Homesteading in the Arctic: The Logic Behind, and Prospects for, Russia's "Hectare in the Arctic" Program

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Moscow launched its "Hectare in the Arctic" program in summer 2021, allowing Russian nationals to obtain a free hectare of land in the country's northern regions. This plan is the latest attempt to address the chronic problem of outmigration and to attract new settlers to the Russian Arctic. Yet, multiple obstacles stand in the way of making the scheme a viable demographic solution. The primary obstacle to success with this program, we argue, is the logic that undergirds it. This article unpacks Moscow's logic by applying Foucault's "security, territory, population" analytical triad. We conclude that the program is Moscow's reaction to perceived threats to Russia's sovereignty in the Arctic, particularly the perceived "China threat" that has been brought on by warming relations between the two countries. This logic undermines the potential of the program by neglecting substantive consideration of the needs and socio-economic conditions for Arctic residents. Ultimately, this case illustrates the challenges and central policy contradictions that Putin's regime faces in making the Russian Arctic an effective zone of economic growth.

Introduction

In the summer of 2021, the Russian federal government launched the "Hectare in the Arctic" program, (also called the Arctic Hectare, or AH, program).[1] Under this scheme, any Russian citizen can receive a one-hectare plot of land (approximately 2.5 acres) free of cost for five years. If the citizen has done something productive with their hectare during that time, they will then have the option to either own the land or lease it for a period of forty-nine years. Activities considered "productive" include building a home, starting a farm, or launching an entrepreneurial enterprise such as a tourist resort. The only criteria for eligibility are that the applicant must 1) be a Russian citizen or a person in the federal Program to Assist Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots Living Abroad and 2) must have a plan for how they intend to use their hectare.

To an outside observer, a homesteading act in the twenty-first century, moreover one in the Arctic—a region that many would say is less than ideal for such a task—invites confusion and prompts the question, why is the Russian government seeking to colonize its northernmost

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periphery? The answer to this question is situated within the greater geopolitical context of Russia's fears vis-à-vis China in the Arctic. To unpack this mystery, we employ Foucault's "security, territory, population" triad (Foucault, 2009) to elucidate the logic behind the emergence of the AH program, and conclude that it is a reactionary measure against demographic decline in the face of an existential fear that the Russian state perceives from external actors, especially China, in this era of Arctic "opening."

The article proceeds as follows: first, we introduce the broader geopolitical context of the Russian Arctic and Russian-Chinese relations. Next, we introduce the AH program and the Foucauldian concept of "security, territory, population" (STP). Then, we apply the STP analytical framework to the AH case in an attempt to explain why Moscow has embraced such a program. Finally, we conclude with some thoughts about the prospects for the AH program's success, as a microcosm of the broader Sino-Russian relationship in the Arctic, and particularly in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The Russian Arctic

During the Soviet era, the Russian Arctic became heavily populated as towns were built to house workers who migrated to various areas of the macro-region, primarily for the purpose of extracting natural resources from fixed locations. Many of Russia's modern northern cities were thus created from scratch, including the country's third, fourth, and fifth largest Far Northern[2] urban areas. Norilsk (pop. 184,645) was founded in 1935 to develop the nickel industry; Novy Urengoy (pop. 118,667) was founded in 1975 to facilitate development of nearby natural gas fields; and Vorkuta (pop. 71,279) was established in 1932 to develop the coal industry.[3]

When the Soviet Union dissolved, these far-flung, and heavily subsidized, locations came to be seen as a burden on a nascent Russian Federation that did not have the sufficient budgetary means to continue supporting them. As a result, employment opportunities dried up and many of those migrant-settler workers returned to their familial support systems, primarily in "the mainland" (*materik*) of Central Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.

