

The political and strategic competition for the Arctic: Rising tensions and conflict potential

Executive Summary or Abstract

The escalating geopolitical competition in the Arctic, and more specifically the geostrategic interests of the United States (US), Russia, and China have garnered increased attention in recent years. Current developments, such as President Trump's post-2024 re-election assertion of the necessity of (forcefully) acquiring Greenland for US national security, underscore the Arctic's growing global significance. The region's rapidly melting ice, combined with more accessible valuable natural resources and new maritime trade routes, are intensifying interest among the world's major powers. Russia maintains a long-standing strategic presence in the Arctic, viewing it as vital to both national security and economic policy. Since its 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia's Arctic posture has grown more militarised, halting regional cooperation and prompting broader geopolitical shifts. China, identifying itself as a "near-Arctic state," is also expanding its position, motivated by economic opportunities and strategic trade routes, although its alignment with Russia remains limited and situational. The United States, historically a hesitant Arctic actor, has begun to assert a more proactive stance in response to these evolving dynamics. Trump's Greenland comments symbolise broader US efforts to counterbalance Chinese and Russian influence. The report seeks to identify the drivers behind the geostrategic interests of China, Russia, and the US, and assess how the interplay of these security, climate, and economic dynamics can determine the risk of conflict in the Arctic.

Introduction

"We need Greenland for international safety and security. We need it. We have to have it...We have to have that land because it's not possible to properly defend a large section of this Earth, not just the United States, without it...It's an island that from a defensive posture, and even offensive posture, is something we need,

especially with the world the way it is, and we're going to have to have it.” -
President Donald Trump¹

President Trump's recent assertive remarks over the United States' (herein US, or USA) interests in Greenland, following his re-election in November 2024, present a useful example that perfectly exemplifies the heightened strategic importance of the wider Arctic region in international politics.² Indeed, the declaration to buy or take over the Danish self-governing island by key members of the new Trump administration has highlighted the growing geopolitical tensions and competition for influence in the Arctic.³ However, moving beyond the backlash from the United States' European allies and the straining transatlantic relationship in the aftermath of Trump's bellicose rhetoric about Greenland,⁴ it is clear that the Arctic represents a current hot spot which has been steadily attracting global interests over the last decade.⁵ More specifically, the intensifying strategic competition between the world's great powers – the United States, the Russian Federation, and the People's Republic of China (herein PRC) – is playing out in the Arctic.⁶

This increased level of contention and activity in the region is closely linked to the interplay of economic, climate, and security dynamics. Valuable economic and natural resources are made accessible due to the warming temperatures in the Arctic⁷ which rise at a much faster rate than the rest of the world.⁸ As the ice recedes, resource exploitation, regional development opportunities, and the opening of new Arctic routes to global commercial

¹ Al Jazeera. (2025, March 27). *Trump reiterates US must "have" Greenland ahead of JD Vance visit*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/27/trump-reiterates-us-must-have-greenland-ahead-of-jd-vance-visit>

² Østhagen, A. (2025b, March 29). *Trump has misunderstood the Importance of Greenland*. The Arctic Institute - Center for Circumpolar Security Studies. <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/trump-misunderstood-importance-greenland/>

³ Arts, S. (2025). *Strategic competition in the Arctic: Navigating a complex security nexus* (pp. 19–23). Munich Security Conference 2025.

⁴ Østhagen, A. (2025a, January 10). *Trump's Greenland Flirt is Clumsy Arctic Geopolitics*. The Arctic Institute - Center for Circumpolar Security Studies. <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/trumps-greenland-flirt-clumsy-arctic-geopolitics/>

⁵ Arts, S. (2025). *Strategic competition in the Arctic: Navigating a complex security nexus* (pp. 19–23). Munich Security Conference 2025.

⁶ Østhagen, A. (2020, September 16). *Geo-Strategic Competition in the Arctic: What Next?* Fridtjof Nansen Institute; Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Stockholm. <https://www.fni.no/publications/geo-strategic-competition-in-the-arctic-what-next>

⁷ Emmerson, C. (2010). *The Future History of the Arctic: How Climate, Resources and Geopolitics are Reshaping the North, and why it Matters to the World* (1st ed.). PublicAffairs.

⁸ Borgerson, S. G. (2008, March 2). Arctic Meltdown: The Economic and Security Implications of Global Warming. *Foreign Affairs*, 87(2), 63–77. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/arctic-antarctic/2008-03-02/arctic-meltdown>

shipping are drawing the attention of China, Russia,⁹ and the US.¹⁰ The complex pattern of regional security dynamics and the contested nature of an unstructured international system incentivises the assertive and competitive presence of these powerful Arctic actors with various priorities and disputes.

Russia has been an actor with a long-standing and established engagement with the Arctic since the 1920s. The region represents both a strategic asset for its foreign and economic policies, and a critical component of its national security and deterrence.¹¹ Following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, security cooperation in the region has largely come to a standstill whilst, at the same time, the Kremlin's political posturing has turned more aggressive towards 'the West'¹² with a noticeable increase in military exercises.¹³ Further, the 2022 Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has halted any form of Arctic cooperation initiatives and dialogue as extensive western sanctions hit Russia.¹⁴ Chinese presence in Arctic affairs has increased since China presents itself as a 'near Arctic-state' partly to legitimise its economic and research interposition in the region.¹⁵ Indeed, Beijing holds a vested interest in expanding new Arctic Sea routes for international trade. This underscores an additional element for any understanding of the region following the increased tensions and political divides due to the Russian aggression in Ukraine, i.e., "...the unprecedented styles of [Sino-Russian] collaboration"¹⁶ in the political, economic, and military dimensions.¹⁷ Although it must be acknowledged that over the past three years Moscow and Beijing have reached unprecedented levels of collaboration due to the difficult

⁹ Arts, S. (2025). *Strategic competition in the Arctic: Navigating a complex security nexus* (pp. 19–23). Munich Security Conference 2025.

¹⁰ Pechko, K. (2025, January 7). Rising Tensions and Shifting Strategies: The Evolving Dynamics of US Grand Strategy in the Arctic. *The Arctic Institute - Center for Circumpolar Security Studies*. <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/rising-tensions-shifting-strategies-evolving-dynamics-us-grand-strategy-arctic/>

¹¹ Arts, S. (2025). *Strategic competition in the Arctic: Navigating a complex security nexus* (pp. 19–23). Munich Security Conference 2025.

¹² Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril 2024*(167), 9–27.

¹³ Arts, S. (2025). *Strategic competition in the Arctic: Navigating a complex security nexus* (pp. 19–23). Munich Security Conference 2025.

¹⁴ Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril 2024*(167), 9–27.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Hadley, G. (2024, December 5). DOD: Russian Weakness Fuels China's Rise in the Arctic. *Air & Space Forces Magazine*. <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/dod-china-russia-ukraine-war-arctic-access/>

¹⁷ Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril 2024*(167), 9–27.

geopolitical environment, the two great powers still hold disparate interests and contradictory approaches in the Arctic region.¹⁸

This overarching dynamic of strategic and political competition is driving the presence of the United States in the Arctic.¹⁹ Since the end of the Cold War, Washington has largely been a dormant actor in the region characterised by a hesitant approach and limited resources.²⁰ However, in the last decade the US²¹ has taken a more proactive position among security concerns over the Russian behaviour in the Arctic and China's interference in the Far North.²² Indeed, the Trump administration's signalling to take control of Greenland fits within the wider American geostrategic objective to obstruct China's political stance and ambitions.²³ Thus, different security and political dynamics intertwine into a complex pattern of great-power competition within the Arctic region.²⁴ This entails a risk of tensions, and a potential for disputes and conflict between the involved actors. In order to understand and outline these dynamics of geopolitical competition, the following questions guide the analysis:

What are the factors that shape the United States', China's, and Russia's renewed geostrategic interests in the Arctic? And how is the geopolitical competition affecting the possibility of conflict potential in the Arctic region?

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

In order to best approach the study of the Arctic foreign policies and grand strategies of the US, China, and Russia – the chosen case studies at the national level –, the research

¹⁸ Dagaev, A. (2025). *The Arctic Is Testing the Limits of the Sino-Russian Partnership*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

<https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/02/russia-china-arctic-views?lang=en>

¹⁹ Gricius, G. (2024). *The Arctic is Cold Again: Climate Change, Political Competition and Security Challenges*. Arctic Circle.

