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Andrei P. Tsygankov

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Robert English, Andrew Thvedt

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THE ARCTIC

Robert English and Andrew Thvedt

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, USA

Introduction

“Words are also deeds,” not just in an abstract, philosophical sense, but in concrete acts as well. And at this tense juncture in US–Russia relations – with cyber intrusion now added to confrontations in Ukraine, Syria, and the Baltics – words are being spoken that could soon become deeds and spread that confrontation to the Arctic. Russia has for 20 years been a constructive partner in Arctic governance. Russia has also for nearly ten years been rebuilding its decrepit security infrastructure in the high north, in order to defend its sovereignty and guard against emergent threats at a time of rapid change in a region of great economic and strategic importance to Moscow. Yet since 2014 – reacting to conflict *elsewhere* – Western pundits, policy analysts, and politicians have abruptly recast Russia’s Arctic activities as something ominous and requiring a determined response.

The new words are about “the scramble for the Arctic,” with some even predicting “hot war in the cold north.” The deeds that those sounding this alarm demand are a buildup in US–NATO Arctic capabilities across the board – land, air, and sea. And they nearly always begin with a call to close “the icebreaker gap.” Simultaneously, the US and NATO have already stepped up military maneuvers and shows of force in the area, as has Russia, in what resembles a budding security dilemma. This is disturbing for a region that, since the Cold War’s end, has been a model of positive interstate cooperation. Yet since this nascent rivalry has objectively little to do with actual threats – in most military measures, Russia is *behind* the US and NATO – one hopes for an easing of US–Russian tensions to halt an incipient Arctic arms race.

Russia, an Arctic power

Unfamiliarity often breeds alarm, and few US politicians or foreign-policy pundits have much familiarity with the Arctic – and certainly not with Russia’s centuries-old traditions in the high north. Canadians, Norwegians, Finns, and other Nordic peoples naturally understand better what it means to be “an Arctic nation,” though none matches Russia in the depth and complexity of their identification with the polar region. From distant forbears to modern pioneers, from sailors and soldiers to scientists, from ancient sagas to modern cinema – the *cultural* as well as economic and strategic significance of the Arctic to Russia is great. Consequently, though it

hardly implies a literal claim, Russian politicians have sometimes waxed lyrical on the order of “the Arctic is ours!” in a manner that jars US ears (though similar rhetoric has also been heard from Canadian politicians).

Humans have inhabited the Russian Arctic since the end of the last Ice Age, the forbears of the Nenets, Saami, Chuchki, and other “indigenous peoples of the north.” The first Slavic or “ethnic Russian” Arctic dwellers were the Pomors who migrated north from the Novgorod region in the 11th century and settled in the White Sea region (present-day Archangelsk). Fisherman, trappers, and traders, the Pomors explored the Urals, rounded the Kola peninsula, established trade with Norway, and may have even sailed to Spitsbergen (Laruelle, 2013).

From the expansion of Ivan the Terrible through the expeditions of Peter the Great, Russian conquest of Siberia, the Far East, and the Arctic lands above them was vital to the growth of the Russian Empire. It was Peter who sponsored the journeys of Vitus Bering, and it was Bering, with Aleksei Chirikov, who explored Alaska and the Aleutians. Semyon Cheluskin, Dmitry Laptev, and others had mapped most of Russia’s Arctic coastline by the mid-18th century (Sale and Potapov, 2009). Opening a Northern Sea Route (NSR) was a key goal, with the development of Siberia and a foothold on the Pacific seen as economically as well as strategically vital (Josephson, 2014). Though Russia sold Alaska in 1867, the late 19th and early 20th centuries were notable for development from Spitsbergen and Novaya Zemlya (in the Barents and Kara Seas) to Kamchatka and Vladivostok (in the Northeast).

Russian zeal for the Arctic hardly flagged with the Bolshevik Revolution as the new Soviet regime launched intensive studies and development in the 1920s. Vladimir Lenin championed these pursuits, through the *Severekspeditsia* or Northern Scientific-Industrial Expedition. Later it was *Komseveroput* that managed the resource extraction vital for Joseph Stalin’s Five-Year Plans through the mid-1930s (Josephson, 2014). With its coal (Vorkuta), metals (Kola), and oil (Uhta), Russia’s Arctic would play a key role in industrializing the USSR. Later reorganized as *Glavsevmorput*, the Arctic administration of the later 1930s embodied the extremes of the time: glorious sacrifice in the service of the state, and brutal exploitation in Arctic GULAG camps from Vorkuta to Kolyma.

The public image of Stalin’s Arctic was one of heroism – the pilots who pioneered polar aviation, and the icebreakers that plied the NSR, as the Red Arctic became “a central myth of Soviet popular culture” (Laruelle, 2013: 27). Adding to that myth was the Great Patriotic War, with the Arctic port of Murmansk being a vital lifeline – and one where Soviet and US sailors risked their lives – in supporting life-and-death struggles against the Nazis. Nearly 4 million tons of supplies came through Arctic convoys, something that left enduring memories of US friendship for many Soviet citizens even through the bitter Cold War years.

From Cold-War confrontation to post-Cold War collapse

The Cold War conjures up contrasting images of the Russian Arctic. One is of deadly nuclear confrontation across the North Pole – from the edge of space, to the ocean depths – while the other is of peaceful exploration and scientific research. One worked for the benefit of humanity, the other took humanity to the brink of annihilation. They coexisted, in the later Cold War years, with a third major pursuit, namely large-scale exploitation of Arctic energy resources. All three would retreat in the Cold War’s aftermath, and all would return by the early 21st century.

