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## **How do geopolitical tensions influence the relationship between the Russian Federation and NATO within the Arctic Region?**

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**How do geopolitical tensions influence the relationship between the Russian Federation  
and NATO within the Arctic Region?**

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## **Abstract**

The Arctic region is a focal point of strategic importance due to climate change that enables new shipping routes and the extraction of untouched natural resources. These new developments create geopolitical tensions between the various actors in this region. However, more events create geopolitical tension like the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This study investigates if geopolitical tensions influence the relationships between the Russian Federation and NATO within the Arctic region. Based on a qualitative content analysis applied to a single case study. This study aims to give more insight into the different effects of geopolitical geostrategy within the Arctic Region.

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## 1. Introduction

*“The increased competition and militarisation in the Arctic region, especially by Russia and China, is concerning. The melting ice in the Arctic is creating new sea routes that would facilitate the movement of large vessels and shorten navigation times. We cannot be naïve and ignore the potentially nefarious intentions of some actors in the region. We must remain vigilant and prepare for the unexpected”.*

(Admiral Bauer, NATO OTAN, 2023).

As stated in the citation the Arctic can be seen as one of the new regions where international conflict could take place. The region shifted from a primarily scientific interesting region to a region of competing commercial, national security and environmental interests. (Ebinger & Zambetakis, 2009).

One major reason for the accelerating importance of the Arctic region is global warming. The effects of global warming are greater than ever in the Arctic, the sea ice is melting rapidly in this region (Polar Science Center, 2024). The melting of the sea ice allows easier access to the region with the discovery of energy deposits and the development of the technology to get these energy deposits (Marshall, 2016). The melting of the sea also increased international rivalry as access to natural resources became easier. (Østerud & Hønneland, 2017).

In 2008, it was estimated that the Arctic region has approximately 90 billion barrels of oil, 1,669 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and 44 billion barrels of natural gas liquids. These quantities are expected to be 22 percent of the world's remaining undiscovered oil and gas reserves (USGS, 2008). In 2022, Canada, Russia and Alaska engage in hydrocarbon exploration. This resulted in the discovery of more than 400 oil and gas fields in the Arctic region. Consequently, Russia and Canada are now pumping out 2.6 million barrels of fossil fuels each day. In 2022, Norway launched a process to open up areas that are extended to its continental shelf to extract minerals themselves (Rowe, 2022).

All these natural resources and opportunities for economic gain resulted in a change of behaviour by countries that surround the Arctic region. Before these new opportunities and developments, Arctic countries like Norway, Russia and Denmark were not that bothered to claim land within this region due to the lack of importance. In recent years, there has been somewhat of an urgency in claiming parts of the Arctic region, because of the new economic possibilities. This resulted in competing claims in this region (Marshall, 2016). An example of these competing claims by different countries is the Lomonosov Ridge, a mountain range

running from the continental shelf of Siberia towards Greenland and Canada. The competing countries are Denmark, which claims this ridge is an extension of its territory of Greenland. Russia, which is an extension of the Siberian archipelago Frans Josef Land. At last, Canada claims it is an extension of Ellesmere Island, which is part of the territory of Nunavut (BBC, 2020). The outcome of this claim is essential for these nations because the importance of this new unclaimed territory is huge.

The change in the behaviour of Russia can be seen in speeches that Putin gives, he sees the strengthening of the energy potential, expansion of logistics, ensuring national security and defence in the Arctic region and the further development within these territories as an indisputable priority for Russia. (Russian News Agency, 2023). The geopolitical tensions already increased because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Wall and Wegge (2023) cite in the CSIS that:

*“The region’s primary diplomatic venue is paused, and military tensions are increasing. When Sweden and Finland join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), every Arctic country save Russia will be a member of the U.S.-led alliance. The war has not diminished Russia’s core economic and security interests in the region, but it has had some impact on its military readiness there in the short term, especially in terms of ground capabilities, if not at sea or in the air” (p.1).*

There are also non-Arctic countries, that also want to be part of the potential economic gain. Like China, that is attracted to the potential of the Arctic region because of new maritime transportation routes and energy security concerns (Lundestad & Tunsjo, 2015). This resulted in the idea of building a Polar Silk Road with Arctic countries (The Arctic Institute, 2023). One of those countries is the Russian Federation which made a joint statement with China on the Arctic by stating:

*“The sides call upon all countries to strengthen cooperation in sustainable transport, actively build contacts and share knowledge in the construction of transport facilities, including smart transport and sustainable transport, development and use of Arctic routes, as well as to develop other areas to support global post-epidemic recovery.” (President of Russia, 2022).*

NATO is also active in the Arctic. NATO sees itself as an Arctic Alliance. This is because 4 out of the 5 littoral states in the Arctic are NATO countries. These countries are the United States, Canada, Denmark and Norway. That is why they have a military presence in this

region with their national forces and forces from NATO allied countries (NATO, 2022). Moreover, The military presence can be attributed to the fact that NATO and the Russian Federation already had a rivalry in the Arctic during the Cold War. However, this cooled off after the fall of the USSR (Bykova, 2024).