<https://www.arcticcircle.org/journal/the-arctic-is-cold-again-climate-change-political-competition-and-security-challenges>

²⁰ Pechko, K. (2025, January 7). Rising Tensions and Shifting Strategies: The Evolving Dynamics of US Grand Strategy in the Arctic. *The Arctic Institute - Center for Circumpolar Security Studies*. <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/rising-tensions-shifting-strategies-evolving-dynamics-us-grand-strategy-arctic/>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Dagaev, A. (2025). *The Arctic Is Testing the Limits of the Sino-Russian Partnership*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

<https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/02/russia-china-arctic-views?lang=en>

²³ Dragonfly Intelligence. (2025, April 7). *Global | Strategic competition in the Arctic intensifying*. Dragonfly Intelligence. <https://dragonflyintelligence.com/news/global-strategic-competition-in-the-arctic-intensifying/>

²⁴ Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril 2024*(167), 9–27.

questions are answered by separating into ‘levels of analysis’, a basic concept in the studies of foreign and security policies, as postulated by David Singer^{25,26} Singer in *The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations* divided its analytical model for international politics into the systemic level of analysis²⁷ – i.e., the international system – and the national level of analysis.²⁸ Singer’s work, alongside Kenneth Waltz’s, have been instrumental in bringing levels of analysis into the field of foreign policy analysis and security studies.²⁹ This framework is intrinsically linked to the anarchical structure of the international system as formulated by Kenneth Waltz making it particularly suited for a study on the Arctic which lacks a structured organisation.³⁰

Thus, the current analytical framework rests upon the theory of neoclassical realism in International Relations for its distinction of domestic and international levels of analysis. This theoretical foundation represents the most balanced choice as it combines the structural premises of neorealism with classical realism’s focus on unit-level factors.³¹ It formulates that whilst states are the principal entities of international politics interacting and competing for power, the differentiations at the nation-state level also account for the specific foreign policy and security strategies.³² Indeed, according to Gideon Rose,³³ the key tenet of neoclassical realism is that:

The scope and ambition of a country’s foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. [...] The impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect

²⁵ Singer, D. J. (1961). The Level of Analysis Problem in International Relations. *World Politics*, 14(1), 77–92. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009557>

²⁶ Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril 2024*(167), pp. 10-11.

²⁷ Singer, D. J. (1961). The Level of Analysis Problem in International Relations. *World Politics*, 14(1), pp. 80-82. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009557>

²⁸ Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril 2024*(167), pp. 10-11.

²⁹ Soltani, F., Naji, S., & Amiri, R. E. (2014). Levels of Analysis in International Relations and Regional Security Complex Theory. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 4(4). doi:10.5296/jpag.v4i4.6973

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Götz, E. (2021). Neoclassical Realist Theories, Intervening Variables, and Paradigmatic Boundaries. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 17(2), p. 9. <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/oraa026>

³² Singer, D. J. (1961). The Level of Analysis Problem in International Relations. *World Politics*, 14(1), 77–92. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009557>

Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril 2024*(167), 9–27.

³³ Rose, G. (1998). Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy. *World Politics*, 51(1), 144–172. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887100007814>

and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level.³⁴

Theorists have identified many different factors that filter systemic pressures on states' behaviours and foreign policies such as policymakers' perceptions, state capacity or resource mobilisation, domestic institutions, strategic cultures, leaders' images and cognitive biases, national ideologies, and interest groups pressure.³⁵ Domestic influences are co-determinants of a state's grand strategy.³⁶ This provides the research with additional explanatory capacity due to the inherent flexibility of the neoclassical realist approach.³⁷ The strategic orientation and the foreign policy of a country are determined not only by the systemic pressures or its relative power and position vis-à-vis the international, but also by their domestic political environment.³⁸ Although neoclassical theorists construct their model starting from the same anarchic, self-help system of international relations where power and security are essential for major powers, they reject the rigid external determinism of a state's foreign policy which rests at the foundation of Kenneth Waltz's structural realism.³⁹ Indeed, the national security strategy of a state may depend, in part, on its leaders' perceptions and beliefs, or the country's political and economic circumstances.⁴⁰ For example, any analysis of Russia's approach to the Arctic would be left incomplete when the research does not account for the specificity of the Kremlin's perceptions about Russia's status and position within the Post-Cold War international system.

For this reason, the present theoretical framework stands out as the more adequate as it allows for the close study of the specific environments – in this case the national, or domestic, level of the United States, Russia, and China – under which the Arctic foreign policies are developed and implemented to understand the link between (great-)power

³⁴ Rose, G. (1998). Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy. *World Politics*, 51(1), p. 146. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887100007814>

³⁵ Götz, E. (2021). Neoclassical Realist Theories, Intervening Variables, and Paradigmatic Boundaries. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 17(2), pp. 1-2. <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/oraa026>

³⁶ Götz, E. (2021). Neoclassical Realist Theories, Intervening Variables, and Paradigmatic Boundaries. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 17(2). <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/oraa026>

³⁷ Ripsman, N. M., Taliaferro, J. W., & Lobell, S. E. (2016). *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*. Oxford University Press.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

competition and strategy.⁴¹ Neorealism, or offensive realism were in fact discarded as a suitable theoretical foundation since, according to structural realists:

Domestic politics and leader characteristics play no significant role in determining policy, given the great dangers of acting inconsistently with systemic imperatives in an anarchic realm. Consequently, if faced with similar external threats and opportunities, states with different regime types, ideologies, and political institutions can be expected to behave in a similar manner.⁴²

Beyond the domestic and systemic levels of analysis, it is worth noting that the past two decades have witnessed the rise of a consistent academic literature on regional studies in security and foreign policy since Buzan and Waever's seminal work, titled *Regions and Power: The Structure of International Security*.⁴³ Indeed, the focus on geographical factors gives a new understanding of the interplay between the national and global dynamics as it uncovers specific patterns of power and security relations.⁴⁴ Regional security and insecurity dynamics within the Arctic are interlinked with the domestic conditions and perceptions of the states – USA, PRC, and Russia –, and the great powers' rivalry at the international level. This introduces a regional level of analysis for the study of international politics which provides a solid foundation for the comparative study of the Arctic strategies of the US, the Russian Federation, and China.⁴⁵ In order to assess the security dynamics of the Arctic, the implications for stability and conflict, and the key drivers of the intervening rivalry between the global powers in the region, three levels of analysis are outlined – domestic, regional, international.

The systemic level factors – The Arctic geopolitical spillover, global power distribution, and the world order

⁴¹ Rose, G. (1998). Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy. *World Politics*, 51(1), p. 147. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887100007814>

Fearon, J. D. (1998). Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Theories of International Relations. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1(1), 289–313. <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev.polisci.1.1.289>

⁴² Ripsman, N. M., Taliaferro, J. W., & Lobell, S. E. (2016). *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*. Oxford University Press. p. 19

⁴³ Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril* 2024(167), p. 11.

⁴⁴ Soltani, F., Naji, S., & Amiri, R. E. (2014). Levels of Analysis in International Relations and Regional Security Complex Theory. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 4(4). doi:10.5296/jpag.v4i4.6973

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Historically, tensions and conflicts originating at southern latitudes or global power struggles have occasionally spilled over into the Arctic, even though the region itself is hardly the primary source of the geopolitical unrest.⁴⁶⁴⁷ For instance, the region became an operational theatre within the Second World War as Northern Norway fell under German occupation; Greenland was provisionally administered by the United States following the fall of Denmark in early 1940; and Finnish arctic territories were invaded by the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1944 as part of the Petsamo-Kirkenes offensive – to-date the largest military campaign north of the Polar circle.⁴⁸ Once again, during the Cold War, the Arctic featured prominently in the systemic rivalry between the US and the USSR due to its strategic relevance.⁴⁹ Indeed, starting from the 1950s, both superpowers acknowledged the region as a key component for their respective military strategies by developing first- and second-strike nuclear capabilities and establishing military facilities like the US' ground-based radar projects - Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line or the Ballistic Early Warning System - in the North American Arctic as the Arctic represented the closest geographical gap between Washington DC and the city of Moscow.⁵⁰ In other words, Cold-War-era geopolitical dynamics in the Arctic stemmed from the systemic competition at the international level rather than intertwining and competing interests within the region.

