries (Dodds 2010). As Gritsenko (2018, 174) argues, “defining the scope of the Arctic can be seen as an attempt to impose social or political order upon the physical space, but it is also linked to identifying the properties of this space and constructing its image.” Accordingly, the Arctic as a space can be conceptualised through a plethora of different imaginaries, including notions of a vast emptiness to be owned, fragile borders to be protected and hidden riches to be exploited.

2.3. Discourse analysis

As demonstrated above, critical geopolitics re-examines how a territorial space is constructed. In doing so, it points to geopolitical assumptions as the driving force of foreign policy, and the importance of discourse to construct these assumptions. As such, discourses are understood here as important parts of policy-making practices through which a country’s

¹ As per the 2014 Decree ‘on land territories of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation’, the AZRF is considered to be all land territories of Murmansk Oblast and Nenets, Chukotka and Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Districts, plus certain municipalities in the Karelia, Komi and Sakha Republics and Archangelsk Oblast (most notably the city of Archangelsk and Novaya Zemlya), and the city of Norilsk. The AZRF also includes all adjacent waters to these territories that are located within Russia’s EEZ and on the continental shelf.

interests and policies are defined and justified, both internally and externally. This introduces the need for discourse analysis.

The practice of discourse analysis is based on the idea that language determines our reality. Language is not only a tool we use to communicate, but also an important factor in the construction of reality as we perceive it. As explained by Neumann (2008a, 61), “representations that are put forward time and again become a set of statements and practices through which certain language becomes institutionalised and ‘normalised’ over time.” Enabling us to identify objects, relate them and place them in context, the dominant discourse determines our particular perception of the “truth”. Taken as indisputable, discourse can close our eyes to alternative interpretations, making it a rather powerful practice.

To counter this, discourse analysis - and the social constructivism that underpins it - relies on the belief in the existence of differences across context and thus rejects the notion of a single objective reality (Fierke 2013). Instead, the importance of norms, rules, and language in the field of international relations are emphasized. Social constructivism thus opposes more traditional International Relations theories, which pay particular attention to the distribution of material power, such as military forces and economic capabilities, and instead focuses on the ideas and beliefs that motivate actors.

Discourse can tell us about a state’s behaviour. It preserves a level of regularity in the social relations of a state, which produces preconditions for action. However, discourse cannot entirely determine a course of action, since it is always subject to multiple possible outcomes. Rather, representation makes room for several different actions and discourse provides us with a limitation on the amount of possible outcomes (Neumann 2008a).

If discourse is thus understood as a particular way to arrange the world, the analysis of discourse clarifies what this particular understanding of the world is. Additionally, discourse can predetermine policy choices, since its rendering of truth and reality disqualifies certain

courses of action. Therefore, this analytical framework of critical geopolitics and discourse analysis enables me to examine the rationale behind Russia's Arctic policy and explore how it relates to Russian ideas of its place in the Arctic.

2.2 The sources

In my research I will use relevant policy documents of the Russian Federation published after 2008. The year 2008 is taken as a starting point since it denotes the official start of Russian policy thinking on the Arctic with the publication of its first state policy (Heininen 2012, 18). To complement the policy documents, I will also collect other written or spoken statements about Russia's endeavours in the Arctic by members of the dominant discourse, i.e. government officials.

Russia's Arctic policy is based on several documents. To reiterate, the Russian government first publicly formulated its policy goals for the Arctic in 2008. This general strategy connects development in the Arctic to the national security of Russia, presenting the main goals, key objectives and strategic priorities and mechanisms for implementing the state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic. The strategy was expanded in 2013 with more concrete goals, measures and implementation timelines. In 2020, a new strategy was published that replaced the previous two. Largely following the lines set out by its predecessors, the current strategy prescribes Russian Arctic policy for the next fifteen years in relative detail.

Russian Arctic policy is strongly connected with other federal policies and strategies, given the region's strategic importance on a national level (Heininen 2012, 19). Therefore, the thesis also consults general strategic documents pertaining to Russia's energy, military, maritime, national security strategies. These documents cover the whole Russian Federation, but my analysis will only concern the parts that discuss or are applicable to the Arctic. The

2010 Military Doctrine was consulted but discarded since it makes no explicit reference to the Arctic.

The table below offers an overview of all documents consulted for the discourse analysis. Given the lengthy titles of some of the documents, shortened titles are provided for clarification purposes. These titles will be used throughout the remainder of the thesis.

Document	Short title
<i>Foundations of the state policy of Russia in the Arctic to 2020 and in the longer perspective.</i>	Arctic Strategy 2008
<i>The development strategy of the Russian Arctic and national security for the period to 2020</i>	Arctic Strategy 2013
<i>On the foundations of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the period to 2035</i>	Arctic Strategy 2020
<i>Energy strategy of Russia for the period to 2030</i>	Energy Strategy 2009
<i>Energy strategy of the Russian Federation for the period to 2035</i>	Energy Strategy 2020
<i>Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation</i>	Maritime Doctrine 2015
<i>Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation</i>	Military Doctrine 2014
<i>National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020</i>	National Security Strategy 2009
<i>National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation</i>	National Security Strategy 2015

3. The Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation

The first perspective conceptualises the Arctic as an international yet isolated space where interstate relations are conducted on basis of regional cooperation and adherence to international law. Premised on the idea that the Arctic is largely insulated from other international trends, the Russian government has created a narrative that presents the region as a space for Arctic nations to cooperate peacefully. This informs an important policy objective of the Russian government: the preservation of the peaceful nature of Arctic politics based on regional cooperation and international law.

To illustrate, the 2008 Arctic Strategy (2008, 2) lists the preservation of the Arctic as a “zone of peace and cooperation” as one of Russia’s main national interests in the region. Similarly, the 2020 Strategy describes the need for the Arctic to remain “a region of peace and stable, mutually beneficial partnerships” (Strategy 2020, 2). The importance of international cooperation in the Arctic is also noted in Russia’s National Security Strategy (2015, 36). This chapter reflects on the ideational origins of this conceptualisation, before describing how this discourse informs Russia’s perspectives on regional cooperation and legal structures in the Arctic.

3.1 Arctic Exceptionalism

The desire to be taken seriously by the international community is a driving factor of Russia’s quest to great power status. In the Arctic, Russia aims to accomplish this by creating a regional order in which it occupies a primary position. This allows Russia to present itself as a key player in the Arctic and prevent external forces from threatening its regional position.