Since Vladimir Putin assumed power, his regime has sought to bring the Russian Arctic back under stronger centralized control. Thanks to its natural resources and potential as a maritime corridor, Russia's Far North has come to be officially viewed as the key to the country's future wealth, status, and prosperity. Under Putin's direction, Russia has sought to regain its great power status and, more specifically, to solidify its status as *the* dominant power in the Arctic. To this end, Moscow had declared, through a variety of decrees and policy documents over the past decade, ambitious targets for developing the Northern Sea Route (NSR) as a set of viable commercial shipping lanes, as well as plans to exploit the country's Arctic Zone as a strategic base of natural resources.[4]

Russia jealously guards its sovereignty in the Arctic, both those portions that are internationally acknowledged, as well as those that are subjectively perceived, as belonging to Russia. In addition to ever-present fears of NATO military domination (Petersen & Pincus, 2021), Moscow feels that its perceived control over the NSR is also at risk. In policy documents, this set of shipping lanes is considered to be "the Russian Federation's competitive *national* transportation passage in the world market" (emphasis added). The word "national" is significant because it "indicates that Russia intends to maintain control over the navigation of foreign civil ships and warships through the NSR" (Koshkin, 2020: 444). This stance puts Russia at odds with the United States, which views

the NSR as international waters (Todorov, 2022). Similarly, while being more circumspect about its stance on the NSR's legal status, Beijing supports the idea of the Arctic as subject to international law but also as a *de facto* international space, given its importance from an economic and scientific viewpoint (Lanteigne, 2017). The perceived threat of "internationalizing" the NSR are therefore taken very seriously.

In tandem with this risk is the fear that the abundant Arctic mineral wealth will create a race for resources in areas that Russia considers to be its own national territory and waters. As numerous non-Arctic states have begun to intensify their Arctic engagement, fears have emerged of international—especially Chinese—corporations "buying up all the resources" (Hønneland, 2020; Paul & Swistek, 2022). China, being the largest and most visible non-Arctic actor, has argued that there can and should be a place for non-Arctic stakeholders to assist in the study and development of the circumpolar north (Lanteigne, 2020; Lim, 2018). Moscow views China as an essential partner in much of its Arctic development plans, especially in light of its increased isolation as a consequence of its invasion of Ukraine beginning in February 2022. However, there is still a degree of distrust in Moscow as to China's long-term intentions for the region. Due to the centrality of Arctic development for Russia's future economic stability, "this is perceived as a threat aimed at the heart of Russian well-being" (Petersen & Pincus, 2021: 499). Moreover, Moscow, and a variety of Russian scholars, perpetuate the narrative that low population numbers in the Russian Arctic are "weakening…the geopolitical and defense interests of the country" (Lagutina, 2019: 22). According to this narrative, without a massive influx of Russian bodies on the ground, the country's Arctic periphery remains vulnerable to external threats.

The China-Russia Relationship

The term "frenemy" might best encapsulate the current Russia-China relationship. Historically, it has been precarious, as reflected predominantly in the region of their mutual border (Fei, 2011). Since the 1990s, Russia has sought economic partnerships with China and has opened its side of the Sino-Russian border to Chinese migration, in order to stimulate economic growth (Zhao, 2020). However, there have been worries about "Sinicization" of the Russian Far East (RFE) (Guo & Wilson, 2020) and the lopsided population distribution on the Sino-Russian border remains a source of anxiety. The RFE has a population of approximately eight million, compared to over 79 million in the adjacent Chinese regions (Simes & Simes, 2021). Even Putin himself was not adverse to using a "China threat" narrative (Liou, 2017). These concerns are spilling over from the RFE into the wider Russian Arctic, which are also facing demographic strains, economic uncertainty, and expanding interest from China.

Prior to its actions in Ukraine in 2014, Russia was actively trading with, and receiving investment from, its preferred Western partners. When Russia annexed Crimea, it provoked international censure and brought sanctions upon itself as a consequence, resulting in the withdrawal of funding, technology, and resources by many Western businesses. Since then, "Moscow has had no choice but to seek alternatives to the losses of its technological partnerships with the West, and so open up to China" (Laruelle, 2020: 20). While both countries have placed a great deal of emphasis on developing cross-border trade and overall economic cooperation, the historical distrust between the two states has not healed. With the knowledge that China is Russia's largest trade partner, while Russia is only the eleventh-largest trading partner for Beijing (FMPRC, 2020), Moscow is

suspicious of China's potential to "buy" influence in Russian domestic affairs and fears potential Chinese infiltration into its sovereign borders.