This study looks at the influence of geopolitical tensions on the relationship between the Russian Federation and NATO, by investigating specifically the effects experienced by NATO due to the Russian Federation their geopolitical geostrategy. In particular, it will analyse the speeches given by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to look at whether the effects of the geopolitical geostrategy from the Russian geostrategy are present.

The contribution of this study is to provide a better understanding of the influence of the effects between the Russian Federation and NATO specifically within the Arctic Region has a scientific and societal relevance. The scientific relevance is to contribute to the understanding of the effects that NATO experiences because of the geopolitical geostrategy of Russia due to the geopolitical tensions that Wall and Wegge (2023) described. Regarding societal relevance, this study contributes to the awareness of the Arctic as a focal point for global security and a potential risk for conflict between major power blocs, like NATO and Russia. As climate change opens new economic possibilities. By diving deeper into the different components of geopolitical geostrategy and what kind of effects these components have on the relationship between the Russian Federation and NATO within the Arctic Region. This study will attempt to answer the following research question: *How do geopolitical tensions influence the relationship between the Russian Federation and NATO within the Arctic Region?*

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Arctic Region

Within the Arctic region, there are the ‘Arctic States’. This is a group of states that have territory within the Arctic region (Chater, 2016; Henderson & Loe 2016). These states are Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Russian Federation and the United States. Countries such as China refer to themselves as ‘near-Arctic countries’. This status can be perceived as not only the right to engage in Arctic affairs but also a responsibility to do so. (Østhagen & Rottem, 2023). That is why China made it clear in their Arctic policy paper in 2018 that they have ambitions to revise the international norms in the Arctic to facilitate the expectations and rights of non-Arctic states, particularly, a ‘Near Arctic’ China. (Depledge, 2020).

The geopolitical tensions in the Arctic are created by the fact that this region has no clear borders, which is why countries like China call themselves a ‘near-Arctic country’. Dodds (2013) claims that there might be multiple Arctic regions that exist because some geographers define regions as socially and politically constructed. This is illustrated by Dodds (2013) who cites: “*The United Kingdom, for example, defines itself as a "sub-Arctic state" and China as a "near Arctic" state.*” (p.30). The broad agreement about this region is that if there is a southern border, it is the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel north (Heininen et al, 2020).

Since the late 1980s, the core issues on the Arctic agenda have been dominated by the issues of the Cold War. The Arctic was divided into two camps, the Soviet Union and the other Arctic states that were allied to, or members of NATO (Young, 2012). In this timeframe, the region was heavily militarized because the Baltic Basin was seen as a great location to test new weapon technology and station nuclear-powered submarines and bombers carrying cruise missiles (Young, 2012).

Since the end of the Cold War, the states demilitarized the region and are collaborating more because of the growing recognition of the strategic significance this region has where the security, economics and environment are interacting with each other. This resulted in the founding of different intergovernmental organisations ending with the creation of the Arctic Council, in 1996. This Council consists of the 9 different Arctic countries. The states mainly collaborate on environmental and natural resources issues (Blunden, 2009).



Recently, The Arctic Council has been the most notable innovation in the region even if it remains a soft law institution that does not produce legally binding obligations for its members (Koivurova, 2008; 2010). However, the first legally binding agreement involving search and rescue (SAR) was agreed in May 2011. This is a huge step because the socioeconomic issues will become more important as the growing interest of non-Arctic actors and organizations with their resource-related and environmental interests (Dodds, 2013). Also, the first legally binding agreement led to the acceptance of a more robust government framework (Exner-Pirot, 2012). Consequently, the increased interest of non-Arctic actors to use international law as a method to try and influence Arctic matters. International law could be a powerful tool for Arctic states to emphasize sovereignty and their individual right in the region (Koivurova et al., 2020).

## **2.2. Geopolitical actors in the Arctic Region**

The most recent geopolitical situation in the Arctic is similar to the old geopolitical rivalries between the different actors in the Arctic region during the Cold War (Stuhl, 2013). These rivalries concern the potential disagreement to unresolved questions on the jurisdiction and conflicting interests of transport routes and resources. (Østerud & Hønneland, 2017)

The international battle of the Arctic territory with its natural resources results in five different Arctic nations, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States, claiming rights to the same territory. These overlapping territory claims have no legal resolution yet as four out of the five states went to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), making a case for their claim within the framework of the UNCLOS. However, these states are using traditional approaches to claim this territory (Watson & Molly, 2009). An example of the importance of these claims is that as much as 20% of Russian GDP derives from the North of the Arctic Circle (Blunden, 2009). So countries become more dependent on the Arctic Region.