Geography dictated that, as the US and USSR targeted bombers and missiles at each other, the Arctic would be their highway since the polar route between Moscow and Washington is the shortest. This was accompanied by construction of many northern installations – chiefly

air bases and radar stations. The DEW Line (Distant Early Warning) across North America was matched by SPRN (*Sistema Preduprezhdeniia o Raketnom Napadenii* or Missile Attack Warning System) on the Soviet side (Åtland, 2008). In the 1960s another threat appeared – that of submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) which, on the Soviet side, were based near Murmansk. So began a 20-year game of cat-and-mouse beneath the Arctic ice.

This was a fruitful time for Soviet Arctic research. “Drifting” ice stations contributed to fields from hydrochemistry and marine biology to geophysics and oceanography. Development of Arctic and West Siberian petroleum deposits began in the 1960s, followed by exploitation of fields on the Yamal peninsula and, in 1984, completion of the Urengoy-Uzhgorod pipeline to supply Europe with gas from the Yamal-Nenets region. Norilsk, second only to Murmansk as the world’s largest city above the Arctic Circle, became the world’s biggest nickel mining and smelting operation. In 1988, Soviet geologists discovered the Shtokman Field in the Barents Sea, and in 1989 the Prirazlomnoe Field in the Pechora Sea. The former holds 3.8 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, and the latter over 600 million barrels of oil. But their development, like so much else, was interrupted by the Soviet collapse of 1991.

This seemed unlikely in the early *perestroika* years, when Mikhail Gorbachev gave his 1987 “Murmansk Address” calling for the Arctic to be a “zone of peace” for international cooperation on research and resource development (Gorbachev, 1987). But in all three areas – military power, scientific research, and resource development – the Soviet collapse set Russia back sharply as the country descended into a decade of chaos and corruption. Arctic bases were shuttered as military spending was slashed. Scientific research suffered too – after decades of continuous manning, the last drifting ice station was closed in 1991 – as did investment not to expand but merely to maintain energy production. State support for Arctic housing, food, and fuel fell by 90 percent in the early 1990s, prompting an exodus of over one million people from the Russian far north (Heleniak, 2009).

Russia revived: a responsible Arctic stakeholder

In 1996, Russia was mired in depression under the stumbling Boris Yeltsin – the economy having shrunk by nearly half since 1992, and the oligarchs riding high after the “loans for shares” scandal gave them control of Russia’s petroleum riches in return for financing Yeltsin’s corrupt reelection. In retreat abroad, Russia was trying to extricate itself from a bloody conflict in Chechnya, while the US was preparing to expand NATO into the former Soviet bloc. At this dark juncture, a bright spot for Russian foreign policy was its role in the creation of the Arctic Council (AC) established by the Ottawa Declaration of September, 1996. For 20 years since, the AC has proved a most successful intergovernmental organization, operating by consensus among its eight members – the US, Canada, Russia, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland – with the Arctic’s indigenous peoples also represented as nonvoting “permanent participants” and a number of observer states as well. The AC addresses a wide range of issues concerning the region – excepting military security – by agreement of its founding members.

Russia held the chair of the AC in 2004–2006, and used it to advance a Search and Rescue (SAR) agreement that was concluded in 2011 (upon determination of each member-state’s area of responsibility). This was the first legally binding agreement negotiated under the AC, aided by a task force on cooperative measures led by the US and Russia (Rottem, 2013). While SAR advanced, Russia was also negotiating with Norway to settle competing claims to the Barents Sea. In 2010, the parties agreed to split evenly a zone of some 175,000 square km and thereby open the area up to development of resources – petroleum, minerals, and fish (Amos, 2011).

By this time, Russia had bounced back thanks to a decade of rising oil prices and the strict management of Vladimir Putin (Appel, 2008). After a series of market reforms, Putin tightened tax collection and channeled revenues into reviving public services (health, education), creating reserve funds (c. one trillion dollars), and rebuilding crumbling infrastructure (including Arctic scientific and military installations). Polar research stations were reestablished after a 12-year absence, while energy investment soared – both vital for a region that by 2010 was generating 20 percent of Russia’s GDP. Among the sources on Russia’s Arctic shelf both on and offshore – in the Kara, Barents, and Pechora Seas – the Prirazlomnoe oil field came online in late 2013 and was soon producing 50,000 barrels daily from the world’s first ice-resistant offshore rig.

It is ironic that while a large amount of the world’s untapped petroleum (13 percent of oil, 30 percent of gas) lies in the Arctic, the alarmism that this evokes causes many to overlook another key fact – namely, that *over 80 percent of that petroleum lies in the undisputed national zones of the Arctic states* (Buchanan, 2016). These deposits are also, as a rule, much closer and more accessible than the remaining 20 percent, rendering competing claims to these distant zones much less urgent – and predictions of conflict still more unlikely. Equally salient is that the Arctic littoral powers have agreed to consensus action to abide by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in settling disputes. Most recently reaffirmed in the Ilulissat Declaration of 2008, this is downplayed if not overlooked altogether in alarmist commentary on states’ rival claims. Russia claims the seabed beyond its 200-nautical mile offshore Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), extending to the North Pole – but so does Denmark, with a Canadian claim expected in 2018. A Google search of “Russia claims North Pole” produces over 32,000 hits, yet the same for Denmark yields fewer than 6,500.