Thus, with the end of the Cold War, and the subsequent friendlier relationship between the Russian Federation and the West, the Arctic was characterised by the rise in international cooperation among the Arctic states.⁵¹ During the 1990s and the early 2000s, the region lost

⁴⁶ Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

⁴⁷ Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril 2024*(167), 9–27.

⁴⁸ Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

⁴⁹ Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (pp. 1–46). Brookings Institution Press.

Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril 2024*(167), 9–27.

⁵⁰ Lackenbauer, W. P., & Farish, M. (2007). The Cold War on Canadian Soil: Militarizing a Northern Environment. *Environmental History*, 12(4), p. 921. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25473167>

Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (p. 2). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (pp. 1–46). Brookings Institution Press.

⁵¹ Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

its systemic relevance as geopolitical competition largely disappeared from an international system strongly dominated by US unipolarity.⁵²

However, in the last decade, the Arctic has rapidly returned to the fore of global power competition. Indeed, this resurgence of geopolitics north of the Polar circle is exemplified by the words of former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in 2019: “The region has become an arena for power and competition [...] We are entering a new age of strategic engagement in the Arctic”.⁵³ The Arctic’s reappearance among the most important foreign policy priorities of the global powers reflects the changing distribution of power in the international environment. Accordingly, neoclassical realism considers the grand strategy of a country to be the product of the systemic pressures within the existing world order. Thus, China’s rise, the United States’ relative decline, and the return of Russia play a primary role in shaping their respective strategic orientation to the Arctic, and its recurring centrality in present-day multipolar international politics.⁵⁴

- Russia

Despite remaining at the very centre of international politics for five decades from the Second World War to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia must be understood as a declining power with negative economic and demographic trends. Indeed, Russian Gross Domestic Product (GDP), adjusted to Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), lags far behind that of China (\$34 trillions) and the US (\$27 trillions) at \$6,5 trillions.⁵⁵ Further, Moscow’s emigration crisis has only been exacerbated in recent years with a significant outflow of young, well-educated, and urbanised exiles leading to a considerable loss in long-term human capital due to the increasingly authoritarian regime and the unlawful invasion of Ukraine.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the Russian Federation under the leadership of Vladimir Putin has sought to rewrite its global position with an increasingly assertive and militaristic stance to

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Pompeo, M. (2019, May 6). *Looking North: Sharpening America’s Arctic Focus*. Arctic Council Ministerial. <https://ee.usembassy.gov/americas-arctic-focus/>

⁵⁴ Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

Arts, S. (2025). *Strategic competition in the Arctic: Navigating a complex security nexus* (pp. 19–23). Munich Security Conference 2025.

⁵⁵ The World Bank. (2023b). *GDP, PPP (current international \$) | Data*. The World Bank. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDPMKTP.PP.CD>

⁵⁶ Kamalov, E., & Sergeeva, I. (2024). *Should I Stay or Should I Go? Russian Emigration in Flux*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/07/russian-emigration-in-flux?lang=en>

restore its great power status. This has raised tensions with western powers, especially in the aftermath of the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale aggression of Ukraine in 2022.⁵⁷ Thus, the Arctic has acquired a strategic importance for Moscow's economic, political, and military future.⁵⁸ The region provides the Kremlin with both development opportunities and the ability to exert power largely uncontested in its wider strategic contention with the United States and the European allies.⁵⁹

Considerations on Russian military power is a crucial factor to understand its positioning within the international system, and its interest towards the Arctic. It must be acknowledged that Russia's resurgent position in international politics is highly dependent on its inheritance of Soviet military arsenals. Indeed, Russian strategic assets date back to Cold-War-era armaments with an estimated 5,580 nuclear warheads (almost half of global stockpiles) mainly deployed on land-based and submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and only a minority on heavy bombers.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, from Moscow's perspective, deteriorating relations with NATO powers have impelled large militarisation efforts since the 2000s across all domains of warfare. Here, the Arctic is increasingly important for Russian national security, and for its nuclear deterrent forces particularly. Home to the Northern Fleet in Severomorsk, housing much of the Russian strategic, sea-based nuclear deterrent, the Arctic hosts considerable air and naval capabilities to project power in the North Atlantic even as the ongoing invasion of Ukraine requires large volumes of military resources.⁶¹ On the one hand, the pressure of the war in Ukraine disproportionately deteriorates the Russian conventional warfighting machine, which is expected to hit the 1,000,000-casualty mark in summer 2025.⁶² On the other hand, the maintenance and build-up of strategic deterrent forces in the Arctic acquires an exponential centrality to retain a military advantage vis-à-vis NATO in the great power competition.⁶³

⁵⁷ Arts, S. (2025). *Strategic competition in the Arctic: Navigating a complex security nexus* (pp. 19–23). Munich Security Conference 2025.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril 2024*(167), 9–27.

⁶⁰ Jones, M. G. (2024, November 22). *Fact-check: What do we know about Russia's nuclear arsenal?* Euronews. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/11/22/fact-check-what-do-we-know-about-russias-nuclear-arsenal>

⁶¹ Arts, S. (2025). *Strategic competition in the Arctic: Navigating a complex security nexus* (pp. 19–23). Munich Security Conference 2025.

⁶² Jones, S. G., & McCabe, R. (2025). *Russia's Battlefield Woes in Ukraine*. Csis.org; CSIS -Center for Strategic and International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-battlefield-woes-ukraine>

⁶³ Fedorov, Y. E. (2024). Russian Military Manpower After Two and a Half Years of War in Ukraine. In *Ifri.org. Institut français des relations internationales*. <https://www.ifri.org/en/studies/russian-military-manpower-after-two-and-half-years-war-ukraine>

Arts, S. (2025). *Strategic competition in the Arctic: Navigating a complex security nexus* (pp. 19–23). Munich Security Conference 2025.

- China

Over the last few decades, China's astounding economic development, marked by three decades of solid double-digit GDP growth, has transformed the country into a formidable political and military competitor.⁶⁴ In other words, the PRC's rise has drastically shifted the balance of power away from the previously uncontested US' predominance of the global order.⁶⁵ According to 2023 economic data on nominal GDP, China has comfortably risen to be the second-largest world economy with more than \$17 trillions, only after the United States (\$27 trillions).⁶⁶ Whilst GDP is not the only measure of a country's rise, over time larger national resources lead to greater shaping power in international affairs.⁶⁷ Drawing upon its (relatively) newfound economic might, since 2013, China launched the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative, the largest foreign infrastructure development project, aimed at strengthening the country's global influence and security along the strategically important land-based and maritime corridors.⁶⁸ Thus, Beijing's international standing in the last decade has been translated into a more assertive projection of influence on the world stage with the aspiration to dominate the new international order backed by increasingly modern and capable armed forces.⁶⁹

Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China has rapidly expanded and modernised its nuclear forces, which are estimated at 600 operational warheads and with plans to reach 1,000 nuclear weapons by the end of the decade, according to analyses by the US Department of Defence (DoD).⁷⁰ This impressive military modernisation is supported by considerable financial resources, approximately \$450 billions – second-largest defence budget in the world –, and an impressive defence industrial base.⁷¹ In recent years, Beijing has been developing strategic capabilities which will allow China to project military power far beyond

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⁶⁴ Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for war: can America and China escape Thucydides's trap?* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. p. 7

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ The World Bank. (2023a). *GDP (current US\$) | Data*. The World Bank. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?name_desc=false

⁶⁷ Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for war: can America and China escape Thucydides's trap?* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.

⁶⁸ Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (p. 24). Brookings Institution Press.

⁶⁹ Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril* 2024(167), 9–27.

⁷⁰ Sacks, D. (2024). *Six Takeaways From the Pentagon's Report on China's Military*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/six-takeaways-pentagons-report-chinas-military>

⁷¹ Ibid.