The claim of territory within the Arctic Region also resulted in a shift of focus on strategic positioning and increased geopolitical tension between NATO countries and the Russian Federation. The geopolitical tensions increased because the territorial claims of Russia are unwarranted and NATO countries want to counter these claims. (Østhagen, 2020).

The Annexation of Crimea and the attempts to win control over Ukraine through military intervention, not only increased the geopolitical tensions between NATO and Russia. Moreover, the annexation demonstrated the fact that the Russian Federation moved back to a traditional geopolitical geostrategy (Wigell & Vihma, 2016). The impact of Russia's war in Ukraine paused the Arctic's primary diplomatic venue while the military tensions in the region

are increasing. Furthermore, the core economic and security interests have not diminished since the Ukrainian war. (Wall & Wegge, 2023). The core economic and security interests of Russia are based on the policy to secure the Arctic to exploit the region's economic potential, reserves of hydrocarbons and shipping routes. (Foxall, 2017).

The policy of NATO changed from a traditional cautious approach to a more assertive one. This includes normalising Alliance engagement in the Arctic and leaves room for the Alliance to expand its activity in this region (Depledge, 2020). This change of behaviour is attributed to NATO having lost interest in the Arctic after the Cold War. NATO their recent awakening in the Arctic is a result of the call for NATO to be a bigger presence in the Arctic region by different NATO countries like Canada and Norway. (Depledge, 2020).

Looking at the discussion of the literature on the Arctic region and the political development within this region. There is a gap in the literature, Wigell and Vihma (2016) discuss the different effects of geopolitics. However, uses these particular effects of a geopolitical geostrategy in combination with the effects of geoeconomics. The particular effects of the geopolitical geostrategy are tested on the situation in Ukraine. This study looks specifically at the effects on NATO of the geopolitical geostrategy of the Russian Federation. Furthermore, the literature on politics in the Arctic after the Cold War is mainly on the expectation of cooperation and peaceful development and the realist perspective slowly faded away into the background. (Østerud & Hønneland, 2017).

The review of the literature suggests that there are geopolitical tensions within the Arctic region and particularly a change in Russian geostrategic thinking. This allows this study to look specifically at the effects NATO is experiencing from this change in Russia's geostrategic thinking.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

The relationship between man and his geographical environment has been discussed since the time of the Greeks (Hagan, 1942). The intent of geopolitics, according to Hagan (1942), is to provide knowledge on carrying out specific state policy and characterize the state as a living organism. Within geopolitics, there are different approaches for example in international relations it refers to a conservative, realist view.

In this study, the theory of Wigell and Vihma (2016) is used. Table 1 shows the effects of a geopolitical geostrategy by Wigell and Vihma (2016). Between the Russian Federation and NATO are geopolitical tensions, as Russia uses a geopolitical geostrategy. The effects of the geopolitics are analysed. The effects of geopolitics are: a high threat perception, a centripetal action-reaction force and the behavioural tendency of counterbalancing/bandwagoning.

<i>Geopolitics</i>	
<i>Operational (agent):</i>	
Means	Military
Visibility	Overt
Logic	Confrontation
<i>Effects (target):</i>	
Threat perception	High
Action–reaction force	Centripetal
Behavioural tendency	Counterbalancing/ bandwagoning

*Table 1: the contrasting traditional geopolitics with geoeconomics (Wigell & Vihma, 2016).*

The threat perception is likely to be higher when the particular country is confronted with a geopolitical power projection. The external geopolitical threat causes widespread alarm among the population of the targeted countries. (Wigell & Vihma, 2016). In the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept, it becomes clear that NATO sees the Russian Federation as its biggest threat (Kıprızlı, 2024). Accordingly, in this study, it is expected that the effects of the Russian Federation their geostrategy could be visible in the speeches of NATO. As the speeches & transcripts contain language indicating a high level of perceived threat from Russia in the Arctic region. (e.g. mentions of aggression, military buildup, territorial disputes). Drawing from the literature, Hypothesis 1: Due to the geopolitical geostrategy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic, the threat perception of NATO is high

The second effect is that the action-reaction force will be centripetal. A centripetal action-reaction force is the tendency for more cohesion and work as one (Wigell & Vihma, 2016). NATO has a centripetal force that keeps the Alliance together and is cohesive from the start of the organisation. This force consists of two parts: a sense of community and a shared identity (Jakobsen & Ringsmose, 2018). Furthermore, the external threat of Russia can play a role in the centripetal action-reaction force. The *external threat hypothesis*, illustrates that security threats increase alliance cohesion by increasing their willingness to cooperate to achieve group goals and a convergence of preferences. (Mader, 2023; Myrick, 2021). The expected effect is NATO taking a leading role in the foreign policy within the Arctic Region enabling a stronger and more coherent voice. So, based on the review of the literature. Hypothesis 2: NATO is expected to have a centripetal action-reaction force to the geostrategy of the Russian Federation within the Arctic.