Skepticism about Russia – more characteristic of foreign-policy pundits than Arctic specialists – stems as much from Russian swagger as any objectively aggressive actions. In 2007, a submarine expedition planted a Russian flag on the North Pole seabed – a seemingly irresistible trope to editorial writers, even though Moscow reassured that it was only a symbolic act of discovery (and no more one of conquest than 1969’s planting of the US flag on the moon). In 2008 Moscow promulgated *Foundations of the Russian Federation’s Policy in the Arctic Through 2020 and Beyond*. While emphasizing defense of Russia’s sovereignty in the High North, its priorities remained – like those of the other Arctic powers – economic development, environmental protection, and a cooperative stance on regional issues (Heininen, 2014). Moscow has surely taken a hard line toward its indigenous peoples – united in the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) – largely due to RAIPON’s cooperation with foreign backers in protesting oil extraction in their homelands (Wallace, 2013). And some Russian officials have spoken provocatively about Arctic sovereignty (Lund, 2015). But this is largely rhetoric for a domestic audience, and Arctic experts generally credit Russia with a cooperative and constructive Arctic policy (Gorenburg, 2014).

Russia reviled: halos, horns, and the Arctic reconsidered

Since 2014, popular perceptions of Russia’s Arctic policy have turned sharply negative. Western reporting and commentary have been marked, sometimes dominated, by rising concerns about “militarization” and Moscow’s purported “aggressive new posture.” The alarm in Western media – reflected in policy analyses and political debates as well – has seen notable threat inflation, dire predictions of the consequences of lagging behind, and so urging a match of any Russian buildup (Coffey 2014; Reterski 2014; Heritage, 2015; Holland, 2014; Stratfor, 2015; Gramier, 2017). Some commentary even raises parallels to such notorious episodes as the supposed bomber and missile gaps of the early Cold War, and the “window of vulnerability” of

the late Cold War. Today, as then, Russian capabilities are exaggerated while the West's countervailing strengths – even superiority – are discounted. Today, as then, the actual context of Russian strategy and its attendant actions are broadly ignored so as to assign the direst possible interpretation. And so today, as then, scenarios of looming Russian aggression are distorted, even cartoonish, and far out of touch with reality. Unfortunately, they are also quite *in* touch with the reigning Russophobia of Western political elites and so raise the possibility of an incipient spiral of arms buildups in the region.

Already over 2008–2012 – as a direct result of two key events – some Western commentators began raising Arctic- and Russia-focused concerns more urgently. One of those was the planting of a Russian flag on the North Pole seabed in August, 2007. The second was the sharp melt-off of the polar ice cap over the summer of 2012, setting a new record low. The first, as already noted, was a purely symbolic act, but numerous pundits invoked dire consequences regardless. The latter event heightened environmental concerns, naturally, but many invoked a *strategic* threat. According to articles in the authoritative journal *Foreign Affairs*:

While other powers are racing to carve up the region, the United States has remained largely on the sidelines . . . The region could erupt in an armed mad dash for its resources.

(Borgeson, 2008)

It's past time for the U.S. to close the icebreaker gap . . . Nuclear-powered icebreakers would also extend the Arctic reach . . . of U.S. Navy cruisers and destroyers . . . Competition over the positioning of military forces in the Arctic could soon intensify, and Russia's recent incursions into the northern European airspace and territorial waters may be an indication of things to come.

(Reterski, 2014)

It is difficult to say what combination of concerns shapes media coverage of the Arctic. Already in 2012 there was a “spillover” effect from other critical coverage of Russia. For example, in 2011, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton criticized Russia's elections and demanded a “full investigation of . . . fraud and intimidation” (Clinton, 2011). This sparked a backlash from Russian officials, and a spate of increasingly critical Western coverage through 2012, as it overlapped with the “Pussy Riot” scandal of that same year (the jailing of feminist punk-rock activists for a profane demonstration in a Moscow cathedral). And in 2013, Russia's image took another hit from the passage of the notorious law against “gay propaganda.” This now-cascading critical coverage of Russia intersected with the Arctic again over the 2013 case of Greenpeace protestors who scaled a Russian oil platform in the Pechora Sea and were detained along with their vessel, *Arctic Sunrise*. Clinton herself argued the emerging consensus in a 2014 speech denouncing Russia's “heightened aggression” in the Arctic, noting that “they recently imprisoned several Greenpeace activists [and] have been aggressively reopening military bases” (Peritz, 2014).

Though she repeatedly employed the term “aggression,” one could have as easily characterized both examples as defensive. Certainly, the Spanish Navy saw arresting Greenpeace protestors scaling *their* oil platform as a legitimate defensive act, since they did just that when the *Arctic Sunrise's* next major protest struck a Spanish oil company (Mathiesen, 2014). Clinton and the myriad Western celebrities who denounced Russia's action in 2013, stayed silent upon the Spanish episode less than a year later. Similarly, the reopening of some Russian northern bases that were shuttered during the collapse of the 1990s (while NATO's northern presence

remained strong) was not only just a step toward catching up, but rather leaping ahead. It was also something widely recognized as necessary given the new security and environmental problems caused by Russia's thawing Arctic. Indeed, US Admiral Robert Papp, Washington's senior Arctic officer, succinctly stated:

Russia is doing those things we would be doing ourselves if there was an increase in traffic above our coast . . . One person might look at that and say "you are militarizing the Arctic," but another person might say you are doing reasonable things to make sure you have safety and security.