Most recently, the Putin and Xi Jinping administrations have sought to maintain the impression of a strong and evolving bilateral relationship, despite Russia's pervasive distrust of China's intentions and potential influence in the Federation, and despite ongoing Chinese misgivings about the Ukraine conflict and its long-term strategic and economic implications (Troianovski & Bradsher, 2022). Days before the Russian invasion began, the two leaders met in Beijing and co-signed a joint statement which included the declaration that *'friendship between the two States has no limits, there are no "forbidden" areas of cooperation'*.[5] Yet, despite such assertions of goodwill, there nevertheless remain several points of division between the two governments that are spilling over into the Russian Arctic.

China in the Russian Arctic

Beijing promotes the idea of the Arctic as an international space. Although China has deepened its Arctic engagement policies since the turn of this century, the country nonetheless remains a relative newcomer in the region. At present, China's interests in the Arctic are threefold: the country wishes to develop relevant scientific expertise in the region, preferably in cooperation with other Arctic and non-Arctic nations, to expand its economic interests in the Arctic, and to play a greater role in emerging areas of far north governance. Its 2018 White Paper on the Arctic, "China's Arctic Policy" (*Zhongguo de beiji zhengce*), states that while no non-Arctic state has the right to claim sovereignty there, they do have the right to engage in economic and scientific endeavors within the boundaries of international law.[6] It also promotes the idea of itself as a "near-Arctic state" (*jin beiji guojia*) (Zhao, 2021), but because it does not possess any Arctic territory, Beijing remains heavily dependent on the goodwill of the eight member governments of the Arctic Council for its far northern policies.

At the center of China's Arctic policy is the Polar Silk Road (*Bingshang Sichou Zhilu*), or PSR. It was designed in 2017 in partnership with the Russian government to place the Arctic within China's greater Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China initially sought to develop a pan-Arctic PSR, but its partnership with Russia is the only one to have somewhat succeeded so far. However, even in the Russian Arctic, some ambitious projects, such as the long-discussed Belkomur railway and associated Arkhangelsk port, have failed to progress beyond the drawing board stage "due to the delays and concerns from the Russian side," (Gao & Erokhin, 2021: 20).

The "crown jewel" of the PSR endeavor was to be the Yamal LNG project - the first BRI energy project in the Arctic. Initially worth approximately US$27 billion, the project commenced in 2017 on Russia's Yamal Peninsula, and is overseen by Novatek, a private Russian energy firm. Partners included France's Total (which suspended operations in May 2022 in response to post-invasion EU sanctions on Moscow), the China National Petroleum Corporation, and the Beijing-based Silk Road Fund (*SiLu Jijin*). In the beginning, Yamal was lauded in Chinese policy circles as being a primary source of much-needed natural gas for Chinese markets, a means to assist Russia in competing with other giants in the global gas market, and a way for Chinese commercial interests to become better integrated into the Russian Arctic (Yang, 2019). However, the double blow of the coronavirus pandemic, which depressed fossil fuel prices to near-unprecedented levels (Lanteigne, 2020), and the widespread post-invasion sanctions placed on the Russian economy have cast doubts on the short-term viability of Arctic energy projects. Various Chinese firms

contracted to work on the Arctic LNG 2 project in Siberia reportedly suspended their operations for fear of sanction penalties (Zhou, 2022). Reports also appeared that China had no plans to send cargo vessels through the NSR during the summer of 2022 (Staalesen, 2022). As the war in Ukraine continues, Beijing has found it more difficult to maintain a non-aligned stance between Russia and the West, and the Polar Silk Road may be an early casualty of this diplomatic conundrum (Lanteigne, 2022).