The conceptualisation in question bears traces of “Arctic exceptionalism”, a political vision which understands the Arctic as a distinct region in international relations that is “detached from world politics and characterised as an apolitical space of regional

governance, functional co-operation, and peaceful co-existence” (Käpylä and Mikkola 2019, 153). Emerging with the end of the Cold War, this vision of political exceptionalism largely draws on the Arctic’s geographical features. The harsh Arctic climate had always rendered the region largely inaccessible and continued to dissuade states from engaging in violent conflict on the frozen lands and seas. Meanwhile, the end of the Cold War Russo-American rivalry brought an end to the geostrategic importance of the Arctic (Käpylä and Mikkola 2019, 154). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the strategic and military significance of the Arctic region largely evaporated. Geopolitical rivalry was replaced by a new agenda based on shared environmental, scientific and economic interests (Østerud and Hønneland 2017). This allowed for a new manner of conduct based on cooperation and multilateralism to take shape, perhaps best signalled by Gorbachev’s 1987 Murmansk speech which called for the region to become a “zone of peace” (Exner-Pirot and Murray 2017, 52). As a result, an institutionalised and rule-based Arctic society emerged over the last three decades.

This new era of Arctic politics brought the creation of Arctic governance structures based on cooperation and multilateralism, including the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy in 1991, Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) in 1993 and Arctic Council (AC) in 1996 (Exner-Pirot and Murray 2017). In terms of international legal landscape, the UN Convention of the Law and Sea (UNCLOS) provides an important basis. Under UNCLOS, states can extend their rights over a larger territory if they can scientifically prove to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) that their continental shelves extend further than the coastal baseline. As of date, all Arctic states except the US have submitted their claims corroborated with scientific data to the CLCS. While several territorial and maritime boundary disputes remain unresolved, they rarely result in a flare up of tensions (Østerud and Hønneland 2017). Currently, the notion of Arctic

exceptionality is based on these existing governance structures which cultivate cooperation and prevent tensions turning into conflict (Käpylä and Mikkola 2019).

Since no region can be truly isolated from international developments, the conception of the Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation hinges on states maintaining a regional order that continues cooperation in the Arctic despite deterioration of relations elsewhere. By “compartmentalising” these relations, Arctic states thus make a *conscious* effort to prevent any spill over from other parts of the world to taint the Arctic politics (Exner-Pirot and Murray 2017, 51). Arctic exceptionalism thus relies on a common understanding amongst Arctic states about the nature of their relationship. Accordingly, Russia needs to convince its Arctic partners of its commitment to regional cooperation in order to form a common position on the exclusivity of Arctic governance. This supports the claim of Khrushcheva and Poberezhskaya (2016, 557-558), who argue that Russia’s discourse on Arctic regional cooperation is primarily aimed at the international community.

The next section describes how the notion of Arctic exceptionalism has informed Russia’s commitment to international cooperation and legal structures and considers how Moscow has attempted - but not always succeeded - to insulate the Arctic from external pressures.

3.2 International cooperation

Russia’s conceptualisation of the Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation hinges partly on successful regional cooperation. Both Arctic Strategies mention “enhancing international cooperation” in the region as a priority, signalling Russia’s aim to establish itself as a cooperative partner. This is significant, as Russia does not claim a primary position in the region but rather “shares ownership of the Arctic with other states” (Khrushcheva and Poberezhskaya 2016, 557).

This means the Russian government imagines Arctic interstate politics to be a regional affair and considers international cooperation to be an issue of Arctic states *only*. To this end, Russian Arctic policy calls for “the strengthening of neighbourly ties between Arctic nations on bilateral and multilateral basis”, specifically mentioning the Arctic Five², BAEC and AC as platforms for international cooperation (Strategy 2020, 10).

As part of isolating the Arctic from global international relations, the Russian government also identifies who should not be not part of the Arctic family. Russia has repeatedly spoken out against granting China observatory status in the AC and has played a part in preventing the EU from becoming an observer (Depledge 2015; Laruelle 2020, 20). The Kremlin thus employs a very regional approach to Arctic governance, as informed by ideas of the Arctic as a region detached from global politics. This inclination to shield Arctic governance from outsiders generally benefits Russia as it ensures that regional issues are addressed by Arctic states without external interference.

This isolationist tendency is reflected in Russia’s approach to regional cooperation itself. Here, the Russian government attempts to insulate relations with its Arctic neighbours from external tensions by focussing on issues of common interest at the regional level. In the Arctic, these typically pertain to soft security and low politics issues of the environment, science and protection of indigenous peoples (Exner-Pirot and Murray 2017, 53).

To illustrate, Russia has focused its international cooperation efforts on soft security issues, such as the establishment of a regional search and rescue system and enhancement of regional environmental security initiatives (Arctic Strategy 2013, 13; Arctic Strategy 2020, 10). Additionally, Russia’s Arctic strategies call for the strengthening of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with Arctic neighbours on environmental protection, scientific research and the preservation indigenous peoples and lifestyles (Arctic Strategy 2013, 14;

² The five Arctic littoral states: Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the United States of America.

Arctic Strategy 2020, 10). In these ‘low politics’ areas, the deterioration of Russian-Western relations elsewhere has had little effect. Regional cooperation has remained largely resilient, as shown by the adoption of a mandatory Polar Code in the framework of the International Maritime Organization in 2014, the establishment of the Arctic Coast Guard Forum in 2015 and the declaration of the Prevention of Unregulated High Seas Fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean in July 2015 (Exner-Pirot and Murray 2017, 56).

The same cannot be said for more contentious areas of Arctic governance, such as hard security. Efforts to establish Arctic military cooperation peaked in 2011 and 2012, when forums as the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR) and the Northern Chiefs of Defence Conference (NCDC) allowed for confidence-building on the highest military level (Depledge et al. 2019). Here, Russia was unable to keep external political dynamics out of the Arctic. Against a background of faltering Russian-Western relations, Arctic states viewed the modernisation of Russia’s military assets in the region with renewed apprehension, as they were now perceived as a sign of potentially assertive behaviour (Käpylä and Mikkola 2019, 157). These dynamics have negatively affected the established practices of Arctic security cooperation. Since 2014, Russia has been excluded from the ASFR and the NCDC meetings have been on hold (Klimenko 2019, 30). As other regional governance platforms do not cover hard security issues, this effectively leaves the Arctic without a regional forum to discuss military security that includes Russia (Pincus 2019).