Taiwan as the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is now the numerically largest naval force in the world with emerging long-range and strategic capabilities.⁷²

Although China remains focused on the Asia-Pacific region, and much of its rapid military expansion is directed at developing combat readiness for an attack on Taiwan, its position as a global power means that the Arctic presents an “opportunity for China to use its economic might to increase its global influence” in light of the long-standing American absence in the region's power politics.⁷³ Chinese assertiveness across the international landscape is intrinsically linked to its emergence as an important player in the North Pole with a claim to its governance as a ‘near-Arctic state’.⁷⁴ Beijing's presence in the region, and its cooperation with Russia need to be understood as critical components of its wider expansion of power challenging the US-led western world. The Polar region is crucial for China to gain a strategic advantage to guarantee a dominant position in the 21st century great power competition, and more specifically in the US-China rivalry.⁷⁵

- USA

“[In recent years] the US has strengthened its focus on the Arctic concentrated on countering what is seen as a growing Russian military threat on the one hand and a creeping Chinese diplomatic and economic presence on the other”.⁷⁶

Within the current international order, the United States retains diplomatic, economic, technological, and military superiority. However, as previous research on US-China competition has noted, China is steadily closing the gap in comprehensive national power vis-à-vis the United States.⁷⁷ Since the mid-20th century, Washington has been the most dominant and influential force in international relations; nonetheless, for the first time

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (p. 24). Brookings Institution Press.

⁷⁴ Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril* 2024(167), pp. 12-13

⁷⁵ Olesen, M. R., & Sørensen, T. N. (2019). *INTENSIFYING GREAT POWER POLITICS IN THE ARCTIC - POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK. From an analysis of assessments and strategies in Finland, Norway and Iceland* (pp. 8–20). Danish Institute for International Studies. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21443.5>

⁷⁶ Olesen, M. R., & Sørensen, T. N. (2019). *INTENSIFYING GREAT POWER POLITICS IN THE ARCTIC - POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK. From an analysis of assessments and strategies in Finland, Norway and Iceland* (p. 9). Danish Institute for International Studies. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21443.5>

⁷⁷ Heath, T. R. (2021). *U.S. Strategic Competition with China*. RAND.

since its decades-long dispute with the Soviet Union, the United States faces an unprecedented long-term challenge with a near-peer adversary.⁷⁸ This entails a strategic challenge which is starkly different from the USSR: China remains a top trading partner despite intensifying tariffs, competition over markets and resources, disputes over trade, technology and cyber, and military-diplomatic tensions primarily over the Indo-Pacific.⁷⁹

The US remains the largest nominal economy in the world at \$27 trillions,⁸⁰ and it has the highest defence budget in the world by a substantial margin – estimated at \$1,01 trillion for the year 2026.⁸¹ However, the scale of China's rise as an economic and political giant signals that Washington is no longer the sole global power, and that the US' position has declined relative to Beijing leading to a shifting global power distribution. Thus, American foreign policy has sought to rebalance China's growing weight with a pivot to Asia since the Obama administration.⁸² This shift of attention and resources from other parts of the world to Asia has contributed to the impression of the US' relative decline of power and influence on the global stage.⁸³ Since the first Trump presidency, and especially during *Trump 2.0*, Washington's strategic orientation towards its military, diplomatic, economic presence in the East and South China Seas has been markedly evident. This comes at the expense of traditional US global leadership in Europe and in the Middle East: President Trump's turn-away from Ukraine and European security, combined with the decade-long retreat from the MENA region must be understood, in part, as a response to the geopolitical shift and American concerns over its competition with the PRC.⁸⁴

Thus, the United States' interest in the Arctic is motivated by its systemic rivalry with Beijing, as Washington seeks to hinder China's international growth, thereby making the Arctic region a hot spot in the global power competition.⁸⁵ Since 2019, the US approach to

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ The World Bank. (2024). *GDP (current US\$) - United States*. The World Bank. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=US>

⁸¹ Dewey, K. (2025). *President Trump's FY2026 defence budget: continuing priorities, new missions*. IISS. <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/military-balance/2025/05/president-trumps-fy2026-defence-budget-continuing-priorities-new-missions/>

⁸² Allison, G. T. (2017). *Destined for war: can America and China escape Thucydides's trap?* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Xia, E., & Piron, A. (2025). *The Geopolitical Impact of USAID's Retreat on Humanitarian Aid: Towards a Complementary Approach between China and the EU?* Egmont Institute. <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/the-geopolitical-impact-of-usaids-retreat-on-humanitarian-aid-towards-a-complementary-approach-between-china-and-the-eu/>

⁸⁵ Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa*, Abril 2024(167), pp. 12-13

the Arctic has been primarily shaped by national security concerns, driven by its global positioning in an era of strategic power competition, particularly with China and Russia as the main adversarial competitors to be countered.⁸⁶ Russian military build-ups and China's growing assertiveness have triggered US reactions in the form of increased capabilities, diplomatic pressure and military exercises – mostly through NATO.⁸⁷

The regional level factors - Stability, institutions, and economic cooperation

During the Cold War, the Arctic was dominated by national security concerns as both the western and Soviet blocs regarded the region as an important military theatre within the East-West confrontation, as highlighted.⁸⁸ Accordingly, the *détente* in international relations between NATO and the URSS in the later years of the Cold War, and Russia following the fall of the Soviet regime, opened up the Arctic for various forms of regional cooperation.⁸⁹ This new set of regional dynamics became evident in the 1990s as the northernmost world region was characterised by a high degree of friendly state-to-state interactions.⁹⁰ Indeed, the prevailing sentiment of the time can be summarised in the words of former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev during his official visit to the city of Murmansk on 1 October 1987: “Let the North of the globe, the Arctic, become a zone of peace. Let the North Pole be a pole of peace” - Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987.⁹¹

Gorbachev's 1987 speech is viewed as the spark for modern cooperation in the Arctic region, eventually engendering a unique, highly stable, state-based regional system. called 'Arctic exceptionalism'. This singular regional framework consists of multilateral structures,

⁸⁶ Olesen, M. R., & Sørensen, T. N. (2019). *INTENSIFYING GREAT POWER POLITICS IN THE ARCTIC - POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK. From an analysis of assessments and strategies in Finland, Norway and Iceland* (pp. 8–20). Danish Institute for International Studies. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21443.5>

⁸⁷ Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

Olesen, M. R., & Sørensen, T. N. (2019). *INTENSIFYING GREAT POWER POLITICS IN THE ARCTIC - POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK. From an analysis of assessments and strategies in Finland, Norway and Iceland* (pp. 8–20). Danish Institute for International Studies. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21443.5>

⁸⁸ Åtland, K. (2008). Mikhail Gorbachev, the Murmansk Initiative, and the Desecuritization of Interstate: Relations in the Arctic. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 43(3), 289–311. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45084526>

⁸⁹ Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

⁹⁰ Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril 2024*(167), 9–27.

⁹¹ Åtland, K. (2008). Mikhail Gorbachev, the Murmansk Initiative, and the Desecuritization of Interstate: Relations in the Arctic. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 43(3), p. 290. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45084526>

indigenous collaboration, joint economic development, scientific and environmental cooperation making the Arctic a distinctive region insulated from flaring global political tensions and characterised by a cooperative architecture aimed at addressing Arctic-specific issues.⁹² The regional regime rests primarily upon the Arctic Council and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The Arctic Council was established following the Ottawa Declaration on 19 September 1996.⁹³ Its members are the eight Arctic states – Canada, the United States, Russia, Greenland/Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – with a rotating two-year chairmanship.⁹⁴ Beyond its fully-fledged members, the institution has become the central node of relations with non-Arctic states as well.⁹⁵ Indeed, thirteen different countries have achieved observer status, most relevantly, China, seeking to participate in the affairs above the Arctic circle.⁹⁶ The Arctic Council represents the main hub for cooperation dealing with all matters regarding the region such as biodiversity, indigenous people, pollution, search and rescue, scientific and exploration agreements, and climate with the sole exception for the area of military security.⁹⁷ However, since 2022, in the aftermath of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, regional cooperation in the Arctic Council, among other dialogue forums, has been suspended.⁹⁸

The second key element in the governance of the Arctic is the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The ‘Constitution of the Sea’, signed by over 167 states and entered into force in 1994, sets forth an international regulatory regime for the world’s oceans including the Arctic Ocean (Figure 1). Relevantly for the Polar region, UNCLOS establishes the national Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) - a 200-nautical-mile off-shore area belonging to a littoral state for exploitation rights over its waters and corresponding seabed; the UN Convention also delineates the limits of the continental shelf, the conservation of the marine environment, and the protection of the freedom of

⁹² Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (p. 24). Brookings Institution Press.