(Jopson and Milne, 2015)

That "safety and security" refers to concerns arising from the predicted increase in traffic through the seas above Russia. For the inevitable oil or waste spills, there exist negligible spill management and cleanup assets. For poachers and smugglers, there are only modest patrol and interdiction forces. And for the scores of tankers, cargo, and cruise ships that will be transiting the NSR within a decade, there are few navigation and search-and-rescue facilities. Pursuant to the SAR agreement of 2011, Russia has assumed responsibility for the largest Arctic area that is simultaneously the least developed; at present, ships traverse hundreds of kilometers of treacherous seas between rescue, repair, and refueling facilities (Inozemtsev, 2016). Some future party of US tourists floundering north of the Bering Strait – because of engine trouble, a storm, or other calamity – will be glad of the new Russian SAR center at nearby Provideniya when the closest US Coast Guard base is in Kodiak, Alaska, over 2,000 kilometers distant.

Of the 12–15 "military bases" usually identified with Russia's Arctic "militarization," at least half are in fact SAR centers. Most of the rest are "air bases" – many just beginning construction, and only destined, even when complete, to be essentially an airstrip with a few outbuildings. And most are also located at such vast distances from the frontiers or facilities of other states that they will be ineffective for power-projection or intimidation purposes. Clearly, the rapid re-classification by Western observers of Russia's Arctic activities – from benign to belligerent – reflects a "halos and horns" effect. This is a cognitive bias where, if we see an actor as essentially nice (or nasty), we are predisposed to assess *all* of their actions positively (or negatively) based *not* on an objective assessment of the actions themselves but instead due to our underlying prejudice (Jervis, 1976). The "horns" effect for Russia, already growing after 2011 due to an authoritarian turn in domestic politics, sharpened dramatically after the Ukrainian–Crimean conflict of 2014. Of course, defense planners must assess an adversary's perceived *intent* as well as his or her objective *capabilities*. But the former should not be so exaggerated as to distort interpretation of the latter far beyond reason – as has occurred in the case of Russia's Arctic policies.

Oh no, the dreaded icebreaker gap!

The inflation of Russia's Arctic "threat" has, in both the media and many think-tank analyses, been so extreme as to raise parallels with the "missile gap" or "window of vulnerability" scares of earlier decades. Thus it is useful to review the elements of these threat assessments, and both scrutinize them in context as well as rebut their most exaggerated claims (MacDonald, 2015).

Arctic military bases. For multiple reasons, the facilities Russia is building across its Arctic do *not* represent the intimidating threat that they are portrayed to be. They are largely directed at coastal security and SAR missions. They generally do not support major power-projection capabilities, and are essentially *defensively* oriented (it is hard to see how *an air-defense system* could be used to invade Canada or seize a Norwegian oil platform, yet some analysts darkly note

Russia's possible placement of *air defense batteries* on its Arctic periphery as an aggressive step). What's more, even at the most optimistic pace, it will take a decade simply for Russia to regain the capabilities it had before its post-Cold War collapse (Klimenko, 2016; Wezeman, 2016). Further, when the aircraft and naval vessels that would use these bases are compared with their NATO counterparts, *it is the latter that have a decided edge.*

Icebreakers. Russia has a sizeable icebreaker fleet – and the US a very small one – because Russia has much greater need for their missions: resupply of icebound research stations or remote coastal communities, escort of commercial shipping through the perilous NSW, and SAR duties across Russia's vast Arctic area of responsibility. Some Russian icebreakers are also leased for polar cruises, or accommodating paying tourists on their research missions. Importantly, *icebreakers have minimal military utility.* Vessels that plod through multiyear sea ice at three knots (nautical miles per hour) are useless in any realistic scenario of naval combat. The image of icebreakers carving a path for frigates and destroyers (per Alaska Senator Dan Sullivan, “The highways of the Arctic are icebreakers . . . Russia has superhighways, and we have dirt roads with potholes”) is simply ignorant (Reterski, 2014; Gramier, 2017). As noted, the number of icebreakers “doesn't relate at all to combat capability” (Stackpole, 2015). The modest Russian navy does not send its combat vessels out into Arctic ice behind icebreakers, and neither would the US Navy. That is why US icebreakers are operated by the Coast Guard; *because icebreakers support the missions of the Coast Guard.* In a mass of misunderstandings and distortions, perhaps none is so preposterous as that of an “icebreaker gap.”

The Russian navy. A recent Heritage Foundation report on Russia's Arctic bases described a major shift of naval assets: “Russia has taken steps to militarize the Arctic. Russia's Northern Fleet, based at Severomorsk, accounts for two-thirds of the Russian Navy” (Heritage, 2015). In fact, this basing is *not* a step Russia has recently taken “to militarize the Arctic” since the Northern Fleet has been the largest part of the Soviet-Russian Navy *since the 1950s.* Yet many pundits accept Heritage's distortion and proceed from the “fact” of a major naval shift northward as proof of Russia's malignant designs. In reality, the Russian navy collapsed after the Cold War and is only now rebuilding. Their Northern Fleet includes some three dozen surface ships (only half of which are truly seagoing, rather than coastal-defense craft) and a similar number of submarines (many of which are Cold War relics and haven't put to sea in years). By contrast, the US Pacific Fleet numbers 60 vessels, and its Atlantic Fleet 190 – as well as over 1,500 carrier-based aircraft (Russia has no true aircraft carriers). Moreover, Russia's basing in the north *is not a sign of strength but a concession to weakness.* Each of Russia's other fleets – the Pacific, the Baltic, and the Black Sea – lack access to the open seas and must transit narrow passages (e.g., the Turkish straits) to exit tightly confined areas such as the Mediterranean, the Gulf of Finland, or the Sea of Japan. Only the Northern Fleet has relatively unfettered access to open ocean. Meanwhile, plans for Russia's first modern aircraft carrier have been delayed repeatedly. Russia *is* building some new vessels, such as the Gorshkov-class frigate – but this design has been decades in development and plagued by problems from faulty turbines to an air defense system 30 years out of date (Friedman, 2016). By *no* stretch of the imagination is Russia seriously challenging US naval dominance (Fedyszyn, 2016; Thomassen, 2016; Polmar and Kofman, 2017a).