The last effect is the counterbalancing and or bandwagoning behaviour. Bandwagoning means in his basic definition, siding with the stronger (Cladi & Locatelli, 2012). Wigell and Vihma (2016) see bandwagoning as the effect where allies of particular countries are aligned with the views and actions of these countries. NATO initiated the *Global NATO* in 2006. This resulted in NATO becoming more unipolar. The structural effect of unipolarity on NATO is a tendency for bandwagoning. (Mowle And & Sacko, 2008). Consequently, NATO countries and allies of NATO will be aligned with the views and actions of NATO. On the other hand, Counterbalancing will not come from the allies of NATO or NATO countries. In this study, counterbalancing is when allies of a particular country favour the geostrategy of the opposing country and express scepticism or opposition against the particular country. The counterbalancing will be expected from Russia because its foreign policy has been shaped to counterbalance the West (Popescu, 2023). Within the speeches, NATO nations and allies of NATO are expected to express alignment with the views and actions of NATO or will be in favour of the geostrategy of Russia. Furthermore, in light of the literature. Hypothesis 3: The geopolitical geostrategy of Russia will trigger counterbalancing and bandwagoning behaviour of NATO nations.

## **4. Methodology**

This qualitative research will focus on a single case study employing a content analysis, as the research question necessitates an examination of what particular effects a geostrategy as a geopolitical strategy of a country has on a specific international organisation. These effects cannot be given a numerical value as the context and underlying message of the speeches must be taken into account.

### **4.1 Case selection**

This study will use a single case study and analyse the speeches and transcripts of NATO as this is a primary source of NATO their discourse. These speeches and transcripts are given by Jens Stoltenberg. Jens Stoltenberg is the Secretary General of NATO since the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2014. The speeches and transcripts by Jens Stoltenberg will be used because he is the principal spokesperson of the Alliance, and represents NATO in public and in relation to other international organisations. Accordingly, Jens Stoltenberg frequently holds speeches, press briefings and conferences. (NATO, 2023).

By directly looking at the speeches, the effects of the geopolitical geostrategy that Russia is using can be seen first-hand. Moreover, NATO speeches are public statements that provide transparency and accountability as can be seen by everyone on their official website. NATO speeches serve the goal of sending a message to external factors like Russia, which enables this study to look at the reaction of NATO against Russia and their geostrategy. Because these speeches are analysed for a longer period, this ensures that it is possible to see whether there has been a change over time in NATO rhetoric or policy stance.

The timeframe of this study is from the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2014 as this is the date that Jens Stoltenberg is appointed as secretary-general to the most recent speech he has given. This excludes the variable of having another person as secretary-general.

### **4.2 Methods of data collection and operationalization**

To examine the effects of the geopolitical geostrategy of the Russian Federation on NATO, this study will apply a qualitative content analysis to primary sources. These primary sources are 85 speeches of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on the Arctic region. These speeches are given in different locations and different settings like summits or universities.

These particular speeches can give an insight into the reaction of NATO to the geostrategy of Russia within the Arctic region. As the executive general talks on behalf of NATO and know these different speeches will be available to the wider public.

In this study, a qualitative content analysis is used. Qualitative content analysis is a method to systematically analyse qualitative data. (Lindgren et al, 2020). In this instance, the 85 speeches of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg will be systematically analysed. This method can be applied to this study as it reveals the themes and main ideas of the different speeches, as well as information about the context that is written in. This is done by condensing the different texts into fewer categories (Schreier, 2013). By condensing the different texts into different categories words and phrases will share the same meaning (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). This helps to reveal the themes and main ideas of the different speeches of Jens Stoltenberg. The qualitative content analysis will be conducted using categories and indicators associated with the expected effects of a geopolitical geostrategy that are described by Wigell and Vihma (2016). A mixed approach is used for the creation of the coding frame for the analysis of the data. This approach is both deductive and inductive, as it establishes connections between the derived hypothesis and the text (Marrying, 2000). Table 2 illustrates the link between the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the relevant variables.

Variable	Conceptualisation	Operationalisation
Threat Perception	The conscious or unconscious perception of a country that something is dangerous	The executive general expressing that Russia's behaviour is a threat to NATO.
Action-reaction force	One nation's way to respond to the actions of another country	NATO responds to the geostrategy of the Russian Federation and explains what their counter-actions are
Behavioural tendency	The way one nation behaves because of the actions of another country	NATO and NATO nations express the way they behave as a reaction to the geopolitical geostrategy of the Russian Federation

*Table 2: conceptualisation and operationalisation of the relevant variables.*

### 4.3 Coding frame

The data is collected through the analysis of the 85 speeches delivered by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg since his appointment on the first of October 2010 until the present day and is employed for the basis of three main categories and subcategories that are connected to the hypotheses. (Schreier, 2013).