Although some have pointed to the potential danger of this gap in Arctic security infrastructure (see e.g. Zandee et al. 2020), the Kremlin has been surprisingly dismissive of this matter. To counter voices concerned about Russia’s enhanced military presence in the North, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov has argued that the Arctic is “a territory of dialogue”, where “there are no problems that require military solutions” (TASS 2014b). Similarly, Putin has argued that “Russia sees no potential for conflicts in the Arctic Region”

(Exner-Pirot and Murray 2017, 56). Such comments negate the potential for military conflict in the Arctic and the need for security cooperation by upholding the notion of the Arctic as inherently peaceful. This discourse thus allows the Kremlin to continue regional cooperation where possible, such as issues of soft security and low politics, and ignore the necessity of cooperation where impossible, such as hard security issues.

3.3 International legal structures

The second component of the Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation pertains to international legal structures. After melting ice coverage raised the question of sovereignty in the Arctic among an international audience, legal infrastructure became a way for Russia to address a changing environment and consolidate its position in the region. Russian official discourse thus presents adherence to international legal structures as essential for peace and stability in the Arctic, signalling “mutually beneficial cooperation on basis of international treaties and agreements” (Arctic Strategy 2008, 3; Arctic Strategy 2013, 13) and the resolution of disputes on the basis of international law” as goals for the region (Arctic Strategy 2020, 4).

The inciting incident of renewed international interest in Arctic legal matters is perhaps the infamous Russian flag incident of 2007, even though the Kremlin has never contended the act to have any international legal weight (Koivurova 2011, 216). Besides causing an international media frenzy, the titanium flag inspired a reflection among the Arctic littoral states on the legal status of the Arctic Ocean. As a direct response, the Arctic Five signed the Illulisat Declaration reasserting their shared commitment to existing legal frameworks (Dodds and Nuttal 2016, 41-44). This declaration disproved fears for an Arctic scramble and consolidated the Arctic as an exclusive region based on collective sovereignty and jurisdiction of the five actors involved (Exner-Pirot and Murray 2017).

Ever since, Russia has complied with its obligations under international legal conventions in exemplary manner. While Moscow has claimed substantial territories in the Arctic Ocean as part of its continental shelf, it has sought to gain sovereignty over these areas via the official route (Koivurova 2011). Russia was the first to make a submission to the CLCS in 2001 and when the commission requested further proof to substantiate these territorial claims, Russia complied by conducting more extensive research and offering additional data in 2015 (Staalesen 2019b). This commitment is further affirmed in official discourse: Putin has emphasised that Russia “will act exclusively within the framework of international law”, stating that “this is how we have always acted and how we intend to act in the future” (TASS 2014a).

Commitment to international legal infrastructure is beneficial for Russia, since it can gain legitimacy for its continental shelf claims and reaffirm its sovereignty in the Arctic (Roberts 2015, 120). Both legitimacy and sovereignty are important concepts for Russia in the region, based on the notion of Russia as an Arctic state (Khrushcheva and Poberezhskaya 2016, 557). Russia’s self-identification as an quintessential Arctic nation thus necessitates an official justification for its presence in the region.

Indirectly, this also articulates that, for Russia, Arctic coastal states naturally have more rights in the region than others. With the Illulissat declaration, the Arctic five coastal states essentially established a regional legal and political order that explicitly excluded other Arctic states and indigenous communities (Dodds 2010). Based on the legal primacy of Arctic nations in the region, Russia is very vocally opposed to other states attempting to violate existing legal structures. Attempts of foreign states to “review the basic provisions of international treaties that regulate activities in the Arctic” or “create their own national systems of legal regulations without taking notice of existing treaties”, is presented as the number one challenge to Russia’s national security in the Arctic (Arctic Strategy 2020, 4).

Russia thus denounces attempts by non-Arctic states to gain access to the region by calling upon the sovereignty of Arctic states as set out by international law.

Russia's insistence on international law, whether by following conventions itself or calling on others to do so, is clear. Similar to its approach to regional cooperation, Russia's position on Arctic law is driven by a desire to establish and consolidate its position as an Arctic actor. Reliance on international law enables Russia to legitimise its Arctic presence and gain sovereignty over its territorial claims, while preventing other (non-Arctic) states from gaining access to the region.

Yet, despite the heavy emphasis on existing Arctic legal structures by Russia on paper, there might be reason to doubt this commitment. In light of Russia's annexation of Crimea and incursions into Ukraine, it becomes clear that international legal norms such as territorial integrity can be disregarded by the Kremlin when convenient. Therefore, there is some scepticism about the consistency of Russia's commitment to legal obligations in the Arctic, particularly when these go against its national interests in the region (Roberts 2015, 112; Käpylä and Mikkola 2019, 161). Although Russia's interests currently seem to lie in the preservation of international legal infrastructure in the Arctic, it is not guaranteed to stay this way.

3.4 Concluding remarks

In summary, Russian international Arctic policy relies on a discourse that presents the Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation, based on the compartmentalisation of the Arctic as a separate entity in world politics. This has two main consequences. First, Russia has advertised the idea that Arctic governance is a place for Arctic nations alone, thus aiming to exclude non-Arctic states from participating in regional fora and boosting legal sovereignty of Arctic states above non-Arctic states. In doing so, Russia has tried to create a exclusionary

regional order in which it can occupy a primary position. By keeping external actors and external tensions away from the Arctic, Moscow thus legitimises its presence and interests in the Arctic among international audiences.

Second, Russia's attempts to insulate the Arctic from deteriorating relations elsewhere has not been fully successful, as the 2014 annexation of Crimea has led to a gap in Arctic infrastructure concerning hard security matters and a general scepticism regarding Russia's commitment to international legal obligations. While Russian discourse has dismissed these setbacks as not to hurt its involvement in other regional cooperation initiatives, this suggests that this conceptualisation of the Arctic might not be sustainable in the long term.