Airpower in the Arctic. Here again is a critical area of decided US/NATO advantage. News stories paint a picture of a Russian threat, focusing on close encounters with fighter jets or bomber patrols that skirt NATO countries' airspace (*The Guardian*, 2015, 2016). But this is largely a sideshow, a ritual that both sides have long practiced and that NATO pilots – as opposed to NATO public-affairs officials – stress is “perfectly legal” and in fact a “welcome” practice routine (Posey, 2016). Moreover, bomber patrols have little to do with the Arctic per se; they are long-range aircraft that merely transit the Arctic, as do ours, while more fighter intercepts

have occurred in the Baltic or Black Seas (Bamford, 2015; LaGrone, 2016). *When it comes to the actual balance of air power in the Arctic, Russia loses hands down.* The US has multiple squadrons – including fifth-generation F-22 and F-35 fighters – based in Alaska, while *Russia has no deployed fifth-generation fighters at all.* The lethality of this force is multiplied by the US’s unmatched airborne warning and control systems (AWACS), while Russia’s are primitive (McHale, 2012; McNaught, 2015). And even in areas where Russia has a local advantage – in numbers, though of older and less-capable aircraft – their reach is sharply limited. The US tanker fleet (in-air refueling) has nearly 500 aircraft while Russia has only about two dozen. Now count in the allies; Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Canada add several hundred more combat aircraft to the Western arsenal, including the latest fourth-generation (F/A-18E, Typhoon Eurofighter) and fifth-generation (F-35A) fighter-attack jets. In sum, Russia can muster significant numbers of capable aircraft in its own backyard, which means essentially a *defensive* role. But in a large-scale offensive operation against the US and its allies, Russian air forces would be decimated.

Submarines and anti-submarine warfare. Here too US advantage is great. US attack submarines – the Los Angeles, Seawolf, and Virginia-class SSNs, known as “hunter-killers” – continue to patrol Arctic waters and track both Russian surface ships and ballistic-missile submarines (SSBNs) with near impunity. The latter are a key element of Russia’s nuclear deterrent, especially as their bomber fleet ages and their land-based missiles have been reduced by treaty. Yet Russia’s aging SSBNs have rarely put to sea in recent years, laying up at dockside instead of keeping their deterrent weapons hidden (Klimenko, 2016). It is not only the parlous condition of these nuclear-accidents-in-waiting, or the expense of deployment. They must also worry about both the shrinking icecap under which they have traditionally hidden, as well as about improving US and NATO ASW systems (Reterski, 2014; Clark, 2015; De Larrinaga, 2016; Osborn 2016, 2017). Meanwhile, the US has adapted some Ohio-class SSBNs to a land-attack role with new cruise missile and special forces delivery systems (Roblin, 2017). Despite recent hysteria about Russian subs in Scandinavian waters (Taylor, 2015), it is the US that has greatly increased its sub-based conventional-strike capabilities. (And with the acquisition of Wasp- and America-class amphibious assault ships, the US Navy’s land attack power is truly fearsome.) The Russian navy is now beginning to deploy some new SSBNs as well as modern attack submarines, but remains far behind in this key dimension of the Arctic military balance (Axe, 2015). Indeed, the Russian submarine fleet is still “dwarfed” compared to its own Cold War-era force (Polmar and Kofman, 2017b).

What to do if the ice melts? Build icebreakers!

A US Navy report on *Naval Operations in an Ice Free Arctic* did indeed recommend that the US acquire more icebreakers (ONR, 2001). That would seem ill-advised – to put it mildly – except that at the time of the analysis the Arctic was not expected to be completely ice-free in the summer until at least 2050. Since then, accelerating loss of polar sea ice has caused some to predict the advent of an ice-free Arctic by 2025 or even sooner (SIPN, 2016), which indeed calls into question the wisdom of building vessels that cost at least \$1 billion apiece and may not be completed until 2020. In any event, a cost-benefit analysis can be performed, based on different climactic predictions, to reach well-advised recommendations on procurement of some vessels that usefully support research, SAR, and law-enforcement needs.

What is clearly ill-advised are policy proposals – based on exaggerated assessments of “Russia’s Arctic threat” – for US and NATO militaries. As seen, most alarm about Russia’s “militarization” of the Arctic is overheated punditry and ignorant threat inflation. Ignorance is key, as lack of knowledge about the Arctic environment – and the military systems at issue – combine to

make such canards as an “icebreaker gap” appear as real threats to the uninformed. (A Google search for “icebreaker gap” yields an astonishing 426,000 hits.) Of even greater concern to the defense analyst is the absence of *specific* threat scenarios – supporting *specific* policy responses – rather than a vague “the Russians are coming!” In contrast to the South China Sea – where territorial disputes are numerous, resource rivalries are urgent, and military forces collide in a crowded sea ringed by densely populated coastlines while key actors ignore international law – conditions could hardly be more different in the Arctic. What *exactly* will the Russians do, requiring *exactly* what US-NATO response?