Hypothesis	Main Category	Subcategories	Indicators
<i>High threat perception</i>	NATO expressing language that indicates a high level of perceived threat	- mentions of aggression - military buildup - territorial disputes	- tensions are high - military - disputes/conflicts
<i>Centripetal action-reaction force</i>	A cohesive response to Russia in the Arctic	- unified policies/strategies - increased cohesion in response to perceived geopolitical threats	- call for action - unilateral - multilateral - allies
<i>Counterbalancing/bandwagoning behaviour</i>	Alignment of NATO's allies with the stance of NATO or NATO allies indicates solidarity or conformity with Russia's geostrategy in the Arctic.	- express opposition to the stance of NATO - bandwagoning - perspectives and views.	- alignment - opposition - point of view

Table 3. Coding frame for content analysis

The first hypothesis that can be seen in table 3 is *high threat perception* as an effect that NATO experiences because of the geopolitical geostrategy of the Russian Federation. The main category is *NATO expressing language that indicates a high level of perceived threat*. The three subcategories that are connected to the first main category are:

- *Mentions of aggression*, this implies when NATO indicates Russia is the aggressor. Wigell and Vihma (2016) express that a geopolitical geostrategy can be seen as an offensive foreign policy that uses the military to achieve its goals.
- *Military buildup*, is used when Jens Stoltenberg mentions that Russia deployed more military personnel or instruments to the Arctic Region or NATO themselves moved more personnel into the Arctic. Since Wigell and Vihma (2016) imply that a geopolitical geostrategy uses military means to achieve its foreign policy.

- *Territorial disputes*, instances where conflicts or disagreement over territorial claims. As Wigell and Vihma (2016) suggest the operational logic within geopolitical power projection is confrontation.

The indicators for these categories include the words: *tensions are high, military, disputes/conflicts*.

The second hypothesis implies that a *centripetal action-reaction force* is an effect of the geostrategy of the Russian Federation that NATO encounters. The main category is *a cohesive response to Russia in the Arctic*. This appears when NATO talks about coming together as one and calling for unity. The subcategories are:

- *Unified policies/strategies*, apply whenever NATO expresses alignment in the policies and strategies. As Jakobsen & Ringmose (2018) suggest that NATO uses unified policies/strategies to keep the Alliance together.
- *Increased cohesion in the response to perceived geopolitical threats*, applies whenever NATO uses a comprehensive point of view. Mader (2023) and Myrick (2021) illustrate that a perceived security threat results in an increase in alliance cohesion.

The indicators of these categories are: *call for action, unilateral, multilateral and allies*.

The last hypothesis explores *counterbalancing/bandwagoning behaviour* as an effect on NATO because of the geopolitical geostrategy of the Russian Federation. The three subcategories that are connected to this main category are:

- *express opposition to the stance of NATO*, this implies when allies or NATO countries are not in line with the policy of NATO.
- *bandwagoning*, this implies when allies of NATO conform and support the policy and actions of NATO in the Arctic region, based on the fact that NATO countries tend to bandwagon (Mowle And & Sacko, 2008).
- *perspectives and views*, this expresses the opinions, beliefs, or interpretations of NATO standpoint.

The indicators of these categories are: *alignment, opposition, point of view*.



## 5. Empirics

The analysis of the 85 different speeches & transcripts by Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg reveals that NATO shows the three different effects of the geopolitical geostrategy of the Russian Federation. These three different effects are: a high threat perception, a centripetal action-reaction force and counterbalancing/bandwagoning.

Out of the 85 speeches & transcripts given by Jens Stoltenberg, at least one of the three effects is observed in 55 of them. Table 4 lists the number of speeches & transcripts analysed in chronological order and displays the outcome of the comprehensive coding scheme applied to each speech. Each “X” under High Threat Perception, A centripetal Action-reaction force and Counterbalancing/bandwagoning signifies the presence of a relevant quote(s).

Speeches/Transcripts	High Threat Perception	A centripetal Action-reaction force	Counterbalancing/ bandwagoning	Not Relevant
1	X			
2		X		
3				X
4				X
5	X	X		
6	X		X	
7	X			
8	X	X		
9	X	X		
10		X	X	
11				X
12	X	X	X	
13	X	X	X	
14	X	X	X	
15				X
16	X	X	X	
17	X	X	X	
18		X		
19	X	X	X	
20	X		X	
21	X		X	
22	X	X	X	
23				X
24	X	X		
25		X		
26	X	X	X	
27		X		
28		X		
29		X		

30		X	X	
31				X
32		X		
33		X	X	
34	X		X	
35	X	X		
36				X
37			X	
38	X	X	X	
39		X	X	
40	X			
41				X
42				X
43				X
44				X
45	X			
46	X	X		
47	X			
48				X
49				X
50	X			
51		X		
52				X
53				X
54				X
55	X			
56				X
57				X
58		X		
59	X	X		
60				X
61			X	
62		X		
63		X		
64	X	X		
65				X
66				X
67				X
68				X
69	X			
70	X	X		
71	X	X	X	
72				X
73		X		
74				X
75		X		
76				X
77	X			

78				X
79				X
80				X
81		X	X	
82		X		
83				X
84		X	X	
85	X	X	X	

Table 4. Results of the 85 Speeches & Transcripts Jens Stoltenberg

### 5.1 High threat perception

The first hypothesis is based on the presence of a high threat perception in the speeches. A high threat perception is present and can be divided into three topics. The first one is the military build-up of Russia in the Arctic, this was a central part of the speeches and transcripts of Jens Stoltenberg. The speeches indicate that across the years Russia reopened the old bases from the Cold War in the Arctic and invested in new military sites in that region (NATO, 2019; 2021; 2022). As well as, more naval presence, more exercises and more submarines in that region (NATO, 2018; 2019; 2023).