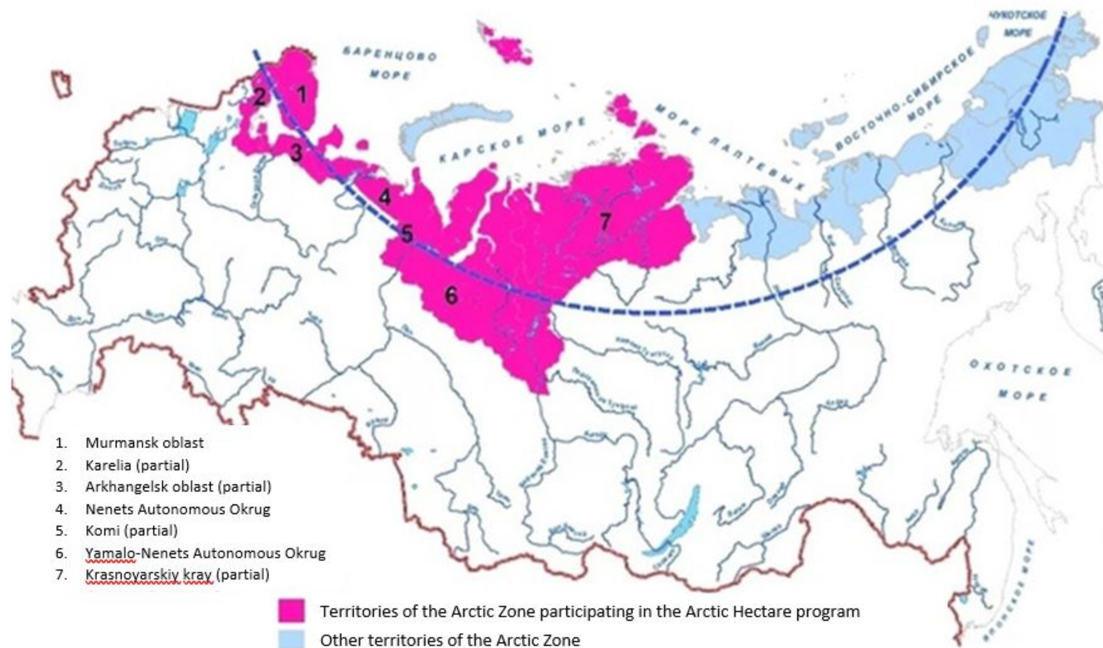
Going beyond strictly state-to-state relations, Chinese influence is also a factor in the emerging debates about Russian Arctic development. A number of scholars believe that China's investment in the Arctic is an existential threat to Russian sovereignty.[7] They see it as an avenue for "creeping conquest of the Arctic: gaining access to the region's natural resources…and *taking control of* the Northern Sea Route" (Koo, 2020, emphasis added). Some have even expressed fear that, "Russia may…become a 'vassal of China'" (Sheng, 2022: 64).

Even tourism has been a factor in this equation as the number of Chinese tourists to Russia's Arctic regions had been rising prior to the pandemic, and this has frequently been cited as a major facet of deepening bilateral Arctic cooperation. For its own part, China also sees tourism as necessary toward legitimizing its claim to being a "near-Arctic state" (Bennett and Iaquinto, 2021) and consider it as "part of the 'soft power' propaganda and popularisation of Chinese culture abroad [which in turn solidifies] the image of the state as an Arctic actor welcomed in the region" (Kobzeva, 2021: 46). However, greater numbers of Chinese tourists had caused strains with local citizens and governments, while raising concerns about economic dependency (Midko & Zhou, 2020; Khurshudyan, 2020; Niu *et al*., 2020).

That Russia feels threatened in its Arctic has been established. *Why* Russia feels threatened is a bit more of a mystery. As Baev (2013: 489) notes, "With its large population centres (like Murmansk and Norilsk)…and huge resource-extraction industry, *Russia is objectively the Arctic superpower*" (emphasis added). Despite depopulation, Russia's Arctic is still the most heavily populated of any of the Arctic countries and, as stated above, the largest Arctic cities are all in in Russia. So, why does Moscow feel that (re-)populating these areas will bolster its security?

The "Hectare in the Arctic" program

As mentioned above, the outmigration of residents from Russia's Arctic region since the collapse of the Soviet Union has been a regular source of concern for Moscow. The proposed solution offered by Moscow and various Russian scholars is twofold. First, the country's military capabilities need to be revamped (Sergunin, 2019). Secondly, the civilian population needs to increase. One of the most readily observable ways Moscow is trying to incentivize the latter is through the creation of the "Hectare in the Arctic" program.