⁹³ Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (pp. 1–46). Brookings Institution Press.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Østhagen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril 2024*(167), 9–27.

navigation.⁹⁹ In this regard, this combination of Arctic institutions and legal governance has fostered the materialisation of various cross-national formal and informal arrangements to mitigate potential areas of friction.



Figure 1: The EEZs in the Arctic Ocean. Copyright to The Arctic Institute and Malte Humpert. Available at: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/arctic-maps/>

Indeed, the Arctic in the 21st century is notably more regulated and structured than it has ever been, reflecting a shared commitment among Arctic states to structured cooperation and regional stability.¹⁰⁰ Key developments include the adoption of the International Maritime Organisation's Polar Code, first introduced in 2002, and long-standing bilateral agreements such as the Russo-Norwegian fisheries agreement, the latest of which was

⁹⁹ Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (pp. 1–46). Brookings Institution Press.

¹⁰⁰ Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

reached in 2024.¹⁰¹ Multilateral initiatives like the 2018 Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement—uniting the five Arctic Ocean littoral states with five other entities (China, Japan, South Korea, Iceland, and the European Union)—further demonstrate a broad commitment to responsible resource management and scientific collaboration.¹⁰² The 2008 Ilulissat Declaration reinforced this consensus, with the Arctic Ocean littoral states affirming their sovereignty while pledging adherence to the UN Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).¹⁰³ Together, these developments highlight a pattern of robust cooperation driven by shared economic and political interests in preserving a stable Arctic and framed within an effective existing architecture of governance.¹⁰⁴

Despite the suspension of the vast majority of circumpolar cooperation following Russian full-scale aggressive war in February 2022, the core framework for Arctic governance remains operational.¹⁰⁵ For instance, since Russia held the 2021-2023 chairmanship of the Arctic Council, sessions were temporarily suspended as part of the western diplomatic effort to isolate the Russian Federation.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, in 2023, with Norway at the lead of the Arctic Council, the institution resumed its work albeit with Moscow still excluded.¹⁰⁷ This points to the necessity of adjusting the varied institutional arrangements to fit the regional geoeconomic and geostrategic landscape.

In fact, while both phases of Russia's offensives into Ukraine – 2014 and 2022 – aggravated geostrategic and political tensions in the Arctic, regional geopolitical dynamics tend to experience reduced pressures in the Arctic.¹⁰⁸ The Finnish and Swedish ascension to NATO membership has helped crystallise the tripartite geopolitical environment in the

¹⁰¹ Staalesen, A. (2024, December 5). *United in cod. Oslo and Moscow safeguard fishery cooperation*. The Barents Observer.

<https://www.thebarentsobserver.com/news/united-in-cod-oslo-and-moscow-safeguard-fishery-cooperation/421867>

¹⁰² Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Young, O. R., Yang, J., & Zagorski, A. (2022). The “New” Arctic as a Zone of Peaceful Competition. *Polar Perspectives*, 11.

¹⁰⁵ Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

¹⁰⁶ Young, O. R., Yang, J., & Zagorski, A. (2022). The “New” Arctic as a Zone of Peaceful Competition. *Polar Perspectives*, 11.

¹⁰⁷ Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

area.¹⁰⁹ Russian economic ambitions north of the Polar circle do in fact require a strong presence in the region but they also necessitate a certain level of stability.¹¹⁰ Further, as western joint cooperation with Moscow dwindles, China has largely funnelled its interests in large-scale resource projects into the Russian Arctic, although the relationship continues to be partly hindered by the Kremlin's mistrust of Chinese interference into its remote provinces.¹¹¹ Thus, as mentioned, the Arctic has become an arena for great power politics within the overarching international affairs in recent years. However, the region remains separated from the potential of severe conflicts: all the major players present clear common interests in the governance of regional issues even though Arctic-specific disputes and disagreements will likely persist.¹¹² This makes the Arctic a unique area where peaceful, intermittent cooperation and competition co-exist owing to a generally shared commitment to avoid armed clashes, manage climate change, develop commercial shipping, and carry out critical scientific research.¹¹³

The Arctic institutional structure and its numerous forms of governance, delineating the bounds within which competition and collaboration between the major powers are managed in the region, represent the main shaping factor at the regional level of analysis.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, these regional power and governance dynamics are subjected to the interplay with different economic and environmental forces. Arctic geophysical and climatological developments have far-reaching consequences around the globe: beyond the amplification of regional warming and the dismantlement of the regional ecosystem, the massive shrinking and dramatic thinning of Arctic ice have global climate effects.¹¹⁵ For instance, the 2020 Russian Arctic strategy, the most recent one yet, assigns a high priority to

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Østhaugen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril 2024*(167), 9–27.

¹¹¹ Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

¹¹² Young, O. R., Yang, J., & Zagorski, A. (2022). The “New” Arctic as a Zone of Peaceful Competition. *Polar Perspectives*, 11.

Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

¹¹³ Young, O. R., Yang, J., & Zagorski, A. (2022). The “New” Arctic as a Zone of Peaceful Competition. *Polar Perspectives*, 11.

¹¹⁴ Østhaugen, A. (2024). Great Power Competition and Conflict Potential in the Arctic. *Nação E Defesa, Abril 2024*(167), 9–27.

¹¹⁵ Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (pp. 1–46). Brookings Institution Press.

countering the threat of warming temperatures in the Arctic as it affects global and regional dynamics of power and climate.¹¹⁶

Arctic climate warming occurs at double the global rate.¹¹⁷ This is particularly evident in the shrinkage of old Arctic Sea ice which has halved in the last 40 years with each winter's ice forming later, being thinner, and melting faster, thus contributing to a faster rise in temperatures as there is less heat-reflecting ice.¹¹⁸ This has fostered several geostrategic and economic concerns.