4. The Arctic as essential for Russian national security

The second perspective understands the Arctic as a region that is essential for Russia's territorial defence and strategic deterrence against other nations. Russia's 2015 Maritime and 2014 Military doctrines have discerned the Arctic as one of the priority geographical areas for national security. The military security aspect of the Arctic can be traced back to the return of the region to Russian policymaking in the 2000s, with current developments pointing to a certain amplification of Arctic security trends. Earlier documents highlight the importance of the Arctic in the sphere of military security and prescribes the need for "a favourable operational regime" in the Arctic (Arctic Strategy 2008, 2; Arctic Strategy 2013, 14). In the 2020 Strategy, guaranteeing Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity is placed on the top of listed national interests. This chapter uncovers the ideational underpinnings of this conceptualisation and explores the discursive elements of Russia's stance on national security in the Arctic. Then, it describes how this conceptualisation informs Russia's militarisation of the Arctic driven by territorial defence and strategic deterrence considerations.

4.1 Military prowess and Russian identity

As described in chapter one, Russia's quest for great power partly relates to material power resources and the ability to project military power. Based on such notions, this conceptualisation considers military prowess a key component of state power and military presence necessary to assert influence internationally and dissuade hostile external pressures (Baev 2008). Military capabilities, in particular nuclear prowess, thus play an important role in the way the Russia state perceives itself and its position in international politics.

Translated to the Arctic, Russia's security thinking is also influenced by geographic and strategic-historical factors. In terms of geography, the Arctic constitutes Russia's northernmost border, spanning from the Barents Sea in the West along the Siberian coast to

the Barents Strait in the Far East. Given the significance of territoriality for Russian identity, the sheer size of these Arctic territories alone reinforces the notion of Russia as an archetypal Arctic nation (Medvedev 2018, 208).

Additionally, the Arctic is recognised as a historic and contemporary nuclear stronghold. Established as a nuclear stronghold in Soviet times, the Kola Peninsula continues to accommodate most of Russia's ballistic nuclear submarines and missile defence systems to this day (Laruelle 2020, 9; Boulège 2019, 7). As nuclear deterrence lies at the heart of Russia's broader security strategy (Klimenko 2016, 26), this quality elevates the Arctic as a strategically important region, both practically and symbolically. The history of Russia's military presence in the region is used by the Kremlin to further establish an Arctic component in Russian identity (Khrushcheva and Poberezhskaya 2016, 555).

Together these factors set up the Arctic as integral part of Russia and raise the symbolic importance of national security in the Russian Arctic for the Kremlin. Given the importance of military capabilities for the Russian notions of national greatness, this necessitates an enhanced military presence in the Arctic.

Unlike the previous conceptualisation which was aimed at an international audience, the Kremlin's discourse on Arctic national security thus seems to have a dual target. On the one hand, it serves to install a sense national greatness among the domestic audience based on notions of military prowess and Russia's "Arcticness" as significant components of Russian national identity (Keil 2014, 170; Khrushcheva and Poberezhskaya 2016, 558). On the other hand, it aims to demonstrate Russia's military capabilities in the region as proof of its great power status to international audiences (Sergunin and Konyshev 2017, 180). The remainder of this chapter explores how both discourses have guided Russia's militarisation efforts in the Arctic, distinguishing between policy goals of territorial defence and strategic deterrence.

4.2 Return of the military

Russia's conceptualisation of the Arctic as essential for national security translates to a modernisation and expansion of military capabilities. Militarisation of Russia's Arctic territories has been a policy objective since the formation of its Arctic policy. Early documents prescribe the creation of military formations "capable of ensuring military security in various conditions" (Arctic Strategy 2008, 2) and call for "combat and mobilisation readiness" at the necessary level (Arctic Strategy 2013, 15). The 2020 Arctic Strategy signals a continuation of these efforts, but sets a more clear agenda, specifically mentioning military security and territorial protection as national interests. Main assignments include "the implementation of measures aimed at protection of Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity"; "the increase of combat capabilities of Russia's armed forces in the Arctic", "improvement of comprehensive aerial, underwater and surface surveillance systems"; and "creation and modernisation of military infrastructure" (Arctic Strategy 2020, 12).

As noted by various scholars, this time period coincided with a significant enhancement of Russia's military capabilities and infrastructure in the Arctic (Sergunin and Konyshov 2017; Boulègue 2019). To illustrate, Moscow has created a special administrative structure for its Arctic military forces in 2014 which will become an independent military district from 2021 onwards (Presidential Decree 2020). The revival of Russia's Arctic military prompted an influx of patrolling and training activities in the region (Staalesen 2019a; Boulègue 2019). Russia has also enhanced its military infrastructure along the Arctic coast by upgrading old Soviet installations and ordering construction of new military bases on Wrangel Island, Cape Schmidt, Severnaya Zemlya and Tiksi (Kremlin 2015). Since 2014, Russia has built or refurbished fourteen airfields along the Northern Sea Route with the purpose of providing logistical support for the Northern Fleet (Laruelle 2020, 10). While

military capabilities are being enhanced throughout the Russian Arctic, the concentration of forces remains around the Kola Peninsula due to nuclear assets being stored here (Konyshev and Sergunin 2014, 324; Baev 2019, 32).

The militarisation of the Russian Arctic is expected to continue, given Russia's negative perception on future Arctic politics. Where the 2009 National Security Strategy only notes the focus in international politics on (Arctic) energy resources, its successor document signals the probability of competition over these resources (National Security Strategy 2015, 4). Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu has suggested conflicting interests in the Arctic "may spark a growing conflict potential" (TASS 2018). The Kremlin even calls for the protection of Russia's national interests in the Arctic as main task of Russia's armed forces *during peacetime* (Military Doctrine 2014, 15). These points illustrate how, in Russia's conception, the Arctic will become increasingly subject to geopolitical competition over resources, which incentivises Russia to rely more on military instruments to protect its interests. The revival of Russia's Arctic armed forces thus seems to be partly motivated to safeguard its substantial economic interests in the region and to ensure maritime security along the NSR (Flake 2017; Hilde 2014). Arguably, the confrontative relationship between Russia and the West since the 2014 Ukraine Crisis has invigorated this protectionist attitude (Rotnem 2018).