Secondly, There has not been any occurrence of a mention of aggression in these speeches. So primarily a military build-up is evident rather than a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia.

The last topic is territorial disputes. Jens Stoltenberg indicates once in his speeches & transcripts that there is a territorial dispute in the Arctic. Norway and Russia signed a treaty to establish the maritime boundary between the two nations in the Barents Sea and Arctic Ocean (NATO, 2014).

Interestingly, over time, the presence of the Russian Federation in the Arctic caused a high threat perception at NATO. China their military build-up and overall presence in the Arctic also play a part in the high threat perception. The first time he mentioned China in his speeches was on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 2019. *“Because China is coming closer to us. China in the Arctic, in Africa, in Europe, in cyberspace. So there is no way we cannot assess and respond to the rise of China”* (NATO, 2019). The military build-up of China in the Arctic consists primarily of the modernization of its military capabilities (NATO, 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022). Additionally, Jens Stoltenberg suggests across the years an enlarged presence of China in this region, yet he does not provide specific examples of this larger presence in this area.

The rise of China in the world, world politics and their military presence as a whole and not only in the Arctic, caused a shift in focus from Russia to China is apparent in the speeches & transcripts as Jens Stoltenberg mentions:

*we see that there are obvious challenges related to the rise of the military power of China and of course you are closer to China than European NATO Allies are, and traditionally NATO has been focused on the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and Russia after that. But what we see is that the rise of China is having an impact on our security, partly because China is coming closer. We see them in the Arctic, we see them in Africa, we see them investing heavily in critical infrastructure, also in Europe.” (NATO, 2019).*

Furthermore, the two main threats to NATO’s security, and consequently the largest contributors to the high threat perception, China and the Russian Federation, are collaborating more and more over time not only on a political level but also organising military exercises with each other (NATO, 2020; 2021; 2022; 2024). This is confirmed in the speeches as Jens Stoltenberg addresses: *“We see China coming closer to us in cyber, controlling infrastructure in Africa and the Arctic, training together with Russia in North Atlantic waters.” (NATO, 2021).*

In conclusion, out of the 85 speeches & transcripts analysed, 33 contain statements specifically focused on a high threat perception. This suggests that NATO perceives a high threat perception due to the geopolitical geostrategy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic. Furthermore, the military build-up of Russia in the Arctic plays a crucial part in the high threat perception.

## **5.2 Centripetal Action-reaction force**

Secondly, in the speeches and transcripts, the centripetal action-reaction force is divided into two parts: increased cohesion in response to perceived threats and unified policies/strategies. The increased cohesion in response to perceived geopolitical threats is noticeable in the statements based by Jens Stoltenberg, as he cites: *“So, when we do things together, exercise together, plan together and then we are able to also face the challenges together in the High North” (NATO, 2024).* The call for a more cohesive response is evident both militarily and politically. As Jens Stoltenberg remarks, *“And we need to do that by forging NATO as a stronger political Alliance. On the military side, throughout the years the cohesive response consists of a collective defence in the Arctic (NATO, 2016; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2022).*

This collective defence is divided into two parts: The collective military presence and the joint exercises. The collective military presence involves the increased readiness of NATO troops as well as more naval and air presence in this region (NATO, 2018; 2019; 2021; 2022). The joint exercises are mentioned by Jens Stoltenberg throughout the years. (NATO, 2016; 2019; 2022; 2023).

On the other hand, Unified policies/strategies manifest themselves in moving as an Alliance alongside NATO Allies having a common approach on different issues. Having a common approach is emphasized by Jens Stoltenberg in the speeches & transcripts: *“The reality is that we are united on this and Allies have a common approach”*. (NATO, 2020). One of the common approaches is the investment in new military capabilities in the Arctic. This becomes clear as Jens Stoltenberg mentions:

*“NATO Allies, including the Arctic NATO Allies, are investing in new capabilities, everything from maritime patrol aircrafts to submarines, and all the other equipment and capabilities we need to make sure that we continue to show the necessary precedence in the High North.”* (NATO, 2021).

In the speeches & transcripts, it becomes apparent that NATO makes a change in how it sees itself. NATO acknowledges itself mainly as a regional Alliance (NATO, 2020; 2021; 2024). But in 2022, Jens Stoltenberg changed this to an Arctic Alliance as well (NATO, 2022).