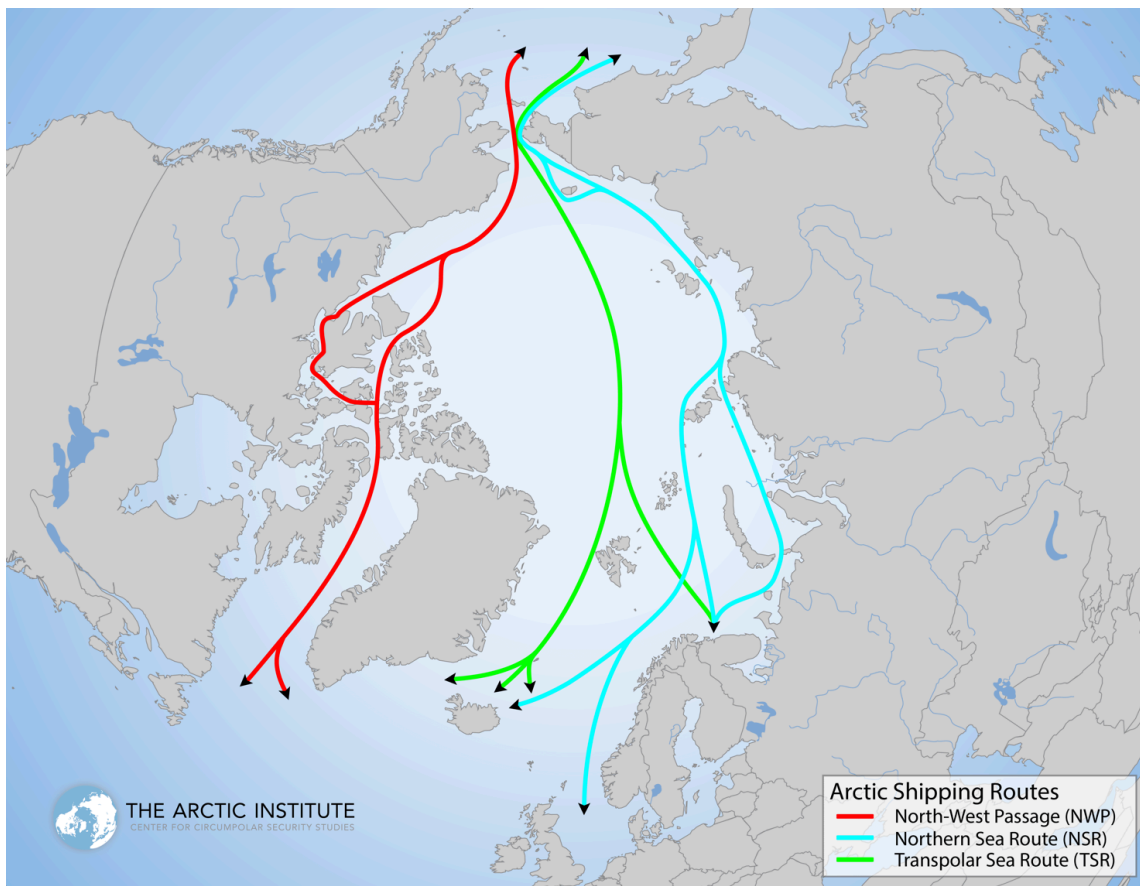


Figure 2: Arctic Sea Routes. Copyright to The Arctic Institute and Malte Humpert. Available at: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/arctic-maps/>

As the Polar ice cap melts due to climate change and the Arctic becomes more navigable over time, resources and economic possibilities are made more accessible, leading to

¹¹⁶ Young, O. R., Yang, J., & Zagorski, A. (2022). The “New” Arctic as a Zone of Peaceful Competition. *Polar Perspectives*, 11.

¹¹⁷ Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (pp. 1–46). Brookings Institution Press.

¹¹⁸ Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (pp. 1–46). Brookings Institution Press.

increased levels of interests and activity.¹¹⁹ Indeed, the Arctic is estimated to have the largest concentration of the world's undiscovered oil (13%) and gas (30%) with an estimated value of over \$18 trillions in today's prices.¹²⁰ Similarly, gold, diamonds, and rare minerals – phosphate, bauxite, iron ore, nickel, copper - worth an estimated trillion US dollars are assessed to be found in the Arctic, according to the 2008 US Geological Survey.¹²¹ Beyond the potential for valuable resources, China, Russia, and the United States are returning to the Arctic with an interest over its potential maritime routes due to their strategic global economic role (Figure 2).¹²² First, the North-West passage (NWP) is a maritime and shipping route along the coast of Alaska and the Canadian Arctic Archipelago theoretically connecting the North Pacific with the Atlantic Ocean.¹²³ Beyond doubts over its viability as a commercial waterway due to extremely shallow waters at its eastern segment, the NWP sits at the heart of a dispute between Washington and Ottawa.¹²⁴ Canada in fact considers the NWP to be within its territorial waters while the United States advocates for it to be recognised as an international strait.¹²⁵ Secondly, the Northern Sea Route (NSR) represents the shipping lane between the European North Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean laying almost exclusively within the Russian EEZ.¹²⁶ Third, the Transpolar Sea Route is a proposed Arctic mid-ocean shipping route going through the North Pole projected to cut shipping distances between Europe and Asia, but it currently is navigable by heavy icebreakers only.¹²⁷

Since the beginning, this perception of untapped potential resources has sparked a contest over territorial and ownership claims, which remain unresolved.¹²⁸ As the Arctic's strategic importance increases, in part, due to regional geophysical changes, vast prospective

¹¹⁹ Marsili, M. (2022). Arctic Security: A Global Challenge. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 26(2), 097359842211202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984221120299>

¹²⁰ Marsili, M. (2022). Arctic Security: A Global Challenge. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 26(2), 097359842211202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984221120299>

Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (pp. 1–46). Brookings Institution Press.

¹²¹ Marsili, M. (2022). Arctic Security: A Global Challenge. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 26(2), 097359842211202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984221120299>

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (pp. 1–46). Brookings Institution Press.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Marsili, M. (2022). Arctic Security: A Global Challenge. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 26(2), 097359842211202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984221120299>

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (pp. 1–46). Brookings Institution Press.

resources and profitable shipping lanes, the PRC's, the Russian Federation's, and the US' competing interests play out above the Polar circle.¹²⁹ This set of regional dynamics construct a complex picture of the Arctic where global intense rivalries are translated into a regional competition system while, at the same time, systemic conflict fault lines are reduced to a state of peaceful competition.¹³⁰

The national level – Domestic factors in USA's, China's, Russia's Arctic geostrategic approaches

The Arctic regional system is increasingly interlinked with international pressures resulting in a heightened geopolitical interplay. Having outlined the main systemic- and regional-level dynamics in search of explanations about the global significance of the Arctic and the geostrategic calculus of the major world powers, the analysis of domestic political perceptions and interests, combined with national geoeconomic considerations, allows to fully grasp the Arctic strategic environment.

“For Russia, the Arctic is a question of national security, national great power identity, legitimacy and prestige – also important for the Putin regime in a domestic context – and national economic growth and development”.¹³¹

According to its New Arctic Policy 2035, announced in March 2020 by President Vladimir Putin,¹³² The Russian Federation's main national interests regarding its Arctic territories can be primarily identified as its priority to develop the Arctic as a strategic resource base and to transform the Northern Sea Route into an international commercial shipping artery under Moscow's undisputable control.¹³³ The basis for the implementation of its strategic

¹²⁹ Marsili, M. (2022). Arctic Security: A Global Challenge. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 26(2), 097359842211202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984221120299>

¹³⁰ Young, O. R., Yang, J., & Zagorski, A. (2022). The “New” Arctic as a Zone of Peaceful Competition. *Polar Perspectives*, 11.

Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

¹³¹ Olesen, M. R., & Sørensen, T. N. (2019). *INTENSIFYING GREAT POWER POLITICS IN THE ARCTIC - POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK. From an analysis of assessments and strategies in Finland, Norway and Iceland* (p. 9). Danish Institute for International Studies. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21443.5>

¹³² Meade, J. (2020). *Russia's New Arctic Policy 2035: Implications for Great Power Tension Over the Northern Sea Route*. National Intelligence University. https://www.ni-u.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/NIUShort_07212020_DNI202201735_IceRusha.pdf

¹³³ Marsili, M. (2022). Arctic Security: A Global Challenge. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 26(2), 097359842211202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984221120299>

interests and national security concerns rests upon Russia's Socioeconomic Development for the Arctic Zone, approved by the Kremlin in 2013.¹³⁴ The Arctic is seen as crucial for the country's national policy: the northern zone accounts for around 25% of the Russian economy,¹³⁵ a fifth of its total exports, and the vast majority of the Russian mineral resource base.¹³⁶ Indeed, over 60% of Russian gas and copper, 80% of its oil, and 90% of nickel are extracted above the Polar circle.¹³⁷ Considering that the Russian economy is largely dependent on extraction and exports of raw materials, the acquisition of the vast natural resources in the Russian Arctic (Figure 3) is seen as a critical national priority.¹³⁸ Indeed, the Kremlin's 2023 Foreign Policy Concept raised the Polar region to second place in the country's strategic priorities, and President Vladimir Putin has long-since held that the Arctic is "where Russia's future lies".¹³⁹

These strategic national interests are underpinned by considerable capabilities. Russia operates a fleet of more than fifty ice-breakers, which are a critical asset for any venture in the Arctic.¹⁴⁰ Further, the Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom alone holds six nuclear powered icebreakers and three more are under construction with the name Project 22220.¹⁴¹ The official intent is to enhance the flow of trade along the NSR and support the expansion of further hydrocarbon exploitation projects.¹⁴² The scale of Russian Arctic capabilities becomes evident when we consider that Canada, China, the US, Sweden, and Finland together operate around 25 vessels.¹⁴³ Russian geostrategic interests partly explain the military build-up to safeguard the Arctic resources and infrastructure.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Khodachek, A. M. (2021). Prospects of socio-economic development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation. *E3S Web of Conferences*, 247. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202124701070>

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (pp. 1–46). Brookings Institution Press.