This also explains why the Kremlin is generally wary of other Arctic states modernising their armed forces, as it believes these to be attempts to undermine Russia's position in the region (Konyshev and Sergunin 2014, 324). Russian Arctic policy signals a shift threat perception from the communal danger of malevolent non-state actors to a more apprehensive position vis-à-vis its Arctic neighbours. Initial policy documents point to terrorism at sea, smuggling and illegal migration as the main potential security disruptors, while the most recent Arctic Strategy specifically notes the acceleration of military build-up by other Arctic states as a challenge to national security (Arctic Strategy 2008, 6; Arctic

Strategy 2020, 4). Russia's desire to assert itself as a key military actor in the Arctic, driven by great power aspirations, thus seem to inform an increasingly confrontative posture vis-à-vis other Arctic states. These factors guide Russia's two main major security objectives in the Arctic: territorial defence and strategic deterrence.

4.3 Territorial defence

The first component concerns the significance of Russia's extensive Arctic territories for territorial defence. Ice coverage and severe climate were long natural defences against potential military threats and the lack of economic or strategic hubs in the region prevented it from becoming a strategic focal point for Russia. This changed when climate change weakened the natural defence of Russia's Northern borders and allowed for economic activities. This development, combined with Russia's aforementioned enhanced threat perception, raised the importance of Arctic territories in terms of regional and national defence. The need for territorial defence is reflected in the type of militarisation of the Russian Arctic: the majority of security infrastructure development is defensive in nature (Flake 2017, 21).

The desire to enhance Russia's territorial and border defence capabilities has become more pronounced over time. While the 2008 Strategy did not include territorial security as a national interest, the 2020 Arctic Strategy lists the safeguarding of Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity as its top national security priority (Arctic Strategy 2020, 2).

Acknowledging the dilapidated state of Russia's Arctic security infrastructure of that time, early policy documents call for the creation of an Arctic coast guard and the establishment of a surface monitoring system (Arctic Strategy 2008, 6-7; National Security Strategy 2009; Maritime Doctrine 2015, 25, 27). Meanwhile, to boost existing defence capabilities, the latest Arctic Strategy prescribes the improvement of state border management, border infrastructure

and technical reequipment of border authorities with modern ice-class vessels and the renovation of its aircraft fleet (Arctic Strategy 2020, 12-13).

Accordingly, the Northern fleet has been gradually enhanced with air defence and coastal defence capabilities to allow for sea control and sea denial activities (Boulègue 2019). Expansion of aerial surveillance structures over the Russian Arctic continues, with the installation of a new Arctic air squadron of multi-purpose fighters and the planned expansion of the S-400 anti-aircraft missile system (Ramm and Stepovoi 2019; Staalesen 2019c). Russia's Arctic naval forces are further enhanced, with the first new conventional armed icebreaker "Ilya Muromets" added to the Northern fleet in 2018 and first vessel "Ivan Papanin" of ice-class patrol ships launched in 2019 (Interfax 2018a; TASS 2019c).

Russian official discourse insists that the militarisation is purely defensive in nature and therefore not a threat. To illustrate, Kremlin official Sergei Ivanov emphasized "our bases do not affect international security, but are exclusively defensive" (TASS 2017), while Putin has underscored the peaceful nature of military expansion in the Arctic, stressing that "this is our territory" (TASS 2014a). It should also be noted that the militarisation of the Russian Arctic has not led to pure isolationism, since Russia continues to collaborate on soft security issues, like search and rescue (SAR) and emergency response (Pezard 2016, 22). Policy documents note the importance of cooperation with border agencies of foreign states (Arctic Strategy 2008, 6; Arctic Strategy 2020, 12) and Russia has a generally positive track record on cooperation with other Arctic coast guards (Østhagen 2016).

These statements and continued coast guard practices indicate that the Kremlin does not want its militarisation efforts to damage international relations, suggesting the main audience for Russia showcasing its Arctic military capabilities is the Russian people. This supports a claim made by Khrushcheva and Poberezhskaya (2016, 559) that Russia's militarisation of the Arctic is "important not so much to its actual security but to its identity

as a strong state targeting people inside the country.” The Arctic has thus emerged as a key space for the Russian government to reassert its great power status among its population by demonstrating its military capabilities.

4.4 Strategic Deterrence

Besides territorial defence, strategic deterrence is an important driver of Russia’s military posture in the Arctic. While the Arctic has historically been a nuclear deterrence asset for Russia, its strategic importance has been reinvigorated by current geopolitical and climatological trends.

In geopolitical terms, Russia has become increasingly suspicious about other states’ activity in the Arctic, particularly regarding the US and NATO (Military Doctrine 2014, 5; Maritime Doctrine 2015, 19; National Security Strategy 2015). For example, the alleged presence of US nuclear submarines in the Barents Sea and range of US missile systems has sparked concern (TASS 2014a; RIA Novosti 2017). NATO-led military exercise Trident Juncture has also lead to hostility, with Minister Shoigu comparing the exercise to “Cold War practices” and Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov suggesting it “provoked an arms race” in the Arctic (Interfax 2018b; RIA Novosti 2019a).

Meanwhile, melting ice has allowed for the transformation of the Russian Arctic from nuclear stronghold to operational theatre. Reduced ice coverage has reinforced the strategic importance of the Arctic as a gateway to the Atlantic and Pacific ocean, as highlighted by the Maritime Doctrine (2015, 24). Currently, this mainly pertains to the North Atlantic, but the Russian Far East could rise in importance, due to the growing interest of Asian actors in the Arctic and the opening of transarctic shipping routes.

These trends have pushed Russia to assert itself as a military power in the Arctic, primarily through its nuclear assets. In 2015, Putin called for the strengthening of combat

potential of nuclear forces, by equipping all parts of the nuclear triad with new equipment and improving early-warning and aerospace defence systems (Kremlin 2015). Currently, Russia is expanding its arsenal of SSBNs and increasing submarine activity in the Arctic (Nilsen 2020; Nilsen 2019). Early-warning systems are expanded to the AZRF, with two new Voronezh radars in the Komi and Murmansk regions to be finalised in 2022, and a basic space segment for early-warning has been set up with the launch of four Tundra satellites between 2015 and 2020 (RIA Novosti 2019b; TASS 2020). The Arctic is thus being (re)established as a nuclear stronghold. Meanwhile, the influx of patrolling and exercises show that Russia is keen to demonstrate its military prowess in the region beyond nuclear assets (Flake 2017).