NATO as a regional Alliance evolves as their dynamics change because of the global challenges they face like climate change, security and global competition (NATO, 2019; 2020; 2021; 2023). However, Jens Stoltenberg does indicate several times throughout the years that *“This is not about NATO becoming a global military Alliance”* (NATO, 2022; 2023). Notably, He contradicts himself by calling NATO a transatlantic Alliance in 2024: *“So first of all, you are right that NATO is a transatlantic alliance, Europe and North America. And we will remain a regional alliance.”* (NATO, 2024).

The creation of the unified policies/strategy can be attributed to the discussions NATO countries have when they come together on different occasions. During these discussions, they try to achieve some consensus on the strategy they want to carry out. This is confirmed by Jens Stoltenberg as he cites: *“And by having discussions like that with all 30 Allies from Europe and North America, sitting together in the same room discussing these issues, we are step-by-step building consensus among an alliance representing one billion people”* (NATO, 2020).

To conclude, 40 speeches & transcripts contain statements that Jens Stoltenberg made specifically focused on the topic. The high number of speeches & transcripts that contain statements regarding a centripetal action-reaction force implies that a centripetal action-force is among the primary effects that NATO perceives because of the geopolitical geostrategy of Russia in the Arctic.

### **5.3 Counterbalancing/bandwagoning**

Bandwagoning can be found in the speeches & transcripts of Jens Stoltenberg. The bandwagoning can be seen as Jens Stoltenberg mentions that NATO works together with different countries: *“Several NATO Allies, as Norway, investing in new planes, in new maritime patrol aircrafts, but also the UK, Denmark - of course, Canada and the United States, are also investing in new maritime and air capabilities which are relevant for the High North.”* (NATO, 2019). This citation indicates that different NATO allies are bandwagoning as they are aligned with NATO policy to invest in the military to protect and have a bigger presence in the Arctic. Not only NATO allies are bandwagoning, in the statements made by Jens Stoltenberg on different issues like: *“Not least on issues like search and rescue, environment, energy and so on. I think there is potential, not only potential, we actually see that that NATO Allies are working with Finland, Sweden as countries outside the Alliance.”* (NATO, 2021). A side note to this citation is that Finland and Sweden ended up joining the NATO Alliance a couple of years later. So there could be underlying interest in this bandwagoning. The so-called “Indo pacific partners” like Japan, and Australia are also bandwagoning as they stand together with NATO against the new military capabilities and the overall rise of China in world politics. (NATO, 2019; 2020; 2021; 2023; 2024).

Counterbalancing can be found in some speeches delivered by Jens Stoltenberg as the Secretary General remarks China and Russia as the main countries that express opposition against the values of NATO. This is evident in the statement that Jens Stoltenberg made:

*“ I think what fundamentally what we see is that two authoritarian powers, Russia and China, are operating together. Because that don't like the rules based international order. They don't share our values, freedom, democracy. And that's also the reason why they tried to deny sovereign, democratic nations the right to choose their own future.”* (NATO, 2022).

In retrospect, out of the 85 speeches & transcripts, 23 have relevant statements made by Jens Stoltenberg regarding bandwagoning or counterbalancing. This suggests an emphasis on the

support and alignment or adversity looking at the policy and actions of NATO. This result also suggests that Jens Stoltenberg finds it important to mention that different countries are in support and align with the policy and the point of view that NATO has. Looking at counterbalancing, Jens Stoltenberg seems to focus particularly on China and the Russian Federation and why it is important for NATO and the partners to stay together as China and Russia are a danger to the Alliance. So, the bandwagoning/counterbalancing can be seen as an effect of the geopolitical geostrategy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic.

#### **5.4 Overview Results**

The results of the analysis offer evidence supporting the conformation of the effects of the three proposed hypotheses. These effects of a geopolitical geostrategy according to Wigell and Vihma (2016) are: High threat perception, Centripetal Action-reaction force and bandwagoning/counterbalancing. Noteworthy, Jens Stoltenberg cites that there are geopolitical tensions in the Arctic on two occasions: *“In the Arctic where as the ice melts, geopolitical tensions heat up.”* (NATO, 2020) and *“To the Arctic, where melting ice-caps are driving geopolitical competition”* (NATO, 2021).

First of all, the findings of the first hypothesis indicate that NATO experiences a high threat perception due to the geopolitical geostrategy of the Russian Federation. This is primarily caused by the Russian military build-up in the Arctic, as the mentions of aggression or territorial disputes were not evident. Regarding the second hypothesis, there is evidence that NATO uses a centripetal action-reaction force as a result of the geopolitical geostrategy of Russia. Jens Stoltenberg emphasizes togetherness and a cohesive response besides the unified policies and strategies he mentions throughout his speeches & transcripts. Finally, the results of the third hypothesis suggest bandwagoning/counterbalancing among allies of NATO and other countries. Since, NATO allies, Indo-Pacific countries, Finland and Sweden express bandwagoning behaviour. On the contrary, Jens Stoltenberg argues that China and Russia are expressing opposition against the views and values of NATO.