Match whatever the Russians are doing. Most frequently seen are arguments to mimic Russian programs. If they have so many Arctic bases, or nuclear icebreakers, so must we. There is no real analysis of the supposed threat, and so no particular justification of the proposed response – there is only a vague Russian menace.

Respond to environmental disasters or cruise-ship emergencies. These are US Coast Guard SAR missions. While there may arise situations where US Navy vessels could assist, this is not their primary purpose and certainly not one prompted by “Russian militarization.” In fact, what is described as Russia’s “militarization” largely consists of *their* building up SAR bases and assets (Auerswald, 2015).

Go out and fight on the ice. Other proposals envision combat at sea – in particular, a clash of surface combatants. Because Russia has many icebreakers, they will dominate “the positioning of military forces in the Arctic” (Reterski, 2014) unless we procure our own to carve out “the highways of the Arctic” (Gramier, 2017) and so enable “U.S. Navy cruisers and destroyers . . . to quickly travel to [the Arctic] theater of operations [supporting] a true forward presence” (Reterski, 2014) that can “attack and defend isolated Arctic bases” (Mizokami, 2016). Such scenarios require ice-hardened combat ships, not just icebreakers, because “if you can only be on the surface where there is little or no danger of ice, then your presence is very restricted” (Johnson and De Luce, 2016). The silliness of this vision would not be worth rebutting, were it not so prevalent. Slow-moving icebreakers cannot possibly carve out “highways” upon which surface ships can rapidly maneuver; even ice-hardened ships (which adds a third to the cost of construction, and compromises other functions) are subject to hull breach even in loose ice; operating in Arctic conditions can also cause everything from weapons malfunction to superstructure icing with the risk of capsizing (Patch, 2009); above all, today’s fantastically expensive naval vessels (Zumwalt-class destroyers cost nearly \$1.5 billion each) would be sitting ducks for missile attacks if operating close to Russian strongholds in compromised Arctic conditions (Thomassen, 2016; Polmar and Kofman, 2017b).

Freedom of Navigation Operations. This refers to proactively asserting a right to operate in disputed waters, i.e., coastal areas that are regarded as international (under UNCLOS) when they are also claimed by the coastal state. The US Navy regularly conducts freedom-of-navigation operations (FONOP) that naturally seem aggressive to the state-claimant involved, such as recent missions near the Paracel and Spratly Islands contesting Chinese claims. Previous FONOP in the Gulf of Sidra, or the Black Sea, resulted in armed confrontations with Libya and the USSR. Some now call for asserting FON rights along the NSR, in areas Moscow claims as an inland waterway (just as Ottawa claims parts of the Northwest Passage that the US also does not recognize) (Foggo, 2016). While the US Navy sees this as a matter of principle, it is also provocative and risky, particularly in the current climate. As noted earlier, the one thing Russia’s Arctic forces are well configured for is *defending* their territory. Add to that Russia’s new air defense installations and emphasis on anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, then provoking a confrontation close to their shores – and possible escalation – could go badly for the US.

Defend a threatened oil platform. Another scenario requires defense against seizure of an oil or gas platform (Auerswald, 2015). Why Russia would launch such an attack is unclear – Russia has no shortage of its own Arctic oil and gas, the resultant environmental catastrophe would devastate them as well, and why would Norway or Canada drill in disputed waters claimed by Russia in the first place? Still, the larger flaw in this scenario as justification for a major naval buildup is that the US-NATO already possesses the assets for just such a mission. Instead of a fleet of slow, vulnerable, ice-breaking surface combatants, it requires stealthy means of delivering firepower and troops in a surprise attack. *And this is a capability that the US already possesses*, with its SSNs and conventional-attack adapted SSBNs – converted Ohio-class nuclear ballistic missile submarines, now carrying cruise missiles and delivering special forces for stealthy infiltration (Moore, 2012). Combined with the unmatched US-NATO ability to bring stealthy long-range airpower to bear on Arctic targets, this unlikely scenario is nevertheless one that plays to US *strengths*, not weakness (Axe, 2015).

Can cooperation trump confrontation?

Russia's revised Arctic strategy highlights the region's economic and strategic importance. Since 2014, emphasis has been placed on protecting sovereignty and responding to threats, including those potentially posed by NATO (MID-Russia, 2016). Also since 2014, responding to the US-NATO buildup in the Baltics and Norway, Russia has taken such steps as increasing Arctic air patrols and conducting large-scale maneuvers (Klimenko, 2016). All the same, Russia has *not* significantly expanded upon the steady rebuilding of its decrepit Arctic security infrastructure begun a decade earlier. It has *not* deployed systems that challenge overall US-NATO dominance in the Arctic, and it has *not* deviated from the policy of consensus decision-making and negotiated resolution of regional disputes. Certainly, some belligerent rhetoric has been heard, though these words are largely directed at a Russian domestic audience. Russia's deeds, however, have not by any means lived up to the threats attributed to them (MacDonald, 2015; Wezeman, 2016).

In 2013, even before the Crimean crisis triggered a reassessment of all of Russia's military programs, there had begun a critique of Russia's "militarization" of the Arctic. At that time, the US Department of Defense itself warned:

Being too aggressive in taking steps to anticipate future security risks may create the conditions of mistrust and miscommunication under which such risks could materialize. There is some risk that *the perception that the Arctic is being militarized may lead to an arms race mentality* that could lead to a breakdown of existing cooperative approaches to shared challenges.