Likely, maintaining an active military presence in the Arctic plays a role in Russia's self-imagination. Military prowess has increasingly been used by the Kremlin to reassert Russia as an important power and the Arctic, with its strategic location and interests, emerged as a logical place for this to this new military confidence to manifest itself (Hilde 2014, 154). The nuclear deterrent, in particular, serves a more symbolic purpose as guarantor of Russia's great power status, both for domestic and international audiences. Russia's military emphasis on the Arctic is thus not only driven by a changing environment, but also by the region's importance for the Kremlin's international ambitions.

4.4 Concluding remarks

In summary, Russia's Arctic military apparatus has significantly expanded in the last decade, based on a discourse that presents the Arctic as essential for national security. A large share of these efforts are to increase territorial defence capabilities, which serve primarily to convince domestic audiences of Russia's Arctic identity and great power status. However, the general deterioration of Russo-Western relations sparked a need to demonstrate Russia's military capabilities to the international community, with the Arctic as new focal point. The

current expansion of Russia's nuclear arsenal points to more geostrategic motivations, which fit within ambitions of the Kremlin to demonstrate its military prowess internationally. This indicates that the conceptualisation of the Arctic as essential for national security might lead to a more confrontative posture by Russia in the Arctic.

5. The Arctic as a base for Russia's economic revival

The third perspective establishes the Arctic as the new resource base upon which the resurgence of the Russian economy can be founded. Economic objectives have consistently taken primary position in Russia's Arctic policy documents. The economic value of Russia's Arctic territories is broadly conceptualised in policy documents, including a broad variety of economic activities as mining, fishing, forestry and agriculture (Arctic Strategy 2020, 6). Amongst these, however, natural resources and maritime shipping take primary position. This chapter describes the ideational foundations of this conceptualisation, before assessing how it drives Russian policy on Arctic hydrocarbon extraction and maritime shipping. Then, it reflects how, in light of a globalising Arctic and need for international donors to fund its Arctic ambitions, the Kremlin is increasingly torn between cooperative and protectionist tendencies.

5.1 Economic prowess and national identity

The Kremlin's commitment to Arctic resource exploitation hails from the significance of the energy sector for the Russian state, and in turn perceptions of greatness. As discussed in chapter one, the Kremlin has used its considerable energy resources to construct notions of Russia's national greatness on its energy prowess.

With this in mind, Russia's economic interest in the Arctic - one of the final frontiers of hydrocarbon extraction with vast reserves of oil and natural gas - is hardly surprising (Laruelle 2014, 135). A vital mechanism for national economic growth and local social-economic development, exploitation of the Arctic's hydrocarbon resources could reinforce notions of Russian greatness as an energy superpower. Meanwhile, emphasis on the Arctic energy riches and their exploitation is also necessary for the Kremlin to legitimise its policies and the significant funds required (Baev 2018, 411).

The significance of Arctic energy riches for the Russian government coincides with prospects of developing the NSR as major shipping route. The extraction and exportation of Arctic hydrocarbon resources necessitates construction of substantial infrastructure, which allows the NSR to be established as a national energy transportation corridor as well as an international commercial shipping route (Blunden 2012). Considering the primary position of maritime transportation – especially energy - in the current globalised international economy, the opening of a new sea lane would have tremendous geopolitical and strategic implications (Kosai and Unesaki 2016). For Russia, the control over potential new major shipping lane would enhance its international status and present economic opportunities for its long neglected Northern regions. Similar to how the Kremlin uses energy riches to construct the notion of national greatness, the establishment NSR as a global transportation route could – if successful – be utilised to further boost prestige at home and abroad.

In short, economic considerations are vital to understand Russia’s activities in the Arctic, given how “Russian leaders unquestionably perceive the Arctic as a vital region to Russia’s economic future, and certainly see it as critical to Russian claims to great power status” (Roi 2010, 563). For the most part, the discourse of the Arctic as base for Russia’s economic revival serves to convince the Russian people of national greatness based on notions of the Russian Arctic as a resource treasure chest and Russia as an energy superpower.

5.2 Arctic hydrocarbon development

The first pillar of Russia’s economic strategy for the Arctic is the development of the region’s vast reserves of hydrocarbon resources. The new interest in Arctic hydrocarbon resources emerged as a strategic priority with the slow but steady depletion of West-Siberian gas and oil reserves (Energy Strategy 2009, 26). Depletion has raised extraction costs in existing

fields and pushed Russian energy companies into Arctic territories (Øverland 2010; Ufimtseva and Prior 2017). This quest for new energy resources fits within a broader quest for a stable supply of energy, which is considered a national security interest (National Security Strategy 2009; National Security Strategy 2015, 19-20; Energy Strategy 2009, 10). The Russian Arctic is thus conceptualised as “a strategic resource base of the Russian Federation” which can “largely meet Russia’s needs in hydrocarbon resources” (Arctic Strategy 2008, 2).

As a strategic resource base, the Arctic can be used to speed up national growth and bolster social-economic development of the whole country (Arctic Strategy 2008, 4-6; Arctic Strategy 2020, 5-6). Accordingly, the 2013 Arctic Strategy prescribes comprehensive study of the continental shelf and preparation for the development of hydrocarbon reserves (Arctic Strategy 2013, 7). Its succeeding document builds upon this by calling for geological exploration activities in hydrocarbon and mineral deposits and stimulation of development of hard-to-recover hydrocarbon reserves (Arctic Strategy 2020, 6). The exploitation of natural resources on the continental shelf for the purpose of strengthening Russia’s economic potential is also mentioned in national strategies (Maritime Doctrine 2015; Energy Strategy 2009), signalling the significance of Arctic resources on a national level.

Despite these ambitions, the actual offshore development in the Russian Arctic remains limited. So far, the Prirazlomnaya oil platform in the Barents Sea is the only realised hydrocarbon production plant in the Russian Arctic (Rogtec 2020). Key problems responsible for the lack of offshore development include the extreme Arctic conditions, technological complexity, high capital costs and environmental risks. Lack of domestic technologies emerged as an issue after the implementation of Western sanctions targeting Arctic offshore, deepwater and shale projects and has been detrimental for a number of projects (Carayannis,

Ilinova and Chanysheva 2019; Aalto 2016). Russian official discourse hardly acknowledges this issue, however.