Map 1: Territories included in the "Hectare in the Arctic" program. Source: http://n-mar.ru/news/35277-v-pervyy-den-realizacii-programmy-arkticheskiy-gektar-v-arhangel-skoy-oblasti-podano-315-zayavleniy.html

The AH program is administered by the Ministry for Development of the Far East and Arctic, and is an expansion of the government's 2016 Far Eastern Hectare (FEH) program, which was designed as one way to discourage depopulation from the country's peripheral areas and, hopefully, to encourage in-migration. Approximately 1.1 million hectares were made available through the AH program. The land plots were "donated" by six of the sub-federal administrative units that are listed as Arctic territory. The Murmansk oblast' has approximately 730,000 available plots, the Republic of Karelia – approx. 337,000, the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug – approx. 17,000, the Republic of Komi – 4261, and the Nenets Autonomous Okrug – 1293. Krasnoyarsk krai is included in the project and intends to offer up 2500 hectares, but has yet to launch the program in its territory (Voronova, 2022). The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) and the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug are also considered to be Arctic territory, but are not included in the AH program because they are already included in the FEH program. The benefit to participating municipalities would be that "the unused plots of land [would be put] into economic turnover and therefore increase tax payments to the local budgets" (The President signs.., 2021).

To an outside observer, this program may seem reminiscent of nineteenth-century American land races. In fact, several Russian scholars have commented on the historical similarity (Maksimov, 2021; Sokolov & Volkova, 2022). As well, with the knowledge that the AH program includes land available on the island of Novaya Zemlya, an island north of the Russian continental mainland which has never been permanently inhabited,[8] one might recall the Canadian government's Cold War-era "High Arctic relocation" program, which attempted to bolster sovereignty by colonizing the extreme northern islands of Ellesmere and Cornwallis with "human flagpoles" (Jull, 1994). However, Russian news reports were quick to assure that the needs of current Arctic residents were taken into consideration, for example, Indigenous peoples' reindeer herding areas have been

removed from consideration for the program (MRFDVA, 2022). Furthermore, it seems that localities can opt out of the program entirely, as did two village councils in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (Makarova, 2021).

While it seems that the government hoped that "free" land would be as enticing a prospect in the twenty-first century as it was in the nineteenth, thus far the scheme has not proven too popular. Cynicism towards the initiative has come from internet commentators and experts alike. For example, when a 2020 *RIA Novosti* article announced the government's decision to expand the FEH program to the Arctic, comments ranged from quips about penguins and polar bears to predictions of corruption by local officials seizing the best hectares for themselves ("Polyarniy gektar," 2020). Experts interviewed also expressed pessimism about the program's viability, such as an economist who opined that the AH's purpose was for government officials to justify their salaries without actually accomplishing anything (Zakharchenko, 2021).

For those who have considered obtaining a plot, the biggest obstacle has been lack of infrastructure, the most frequently cited being lack of roads and electricity to the hectares (Lezhneva, 2021). It is unsurprising, then, that the most popular areas have been in the Murmansk oblast' and the Republic of Karelia (KDVA, 2022), both of which have the most developed infrastructure and relatively milder climates, compared to other AH areas. As of 1 June 2022, just over 100,000 people have taken the government up on its offer of either an FEH or an AH plot. According to the operator of the programs, the Corporation for the Development of the Far East and Arctic, 103,800 people have received an FEH plot (out of 140 million available plots) and 2,500 (of the 1.1 million available plots) have received an AH plot (KDVA, 2022). Given that the population of Russia is over 144 million, this means that less than 0.001% of the population has chosen to participate..

Based on the outsized number of promotional articles highlighting participants who chose to create "glamping" sites, hunting/fishing lodges, and even a military sports complex (NaDalniyVostok, 2022), government and media sources seem to be pushing people to consider launching tourist enterprises. One likely reason for this is that, unlike natural resource exploitation, tourism is not a capital-intensive industry and, in theory, provides for greater economic diversity. Another reason is that tourism is a soft-power "technology defining and reassuring sovereignty over a certain territory…tourism may serve as a political mechanism of territorialization and sovereignty maintenance" (Zelenskaya, 2018: 37). According to Zelenskaya, the Russian state engaged in such a territorialization already in 2009, when it created the Russian Arctic National Park, which was intended to demonstrate to the world that Russia had not abandoned its Arctic region after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now, the state is expanding opportunities to small businesses to help it with its work in asserting Russian sovereignty in the Arctic.

Despite its best efforts though, so far, most plots granted are designated for building private houses (Golubkova & Matsiong, 2021). Herein lies the conundrum. Since the majority of AH participants are building homes, rather than starting a business, an external source of income is necessary to develop and maintain it. One of the biggest reasons for outmigration has been the lack of employment opportunities in these regions. To be sure, there are areas in the Far North where labor is needed, such as in the hydrocarbon exploitation regions like the Nenets and Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrugs. However, these areas have underdeveloped infrastructure and therefore are attracting few participants. Furthermore, most of those taking advantage of the offer

have been local residents, tempering hopes of in-migration—and a potential influx of labor—from more densely populated central regions of the country (Ivanova, 2022).