(DoD, 2013; *emphasis added*)

That mentality is not only visible, it is prominent among many Western, particularly US, media and think-tanks. Yet several factors slow the move from arms-race mentality to an actual arms race. One is the huge expense of the weapons systems touted (icebreakers cost over \$1 billion each, ice-hardened surface combatants could top \$2 billion). Another is the implausibility of the "threat scenarios" touted. And together these buttress a third restraining factor, which is that most military experts do not agree with the alarmist assessments and redirection of priorities toward acquisition of major new Arctic capabilities. From the caution of Admiral Robert Papp, to the pages of military journals where Arctic alarm remains low, to the words of the US Defense Department quoted earlier, the difference between professional military and civilian foreign-policy specialists is significant.

Nevertheless, history knows cases where the military is overruled and, in particular, where a new US presidential administration – acting on the advice of impassioned civilian analysts – launches a major new program or priority. The “Star Wars” or Strategic Defense Initiative of the Reagan Administration is just one such example. That program too began with the persistent elaboration of a Soviet threat, the so-called “window of vulnerability” to nuclear attack. In the case of the Arctic, elaboration of a new Russia threat is still at a relatively early stage. Nevertheless:

Political rhetoric and press reporting about boundary disputes and the competition for resources may inflame regional tensions. Efforts to manage disagreement diplomatically may be hindered *if the public narrative becomes one of rivalry and conflict.*

(DoD, 2013; *emphasis added*)

There has already emerged a “narrative of rivalry and conflict” on the Arctic, driven by determined policy advocates and abetted by careless journalists and politicians (some with vested interests). Whether this narrative grows, and the nascent “securitization” of the Arctic predominates, cannot be predicted. It could ultimately depend as much on the whims of a new US President as it does on the broader arc of US-Russian relations – the Crimea was where Russia’s Arctic threat really began, in a critical sense – with the two closely linked in any case (Hoag, 2016; Yalowitz and Gallucci, 2016; Buchanan, 2016). A more pointless and wasteful venue for arms racing is difficult to imagine.

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PART IV

Organizations

Andrei P. Tsygankov

The final part of the volume addresses the issue of Russia's participation in international organizations. In studying Russia's experience with global governance, I selected some of the most important – although not all – organizations operating at both global and regional level such as the United Nations, G20, several pan-European and Asian organizations, as well as those limited to the post-Soviet Eurasia.

In addition to summarizing scholarship on the country's experience with selected organizations, each contributor assesses Russia's practical experience over time and in comparison with other organizations as generally successful or not in accomplishing Moscow's objectives. S/he also explains how Russia's perception and strategy within an organization have evolved and what has accounted for the change. Here, scholars seek to shed light on the question of whether Russia is guided primarily by national interests as it sees them or by wider global and regional concerns, or both. Finally, each chapter briefly reflects on a future role for a studied organization in RFP.

The first chapter analyzes Russia's experience with the UN. Alexander Sergunin argues that Russia's UN record has been largely positive. Russia views the UN as indispensable in preserving global peace and stability and has been a responsible actor within the organization by fulfilling multiple duties. It has been a critically important participant in the UN Security Council and exercised its veto power 13 times since the end of the Cold War. Russia has also contributed to the UN debate on sustainable development by promoting an approach that combines economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Furthermore, Russia has greatly contributed to the debate and practice of conflict management and peacekeeping. While accepting some principles of the R2P, Moscow criticized the concept's application in practice. Finally, Russia has been a prominent participant in discussing the issue of UN political, economic, and financial reform. According to Sergunin, the UN has been important to the Kremlin for both legitimacy and balancing objectives. Russia has worked hard to preserve the organization's unique legitimacy for providing global peace and security and to balance against U.S. attempts to dominate in global affairs. Sergunin maintains that Russia's future experience with the organization will continue to be guided by both considerations.

The other global organization of significance to Russia has been the G20. Andrej Krickovic writes that since the organization's establishment in 1999, Russia has been its consistent advocate and supporter although its interest in the G20 declined following the Ukraine crisis. Krickovic

argues that both Russia's support and decline of interest can be attributed to Moscow's changing perception of international realities. Initially, Russia viewed the G20 as a potential force for boosting the country's status as a major power and addressing practical issues of replacing the dollar with a supranational currency, establishing new rules for global trade, investment, and macroeconomic policy. However, Moscow's status ambitions increased following Russia's confrontation with the West over the annexation of Crimea to go beyond political economy issues to address the fundamentals of security and international order and to reflect the Kremlin's desire for establishment of a modern day "Great Power Concert."

Russia also proved overly optimistic in expecting real solutions from the G20 forums. Although these forums were helpful in discussing the potential contribution of rising non-Western economies and possible shape of future global institutions such as the BRICS Development Bank and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the G20 forums were not capable of tackling principal issues of global economic governance. In Krickovic's assessment, Moscow has been generally a good citizen within the organization by complying with 74% of its major G20 commitments – slightly more than the organization's average of 72% – and the organization will continue to be important in fulfilling Russia's goal of diversifying global political economy away from the West.