Overall, all of the three effects have been visible in the speeches & transcripts. This confirms that the Russian Federation their geopolitical geostrategy has influenced the relationship between NATO and the Russian Federation in the Arctic. Interestingly, China began to play a much bigger role throughout the years. The effects of China have not been taken into account in this particular study. However, the growing presence of China in world politics and the Arctic could have played a role in all of the effects of Wigell and Vihma (2016).

## 6. Discussion

The findings of this research add a new insight to the scholarship on the effects of a geopolitical geostrategy by displaying that the effects: high threat perception, centripetal action-reaction force and bandwagoning/counterbalancing are apparent at NATO due to the geopolitical geostrategy of Russia particularly in the Arctic. These particular effects by Wigell and Vihma (2016) have never been explored through this particular theoretical lens. The result of the first hypothesis supports the literature as Kırızlı (2024) states that NATO sees Russia as its biggest threat. Consequently, the threat perception is likely to be higher when a country is confronted with geopolitical power projection (Wigell & Vihma, 2016). So, the outcome of the first hypothesis supports the literature on a high threat perception as an effect on geopolitical. Diving deeper into the centripetal action-reaction force, the outcomes of the second hypothesis affirm the literature because Jakobsen & Ringsmose (2018) indicated that NATO has a centripetal force that keeps NATO together due to a sense of community and a shared identity. As well as, Mader (2023) & Myrick (2021) illustrate that the *external threat hypothesis* increases cohesion and willingness to cooperate to achieve group goals. The external threat in this study is the Russian Federation which resulted in a more cohesive NATO and the emphasis of Jens Stoltenberg on standing and working together as one.

The literature indicates that NATO has a tendency towards bandwagoning because of its unipolarity (Mowle And & Sacko, 2008). This supports the findings of the last hypothesis. NATO nations are aligned with the views and actions of NATO. The counterbalancing in this study is solely from Russia and China, which supports Popescu (2023) who mentions that for the last two decades, the Russian Federation's foreign policy has been based on counterbalancing the West.

The limitations of this study, the data that has been used is solely from the perspective of NATO. This viewpoint only describes NATO's interpretations and viewpoints. Moreover, all the speeches are given with the knowledge that they will be published and will get widespread attention via different media outlets. Consequently, the context of these speeches could be more accentuated and with an underlying political message that cannot be detected. All the sources that have been used in this study are public. This can be a limitation as NATO can be selective in what they publish and what they keep behind closed doors.

The limitations of the theory that has been used in this study, could not be entirely true because of the complex situation of the Arctic region. Moreover, some theories that might be useful for



this study could have been missed and not have been used. Additionally, the choice for a single case study allows this study to be more in-depth on the different variables. However, a single case study has an inability to provide more general conclusions. (Zainal, 2007).

## **7. Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of the geopolitical geostrategy of the Russian Federation on NATO in the Arctic. Drawing on literature highlights the effects of geopolitical geostrategy, three theoretical expectations, have been proposed. These expectations suggest that a high threat perception, centripetal action-reaction force, and counterbalancing/bandwagoning (Wigell & Vihma, 2016) are effects visible due to a geopolitical geostrategy. The analysis indicates that within the speeches of NATO, the effects of the geopolitical geostrategy of Russia on NATO are visible. The outcome of the study is that the geopolitical tension influences the relationship between NATO and the Russian Federation. Therefore, this leads to a new theoretical perspective from which the effects of geostrategy can be studied and improved.

Regarding the scientific relevance of this study, the findings this study contributes to a better understanding of the effects that NATO experiences because of the geopolitical geostrategy of the Russian Federation. Given the proven effects of Wigell and Vihma (2016) experienced by NATO, this research reveals that a high threat perception, centripetal action-reaction force and bandwagoning/counterbalancing are the effects that NATO experiences because of the Geopolitical geostrategy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic. Moreover, the confirmation of the *external threat hypothesis* (Mader,2023; Myrick, 2021) leads to more cohesion and willingness to cooperate to achieve group goals. Additionally, The affirmation of NATO tends to bandwagon because of its unipolarity (Mowle And & Sacko, 2008).

Regarding the societal relevance of this study, the findings suggest a valuable direction for the awareness of the Arctic as a focal point for global security and the potential risk for conflict between major power blocs, like NATO and Russia. Because of the new economic possibilities that opened up due to climate change.

Following the findings from this study, it becomes evident that China their role in the Arctic is progressively expanding according to the analysed speeches & transcripts of Jens Stoltenberg. Future studies should build on this research on the effects of geopolitical geostrategy by Wigell and Vihma (2016) and further explore the effects that China's geopolitical geostrategy has on NATO in the Arctic, in particular

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