After disappointing progress in the offshore sector, the maritime transportation of hydrocarbons emerged as Russia's new golden goose. The transportation of natural gas in liquified form (LNG) alleviates the need for expensive pipeline construction projects across the vast Arctic tundra or polar seabed and allows Russia to diversify its energy exports. With development of its Arctic resources, Russia aims to become a leading player in energy markets of the Asian-Pacific region (Energy Strategy 2020, 5). According to Minister of Energy Alexander Novak, national LNG output is to increase from 28 to 120 million tonnes by 2035, which would constitute a 20% share in the global LNG market (TASS 2019b). Russian official discourse has been eager to celebrate the success of Yamal LNG, Russia's biggest liquification plant to date. Yamal is considered a springboard for Russia to "remain one of the world's largest energy powers" and to become "the absolute energy supplier for the whole continent" (TASS 2013). Current LNG output is nowhere near these ambitions, however, accounting for only a meagre 16% of Russia's national gas exports (Elagina 2020).

Russia thus has large ambitions for its Arctic hydrocarbon sector but is less successful in realising them. The disconnect between the reality of these endeavours and how Russian discourse presents them signals a desire by the Kremlin to reinforce Russia's power status in the Arctic. Given the importance of energy prowess for notions of Russian greatness among the Russian people, this discourse seems primarily aimed at domestic audiences.

5.3 Maritime shipping & infrastructure

The second pillar of economic development pertains to maritime shipping in the Russian Arctic. Policy documents call for the establishment of the NSR as a "national transport corridor" that connects the Russian Arctic to the rest of the world as well as a globally

competitive shipping lane (Arctic Strategy 2008, 3; Arctic Strategy 2020, 2). The national importance of maritime capabilities in the Arctic is confirmed in the Russia's Maritime Doctrine, which calls for "establishing conditions for Russian oil and gas companies and gas transportation companies in the Arctic seas" as well as "development of the Northern Sea Route" in general (Maritime Doctrine 2015, 24). Importantly, the establishment of the NSR is also connected to the social and economic development of the AZRF (Arctic Strategy 2013, 5-6; Arctic Strategy 2020, 4-5).

The Russian government seems determined to develop the NSR into a viable shipping route and has decreed to significantly increase annual goods volumes by 2024 (Staalesen 2018b). To allow for "year-round, safe, uninterrupted and economically efficient" transportation along the NSR, the Kremlin recognises the need for modernisation and construction of maritime infrastructure. Requirements include a (nuclear) icebreaker fleet, rescue and auxiliary fleets and ice-class vessels (Arctic Strategy 2020, 7). To complement maritime shipping, the Kremlin envisions the modernisation of coastal infrastructure with a transportation network along the Siberian coast including construction of new (deep-water) ports, railroads and airports (Arctic Strategy 2020, 8). It is clear that large investments are needed for these plans to be realised. According to one government official, investment in the Russian economy in the Arctic may exceed \$86 billion by 2025 (TASS 2019a).

While it is too soon to say how successful the Kremlin will be in realising these goals, it is certainly not afraid to put money where its mouth is. Russia currently operates the largest fleet of icebreakers in the world, consisting of 40 nuclear and conventionally powered vessels (Gady 2019). It is also in the process of expanding its icebreaking and SAR capabilities, and envisions the construction of Arctic ports, several railways and airports along the Siberian coastline to be finalised between now and 2024 (Kremlin 2019).

Russia's desire to develop the NSR largely stems from economic considerations, as it would be the basis of "acceleration of Russia's economic growth" (Arctic Strategy 2020, 2). An established route would enable the Russian government to levy tolls and would incentivise economic activity in the Russian Arctic, a region that has been historically underdeveloped (Flake 2013, 48). At the same time, the insistence on developing its Arctic coast ties in with notions of Russia's Arctic identity. With its infrastructure projects and eye-catching icebreaker fleet Russia enhances its physical presence in the Arctic, which serves to reinforce the notion of Russia as an Arctic nation among domestic and international audiences.

Meanwhile, with its references to the development of Arctic territories, the Kremlin aims to convince the Russian people of the long-term benefits of Arctic development. According to Daria Gritsenko (2018, 179), the industrialisation of the Arctic, especially in form of infrastructure, is often presented as "bringing civilisation [...] to remote communities". Enthusiasm about the NSR as future international shipping route and civilising force for the region thus legitimises the government allocating large funds to develop these territories.

5.4 Russia vs. foreign actors: between cooperation and confrontation

The surge in Russian economic activity in the Arctic raises the question about the competitive or cooperative nature of Russia's strategy. Russian discourse has been sending mixed messages. On the one hand, Russia seems to have adopted a more geopolitical approach to Arctic resources. For example, the Kremlin advocates it should take the lead in development of Arctic resources and shipping lanes, as it perceives global competition over these to be increasing (National Security Strategy 2015, 4). On the other hand, the Kremlin recognises the need for international cooperation in one of the world's most hostile regions for economic

development. The most recent Arctic Strategy (2020, 10) calls for “active engagement with Arctic and non-Arctic states towards mutually beneficial economic cooperation in Russia’s Arctic territory.”

Russia has a history of implementing protectionist measures in its energy sector. The nationalisation of oil and gas companies in the 2000s has left the majority of energy companies under complete or majority state control, while legislation has been passed that restricts foreign entities from entering the Russian energy market and discourages foreign investment (Harsem et al. 2011; Laruelle 2014, 148). The Arctic, however, denotes a slight department from this practice. In 2013, the Kremlin decided to liberalise the LNG sector by suspending its state firm’s monopoly on gas exports (Henderson and Moe 2016). It has also acknowledged and welcomed the much needed involvement of foreign companies to jumpstart its Arctic energy sector (Energy Strategy 2009, 61). Since Western-Russian energy collaboration in the Arctic is largely restricted by the 2014 international sanctions, China has increasingly established itself as Russia’s money purse for Arctic projects (Laruelle 2020). In short, the difficult qualities of the Arctic hydrocarbon sector push Russia to adopt a more cooperative stance towards the Arctic. The mutual benefits of economic development is signalled in Russian discourse to encourage international cooperation and establish Russia as a benign business partner to foreign audiences.