Security, Territory, Population

In a series of lectures from 1977 to 1978, Michel Foucault articulated the precursor to his groundbreaking governmentality concept as "security, territory, population." In this triad, he understood security as an attempt by the state to limit "what the state might be called to account for or what the state might intervene in and how" (Salter, 2019: 360). This decidedly neoliberal security concept is operationalized as a devolution of responsibility for potential future negative outcomes onto non-state entities (private enterprises, individuals). The AH program is an ideal case to demonstrate this concept in action. Rather than investing in education or (re-)training northern populations for economic development opportunities beyond raw material extraction, the government is offering land for people to develop on their own. The government will help them get set up (registering a plot, financing the building), but will not assume responsibility for individual-level consideration such as, how can participants pay back the loans if they do not have jobs or how people can develop their plots in the absence of sufficient infrastructure.

While Foucault's focus of inquiry was not on territory (and its attendant concept, sovereignty) on the international level, many scholars in the following years have developed this dimension (Bonditti et al., 2017). This is important, especially in our case, because as prominent Foucauldian IR scholar Mark Salter (2019: 360) notes, "sovereignty does not simply occur in relation to an absent audience or to an international metasovereign authority. Rather territory and sovereignty are both asserted somewhere *in relation to other competing actors*" (emphasis added). So, in Foucauldian terms, territory involves "the consolidation of territorial claims through the assertion of sovereignty" (Salter, 2019: 360) for the benefit of potential international rivals (real or imagined) for ownership of that territory. Here, Russia is demonstrating this understanding of territory in a rather antequated way – colonizing its Arctic region to assert effective occupation over it, despite the fact that no challenges to its sovereignty have been mentioned by its perceived rivals (primarily NATO and China). While it is true that the US considers the NSR to be international waters and that China is investing in Arctic enterprises, it is worth noting that no challenge has been made to Russia's sovereignty over the continental mainland (or Novaya Zemlya) which is included in either the AH or FEH programs.

In Foucauldian terms, population refers, not to people, but to quantitative groups that are socially constructed "through knowledge practices and governed indirectly through cases, rates, and statistics [and from which] populations came to be constructed, known, and managed" (Salter, 2019: 361). In our case, Russia is demonstrating this understanding of population through its constant worry about demographic decline. The remedy that Russia is proposing – the Arctic Hectare program – demonstrates the government's intense desire to control its Arctic territory and population, primarily for the benefit of an international audience, as well as its tone-deafness to the needs of its Arctic residents.

The overall situation is one of contradictions. The contradictions involved in, and surrounding, the AH program are numerous. In an attempt to generate more local revenue, Moscow is attempting to attract more people to a region of the country that is expensive to subsidize. The preferred areas in Murmansk and Karelia are not where labor is needed most, which could potentially result in higher budgetary commitments from the center. Moreover, the federal government is intent on

pursuing both the FEH and AH programs, despite low levels of interest and even lower levels of participation. These programs suffer from an overemphasis on reaction, based on a "top-down" Moscow-centered view of its peripheries. Rather than taking substantive (as opposed to declarative) action to improve the developmental status of the Russian Far North by delivering on the general needs of Arctic residents for jobs and economic security, quality schools, improved transport infrastructure, increased broadband, etc., the government is offering them bare plots of land. Finally, the AH program is one attempt to signal to NATO and to China that Russia is effectively occupying its northernmost territory and is therefore immune to any external threats. However, Russia's sovereignty over the areas in the AH program are uncontested. The federal government is responding to a challenge that has not been issued about Russia's sovereignty of the continental mainland of the Russian Far North. Such logic will continue to undermine Moscow's domestic Arctic ambitions. Ultimately, this case illustrates the challenges, and central policy contradictions, that Putin's regime faces in making the Russian Arctic an effective zone of economic growth.