In addition to global organizations, Russia has participated in various regional institutions. Among those, Moscow has traditionally viewed as important European organizations responsible for the rule of law and human rights as well as regional security. As Hanna Smith writes, the Council of Europe (CoE) has represented the former, while the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has been charged with the latter. Russia has had a challenging experience with both the CoE and OSCE. Moscow became a member of the CoE in 1996 expecting a greater integration with Europe despite the latter's growing criticism over Russia's conduct of the first Chechnya war. Moscow then grew increasingly disappointed with the CoE because of human rights problems in Chechnya, Russia's claims to have an exceptional role within the organization, and increasingly unpopular decisions by the European Court of Human Rights, a part of the CoE, to protect ordinary Russians against their own state.

Russia experienced a similar disappointment with the OSCE, which the Kremlin desired to become a European security umbrella alternative to NATO. Instead, in Russia's perception, since the organization's summit in Istanbul in 1999 the OSCE has grown intrusive in Russia's internal affairs and deviated from the original mission of peacekeeping by taking up the task of monitoring elections. President Putin later characterized the OSCE as "a vulgar instrument" for promoting "the foreign policy interests of one or a group of countries". Despite these tensions, Smith maintains that Russia remains interested in preserving relations with the pan-European organizations and hopeful that frank dialogue will lead to their improvement.

In Asia, Russia too became less interested in transregional multilateralism over time, although for different reasons than in Europe. Artyom Lukin provides a broad overview of Russia's Asian experience and demonstrates in his chapter how after an initially passive attitude in the 1990s Russia developed an active approach and presence in all major political and security institutions in Asia including ASEAN, Six Party Talks, the EAS, and others. However, having gained prominence in these institutions by 2011 and having hosted an important APEC summit in 2012 in Vladivostok, Russia began to scale down its trans-Asian activism in order to concentrate on Eurasian affairs. In Moscow's perception, the focus on Asia did not bring the sought after benefits of status and prestige, while strategically and economically the region remained too distant to merit a policy effort comparable with that toward Europe or the Middle East.

The new vision that motivates the Kremlin has become that of a "greater Eurasia" in which Russia is a major player, along with China and several other powers including, potentially, the

United States. Lukin describes various new formats in which Moscow has played a role to buttress the new vision such Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), CICA, trilateral forums with the involvement of India, China, and Mongolia, and others. In developing the idea of greater Eurasia, Russia works in close cooperation with China and is motivated by compatibility of the two countries' interests, perception of threats, and norms of Westphalian sovereignty. In Lukin's assessment, Russia's preoccupation with establishing the concert-of-power arrangement in Eurasia is important yet challenging and potentially risky given the growing power differentials with China and India.

One prominent organization in the greater Eurasian region that Russia has supported and helped to develop is SCO. Maria Freire documents Russia's consistent efforts to promote the SCO – first as an organization to address in a multilateral format the vacuum of security and stability in Central Asia, and then as a more ambitious trans-Eurasian institution with participation of major powers including India, Pakistan, and others. Freire maintains that such evolution of Russia's position toward the SCO should be explained by several inter-related factors including a desire to contain the West's influence, preoccupation with security, and promotion of non-Western norms and values. Moscow is also concerned with the increasingly dominant role of China in the Eurasian region and seeks to involve other powers to offset China's influence. Freire assesses such effort by Russia as only partially successful given Beijing's growing economic weight and ambitions to play the central role in shaping the economic and institutional structure of the region.

In the effort to promote its own economic and security vision in the region, Russia also has sought to build institutions in which to act as the dominant power. As noted earlier in the chapter by Charles Ziegler (Chapter 7), Moscow is more open to global governance and multilateral cooperation in those areas that do not affect its vital security in the Eurasian region. In order to preserve its security and status in the immediate neighborhood, Russia has developed the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

Mikhail Molchanov's chapter analyzes Russia's experience with the EAEU and argues that Russia has made a considerable progress in developing the organization institutionally, yet has been far less successful in delivering results defined as a growing volume of trade and investments. Although initially after its establishment in 2011 trade expanded during the first two years, it has been in decline since then. Molchanov explains Moscow's interest in developing the EAEU by mutual dependencies of its members (Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Kyrgyzstan) and by desire to adjust to neoliberal globalization in the increasingly regionally centered world. Even if Russia is a *de facto* dominant economic power, he maintains, participation in the organization brings long-term benefits to all members. In the light of the described economic problems and rising power of China, Molchanov's assessment is that Russia will have to adapt and eventually acquiesce. Recent efforts by Putin to integrate the EAEU, the SCO, China's "One Belt, One Road" project, and ASEAN into a "Big Eurasian Partnership" may be viewed as recognition of this reality.

Finally, in her chapter on the CSTO Ruth Deyermond describes how the organization has evolved from the initially limited Collective Security Treaty established in 1992 into the Organization with an expanded scope in 2002. In response to insecurities in Afghanistan and the U.S. military presence in Central Asia following the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2011, the CSTO began to develop various military and counter-terrorist capacities. Since the mid-2000s, the organization has built a Rapid Reaction Force and has been conducting many more military exercises. Finally, in response to the color revolutions, the CSTO adopted special provisions pledging to defend its members' (Russia, Belarus, Armenia, and Central Asian states) "constitutional order" from destabilization by various political, ideological,

and informational means. Deyermond recognizes Russia's dominant position within the organization, but finds this explanation insufficient for understanding Moscow's motives. She draws the reader's attention to mutual security concerns and perceptions of its members. She further warns against overstating the domination/hegemony argument by pointing to limitations of Russia's power as expressed in its inability to keep Uzbekistan within the CSTO, as well as to Moscow's non-intervention in Kyrgyzstan's internal destabilization in 2010. Overall, Deyermond finds the organization to be an important yet limited vehicle for advancing RFP goals.