¹³⁹ Komin, Mi., & Hosa, J. (2025, May 27). *The bear beneath the ice: Russia's ambitions in the Arctic*. ECFR; European Council on Foreign Relations. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-bear-beneath-the-ice-russias-ambitions-in-the-arctic/>

¹⁴⁰ Marsili, M. (2022). Arctic Security: A Global Challenge. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 26(2), 097359842211202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984221120299>

¹⁴¹ Marsili, M. (2022). Arctic Security: A Global Challenge. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 26(2), 097359842211202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984221120299>

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¹⁴² Marsili, M. (2022). Arctic Security: A Global Challenge. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 26(2), 097359842211202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984221120299>

¹⁴³ Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (pp. 1–46). Brookings Institution Press.

Nevertheless, among Russian elites, there exists a distinct hardline national security concern which illuminates its military posture in the Arctic.¹⁴⁴ The Russian Arctic Policy 2035 identifies “Protecting Russia’s Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity”¹⁴⁵ as the new primary national goal in the region. Russia’s location at the heart of the Eurasian steppes has long-since shaped its sense of strategic vulnerability along its borders in Moscow’s political and military security culture, despite the country’s vast territory.¹⁴⁶ This holds true as well for its 24,150-km-long Arctic coastline: the Kremlin’s military planning includes the defence of its immense northern frontier.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, Russian military capabilities are largely defensive in nature; they are centred around the concept of ‘strategic bastion’, consisting in Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capacities to provide perimeter defence to the ‘bastion’ of Russian second-strike nuclear forces, i.e., the Kola Peninsula, home base of the Northern Fleet.¹⁴⁸ The military security interests notwithstanding, Russian decision-makers still prioritise regional stability as the overarching objective in order to develop the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation according to their vision of a strategic resource base.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Olesen, M. R., & Sørensen, T. N. (2019). *INTENSIFYING GREAT POWER POLITICS IN THE ARCTIC - POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK. From an analysis of assessments and strategies in Finland, Norway and Iceland* (p. 9). Danish Institute for International Studies. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21443.5>

¹⁴⁵ Meade, J. (2020). *Russia’s New Arctic Policy 2035: Implications for Great Power Tension Over the Northern Sea Route*. National Intelligence University. p. 3.

https://www.ni-u.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/NIUShort_07212020_DNI202201735_IceRusha.pdf

¹⁴⁶ Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

¹⁴⁷ Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

Arts, S. (2025). *Strategic competition in the Arctic: Navigating a complex security nexus* (pp. 19–23). Munich Security Conference 2025.

¹⁴⁸ Boulègue, M. (2019). *Russia’s Military Posture in the Arctic*. Chatham House. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2019/06/russias-military-posture-arctic/2-perimeter-control-around-bastion>

¹⁴⁹ Olesen, M. R., & Sørensen, T. N. (2019). *INTENSIFYING GREAT POWER POLITICS IN THE ARCTIC - POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK. From an analysis of assessments and strategies in Finland, Norway and Iceland* (pp. 8–20). Danish Institute for International Studies. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21443.5>

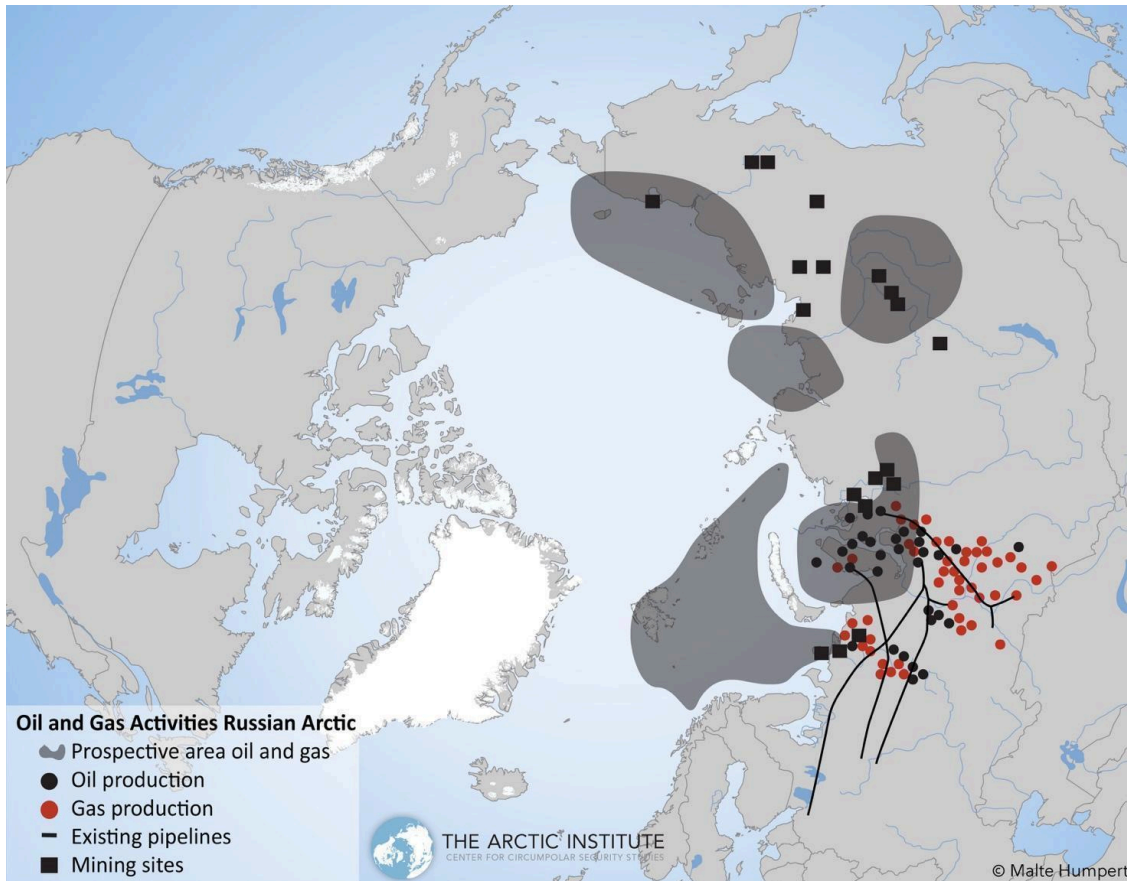


Figure 3: Oil and Gas in the Russian Arctic. Copyright to The Arctic Institute and Malte Humpert. Available at: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/arctic-maps/>

In January 2018, the People's Republic of China released its first ever Arctic Policy White Paper outlining Xi Jinping's national position for the region, despite the country being over 1,500 kilometres from the Arctic circle.¹⁵⁰ China's entry into the North is largely based around the perception of its status as an international heavyweight and its economic interests into the resource-rich Arctic.¹⁵¹ Thus, the Strategy contextualises Beijing's claim of near-Arctic-status, and it promotes the framework of the Polar Silk Road, which has been interlinked to the Northern Sea Route since 2019, following increased Sino-Russian cooperation.¹⁵² This indicates the long-term commercial and foreign policy ambitions to utilise the region both as an asset for China's further economic development and an attempt to present China as a responsible major power within Xi Jinping's overall strategy. Since 2014, the Chinese state and party leader has strived to elevate the country to the status of a major Polar power for the Arctic Ocean, considered the third Silk Road

¹⁵⁰ Marsili, M. (2022). Arctic Security: A Global Challenge. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 26(2), 097359842211202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984221120299>

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Marsili, M. (2022). Arctic Security: A Global Challenge. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 26(2), 097359842211202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984221120299>

corridor, is a crucial springboard in his quest to make Beijing a great maritime power.¹⁵³ The growing importance of the Arctic for Chinese regional and international interests is underscored by the presence of its three icebreakers in polar waters across summer 2024.¹⁵⁴ This recent development has broad implications for Chinese-Russian cooperation. Following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Moscow's weakening has increasingly resulted in a position of increased dependency vis-à-vis China, which can be expected to lead to further Chinese encroachment into the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation.¹⁵⁵