In contrast, Russia has been much less cooperative about maritime shipping. The Kremlin is adamant of its territorial claim over the NSR, based on the lane’s location within Russia’s internal waters (Guy and Lasserre 2016, 301). Russia interprets the NSR as a national waterway, which allows it to set the rules that regulate shipping along the route (Wegge and Keil 2018, 98). This understanding has sparked controversy among other (Arctic) actors – in particular the US – who argue the route to be in international waters and therefore not subject to Russian legislation (Blunden 2012, 116). Russia showcases a desire

to monitor and control activity on the NSR. Since 1991, it has imposed a transit fee on foreign vessels in return of pilot and ice-breaker escorts (Flake 2013, 45; Guy and Lasserre 2016, 301). More recently, legislation was implemented that bans foreign ships from shipping hydrocarbons in the Russian Arctic (Staalesen 2018a). This suggests a more hostile understanding of shipping interests in the Arctic, based on notions of ownership and territorial sovereignty. Russia's insistence on the ownership, and thus full control, over the NSR signals a rejection of international understandings of Arctic governance (Baev 2018, 417).

5.4 Concluding remarks

In summary, Russia's approach to the Arctic is heavily guided by economic interests. Based on the significance of energy and transportation routes as strategic commodities, Russia is keen to establish itself as Arctic energy superpower and shipping authority. The potential wealth and status Russia hopes to attain through these sectors is indicative of symbolic considerations behind its economic policy, as these fit within its great power ambitions. In both sectors, Russia relies on notion of territoriality, ownership and Russia's Arctic identity to reinforce its aspirations among domestic audiences.

At the same time, Russia's approach seems internally conflicted between cooperative and competitive tendencies, as it wants to establish itself as a great power without jeopardising its much needed international relations. Given Russia's large economic ambitions, it is expected it will remain on the cooperative course, especially since sanctions limit its business opportunities. However, this cooperative stance seems largely pragmatic, meaning it will endure as long as it is beneficial for Russia's economic performance in the Arctic.

6. Conclusion

More than a decade ago, Elana Wilson Rowe (2009, 206) described Russia's relationship with the Arctic as "a tension between the securitisation of northern space and the nationalisation of northern resources and more international and market-driven orientations." Current Russian Arctic policy, while much more formalised and fleshed out, continues to be caught between these open and closed tendencies.

This thesis was inspired by these apparent inconsistencies in Russia's Arctic policy. It has argued that while (geo)political, strategic and economic considerations are certainly important factors, they alone cannot fully account for Russia's policy decisions. Therefore, it has employed a critical geopolitics perspective and aimed to investigate Russian Arctic policy as a product of a geographic construction based on ideas and perceptions of Russian identity. By doing so, it has followed Dittmer et al. (2011), who argue that it is not just environmental change in the Arctic that leads to a new geopolitical reality, but rather that the region is being discursively reconfigured. Additionally, this thesis has made a humble contribution to the body of critical geopolitics by illustrating how an entity can construct multiple renderings of a geographic location, which can act both complementary and contradictory to each other. In the case of Russia in the Arctic, conceptualisations of the Arctic as either a zone of peace and cooperation, a space essential for national security or a base for economic revival have all informed cooperative *and* competitive strands of Russian Arctic policy.

Examination of official discourse reveals the importance of history, identity and symbolism in Russia's conceptualisations of the Arctic. Driven by a desire to achieve great power status, Russia aims to employ the Arctic's political, strategic and economic resources to reinforce its position on the international level. While policy remains to a certain extent subject to material interests, such as the presence of important nuclear assets and large hydrocarbon reserves, these are often premised on historical legacies and notions of Russia's

Arctic identity. To illustrate, the historic importance of nuclear assets for Russia's self-identification as a great power explains the heavy emphasis on protection of the Arctic as strategic stronghold. Likewise, the extraction of Arctic hydrocarbon resources is extra significant for Russia, given the prevalence of energy in Russian conceptions of national greatness. The thesis thus confirms the significance of identity for construction of geopolitical reality, and in turn the formation of policy. It finds evidence that the Kremlin employs a national discourse based on notions of Russian greatness and the Arctic as an inherent component of Russian identity. By presenting itself as "a great Arctic power", the Kremlin aims to justify its increasing presence and assertive posture in the region.

This thesis finds that Russia's official narrative is mostly directed at a domestic audience, in effort to convince it of the government's long-term and costly ambitions for the region. The need to keep up this narrative explains the occasional discrepancies in the discourse, such as the lack of references to the current gap in Arctic security infrastructure and the impact of international sanctions on Russia's Arctic energy sector. Of course, it is exactly these instances that prove how Russian Arctic policy is not only subject to domestic interests, but also to international developments. Despite discursive efforts to insulate the region from external pressures, Russian policy recognises the globalisation of the Arctic and its potential negative effects on Russia's position in the region. Since it is dependent on foreign involvement to realise its economic ambitions, the Kremlin is keen to prevent further isolation. An explicit discourse on mutually beneficial cooperation, in political and economic terms, signals how Russia has tried to keep its seat at the Arctic table and maintain the cooperative nature of the region.

Contradictions in Russia's Arctic policy thus stem from the fact that it covers a variety of policy areas and tries to cater to two different audiences. In general, assertive or confrontative tendencies hail from a discourse which tries to convince domestic audience of

Russian greatness in the Arctic by referring to its military capabilities, ownership of the region and the prospects for the hydrocarbon sector. Meanwhile, the cooperative strands in Russia's Arctic policy are derived from a discourse that aims to demonstrate Russia's commitment in regional cooperation and legal structures to international audiences.

While it is too soon to say which tendency will prevail in the future, one thing is clear. With the transformation of the Arctic from a peripheral to a global region, the political and economic significance of the Arctic will continue to grow. The prevalent space the Arctic region has occupied in Russian identity since Soviet times is thus expected expand. This means Russia's competitive and cooperative inclinations will increasingly be at odds with each other. For now, the globalisation of the Arctic, and Russia's position within it, is still a tale in the process of being written. Rising temperatures in the Arctic might very well lead to rising tensions between regional and external actors, especially if Russia continues to view these as increasingly in competition over Arctic resources. At the same time, Russia's dependence on international cooperation to foster its economic ambitions means it will be more keen to maintain favourable relations in the region than one might expect.

In any case, the ability to distinguish between a discourse aimed at boosting moral among domestic audiences and one aimed at fostering cooperation in the international community makes it easier to avoid misconceptions about Russia's Arctic ambitions. This understanding might become key going forward, if the international community is interested in maintaining dialogue with its Russian neighbour in the High North.

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