Conclusion

In this article, we have attempted to use Foucault's "security, territory, population" analytical model to explain the logic behind the Arctic Hectare program as a reactionary measure of the Russian federal government, in the face of both internal demographic decline and a perceived external threat to its sovereignty in its Far North, primarily by China. In line with the Foucauldian understanding of security, the Russian state has devolved responsibility for its Far Northern economy onto Arctic residents in the hopes that they can build a living, literally from the ground up. Moscow has demonstrated a Foucauldian understanding of territory and sovereignty assertion through an old-fashioned settler colonization campaign. And finally, Moscow's anxiety over demographic decline in peripheral areas, and the need to boost numbers, underscores the Foucauldian understanding of population.

It is still too early to evaluate the outcomes of the AH campaign. At the program-level, as a reasoned assessment would need to wait at least five more years until 2026/2027, when information will be available regarding which recipients actually fulfilled the "productive use" criterion with their hectare. Macro-level developments are also likely to have a significant impact on Russian citizens' desire to "take the leap" into homesteading. Some effects of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine are already being felt. Economic sanctions have caused a halt to Western investment in Arctic partnerships and hesitancy on behalf of Chinese partners, for fear of sanctions being levied against themselves as well. With the NSR being shunned by Western concerns as well as (quietly) by China, Moscow's visions of the Russian Arctic developing into a major transit and energy hub have collided with hard political realities (Solski, 2022). This could lead to another unemployment-induced exodus of residents from the Arctic. With regard to the heavily-promoted tourism opportunities, experience shows that people are less likely to migrate or start a business during times of uncertainty. Those considering establishing a tourist destination have two negatives working against them: the tourism industry has not recovered from the coronavirus pandemic and as Russia is "closed" to international flights and travel.

The greater Russia-China relationship, often contradictory, is the wild card in gauging the future of the AH program. The Putin regime has sought to build an Arctic partnership with Beijing, viewing China as an essential provider of economic and logistical support for the Polar Silk Road, while at the same time pressing its Arctic sovereignty and allaying concerns within Russia about

possible outsized Chinese influence in the Russian Far North. For its part, China has, since February 2022, sought a middle ground between ostracizing Russia and deepening relations with the Putin regime which could result in Western punative measures. From Moscow's viewpoint, there is the potential for the "worst of both worlds" scenario whereby Russia is forced to increase its dependence on Chinese economic support in the face of Western pressures, which might open the door to greater Chinese influence on Russian policies, including in the Arctic, regardless of the results of the AH initiative.

Only time will tell.

Notes

1. Federal Law of 28 June 2021 N. 226-FZ "On Amendments to the Federal Law 'On the Peculiarities of Provision to Citizens of Land Plots in State or Municipal Ownership and Located on the Territories of the Subjects of the Russian Federation that Are Part of the Far Eastern Federal District, and on Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation' and Certain Legislative Acts Russian Federation." https://base.garant.ru/401399809/ [in Russian]
2. For the purposes of this article, the terms "Russian Arctic" and "Far North" will be used synonymously.
3. With a population of 349,190, Arkhangelsk is currently both the largest Arctic city in Russia, as well as the biggest city in the pan-Arctic region. However, it is an historical settlement whose growth was not connected to natural resource exploitation. The Arctic's second largest city, Murmansk (pop. 279,064) was – and still is – a major military outpost. Statistics source: "Resident population of the Russian Federation by municipalities as of January 1, 2022," *Federal State Statistics Service,* format: Excel spreadsheet, uploaded April 29, 2022. https://rosstat.gov.ru/ [in Russian].
4. Presidential Decree of 5 March 2020 No. 164 "On the Foundations of the Russian Federation's State Policy in the Arctic for the Period Up to 2035." http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/f8ZpjhpAaQ0WB1zjywN04OgKiI1mAvaM.pdf [in Russian].
5. 'Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development,' *President of Russia*, 4 February 2022, http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770.
6. White Paper on China's Arctic Policy. *State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China*, 26 January 2018. http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/32832/Document/1618203/1618203.htm [in Chinese].
7. One extreme example can be found in Ananskikh et al. (2019). Although the article's academic quality is questionable, the facts that it was published in a scholastic journal and that the lead author is a member of the State Duma, indicate the pervasiveness of the "China threat" narrative.
8. The Russian Imperial government did attempt to settle a group of Indigenous Nenets people on Novaya Zemlya in the late nineteenth century, but they eventually returned to the mainland (Engelhardt, 1899).

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