According to its Arctic Strategy, Beijing's official interests lay on its participation in Arctic research since geophysical and climatological changes in the region have international implications and affect weather patterns in Asia.¹⁵⁶ Whilst heightened Chinese strategic presence in the region with Polar research capacities is consistent with their declared intentions, the PRC views its Arctic research facilities as a critical component of the dual-use civil-military 'BeiDou-2' satellite program.¹⁵⁷ On this, the Pentagon's warnings, since 2019, that China may use its civilian research presence to strengthen its military posture seem sound, particularly concerning the potential deployment of submarines as a nuclear deterrent.¹⁵⁸ However, Xi Jinping and the Chinese leadership have so far maintained their emphasis for international cooperation, stability, and compliance with the existing regulatory framework in the Arctic region.¹⁵⁹

Since the end of the Cold War, the US has mostly lacked a comprehensive, and active, approach to the Arctic, relegating it to the periphery of its security and foreign policies.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, before the mid-2010s, American marginal interests in the Arctic region were limited to the maintenance of the submarine-launched nuclear capacity and the radar capabilities, part of the NORAD missile defence system.¹⁶¹ The Arctic return to the

¹⁵³ Paul, M. (2025). China's Arctic Turn. *SWP Comment*, 2025/C(08). <https://doi.org/10.18449/2025C08>

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Olesen, M. R., & Sørensen, T. N. (2019). *INTENSIFYING GREAT POWER POLITICS IN THE ARCTIC - POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK. From an analysis of assessments and strategies in Finland, Norway and Iceland* (pp. 8-20). Danish Institute for International Studies. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21443.5>

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Marsili, M. (2022). Arctic Security: A Global Challenge. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 26(2), 097359842211202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984221120299>

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Spohr, K., & Hamilton, D. S. (2020). From Last Frontier to First Frontier: The Arctic and World Order. In K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton, & J. C. Moyer (Eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (pp. 1-46). Brookings Institution Press.

¹⁶¹ Olesen, M. R., & Sørensen, T. N. (2019). *INTENSIFYING GREAT POWER POLITICS IN THE ARCTIC - POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK. From an analysis of*

forefront of American grand strategy has been motivated by the 'Trump's administrations' overriding preoccupation with great power competition vis-à-vis China, and to a significantly lower degree Russia. In order to counter these perceived strategic threats, the United States have embarked upon an Arctic Strategy based on:

“Increasing its diplomatic presence in the area, hosting military exercises, strengthening its force presence, rebuilding its icebreaker fleet, expanding Coast Guard funding and creating a new senior military post for Arctic affairs inside of its own military.”¹⁶²

This security-heavy response is reflected in the American leadership's perception of the Arctic as a national security concern. Mike Pompeo's 2019 speech in Finland and President Trump's insistent interest in Greenland, both mentioned earlier in the paper, are exemplary of the great power narrative shared by bipartisan political and military elites in Washington since the later years of the Obama presidency. Indeed, the 2022 National Strategy for the Arctic Region and the 2024 Department of Defence Arctic Strategy both focus on developing critical defence objectives and awareness, capacity for power projection in the domain, and increasing military capabilities to defend the homeland:

“Enhance its Arctic capabilities, deepen engagement with Allies and partners, and exercise our forces to build readiness for operations at high latitudes”.¹⁶³

Conclusion

In the 2020s, the Arctic will be characterised by a unique interdependence of climate, power, security, and resource dynamics, owing to the special regional conditions and the interplay of national and common interests. The report has sought to address the competing, yet collaborating (at times), interactions between the major powers in the Arctic. Indeed, geopolitics in the Arctic is intrinsically linked to the emerging great power competition in the global system; the notion of Arctic exceptionalism cannot be framed

assessments and strategies in Finland, Norway and Iceland (pp. 8-20). Danish Institute for International Studies. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21443.5>

¹⁶² Marsili, M. (2022). Arctic Security: A Global Challenge. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 26(2), p. 149 097359842211202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09735984221120299>

¹⁶³ U.S. Department of Defence. (2024). *2024 Arctic Strategy*. U.S. Department of Defence. p. III.

and understood as it has been in the post-Cold War international environment. This has resulted in a weakened institutional regional base which, nonetheless, remains standing as geophysical and geoeconomic interests largely coalesce into a shared responsibility for regional stability. Geopolitical tensions between the United States, the People's Republic of China, and the Russian Federation have inevitably reached the Arctic region, particularly after the outbreak of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Whilst increased demand for Polar resources, rearmament, and military exercises have received much of the spotlight, it is important to note that the conflict potential in the Arctic remains low due to the presence of regional and national forces which limit the intensity of geopolitical strife.

Nonetheless, the Arctic is now seeing an unprecedented level of militarisation since the tentative *détente* symbolised by Gorbachev's 1987 hopeful words for circumpolar cooperation. Russian national interests, strategic culture, military thinking, and systemic position within global politics motivate Moscow's security and geostrategic presence in the Arctic. Conversely, the United States' approach to the northernmost region is largely based on a wide-ranging diplomatic offensive in response to the Kremlin's remilitarisation and Beijing's growing power, backed by a security-focused Arctic posture. Against this background, the PRC has been steadily strengthening its position as a regional stakeholder based on largely geostrategic interests, although signs of more geopolitical actions need to be monitored and cannot be discounted. Thus, (limited) cooperation and (muffled) competition are not two mutually exclusive outcomes, rather they represent the likely state of the Arctic for the 2020s.¹⁶⁴

Indeed, against this backdrop of rising geopolitical tensions across the globe, the Arctic is no more separated from the heightened conflict potential that currently persists in international geopolitics. This is evidenced from the increased irregular activities including hybrid warfare and espionage in the North-Atlantic and the Barents Sea. This includes the unexplained acts of potential sabotage to undersea infrastructures such as critical communication and power cables in the North and Baltic Seas in recent years. Whilst maintaining that there exists a shared desire to minimise tensions and regional governance dynamics which dampen external power conflicts, it is worth highlighting two key possible

¹⁶⁴ Young, O. R., Yang, J., & Zagorski, A. (2022). The "New" Arctic as a Zone of Peaceful Competition. *Polar Perspectives*, 11.

flashpoints for the future of the Arctic whose likelihood is, nonetheless, assessed as medium-to-low.¹⁶⁵

1. The area of the North Atlantic and Barents Sea is at the core of the NATO-Russia remilitarising dynamics. The region, and the access to the Atlantic Ocean, is the key to the Kremlin's military and strategic planning. Tensions between Moscow and NATO powers have been steadily escalating since the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, although there is a guarded restraint in order to avoid large-scale confrontations as exemplified by the Western states' caution even in the face of hostile provocations – i.e., the suspicious attacks on critical undersea infrastructure (CUI). Large-scale exercises and military presence have intensified in the area, making the North Atlantic/Barents Sea region a potential front of flaring tensions.¹⁶⁶

2. Greenland has recently risen to the forefront of the transatlantic relationship following Donald Trump's re-election to the US Presidency. International political dynamics, such as Chinese economic and development interventions in the resource-rich Danish-held islands in the 2010s and the consequent American reaction, are interwoven with local political forces, namely the indigenous independence aspirations.¹⁶⁷ The interplay of independence claims, European interests and sovereignty - lead by Copenhagen -, and the US-China rivalry put the autonomous Danish island at the centre of a possible heightened strategic confrontation between global powers.

The Arctic of the 21st century features similar patterns of militarisation, competition, and tensions to those observed globally, as the relevant regional actors are involved in complex dynamics of geopolitical competition. Although, until now, these developments have been predominantly restricted to the European Arctic and the adjacent areas of the North

¹⁶⁵ Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

¹⁶⁶ Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

¹⁶⁷ Morrison, C. E., & Bennett, M. (2024). The fall and rise of global geopolitics in the Arctic. In O. R. Young & J.-D. Kim (Eds.), *North Pacific Perspectives On The Arctic* (pp. 1–23). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035344956.00007>

Atlantic, where the geographic proximity between Russia and NATO-countries leads to extensive land and maritime contact points. Nonetheless, the prospect of conflict in the Arctic remains low even in the aftermath of the Russian aggression in Ukraine. The harsh environment and the absence of usual fault lines for clashes contribute to preventing an escalation of outright conflict in the Arctic due to its steep opportunity costs.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

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