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The cold consequences of war

- An investigation into the effects of the Ukraine war on Russia's Arctic strategy

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the ongoing war in Ukraine has affected Russia's activities in the Arctic and to what extent these effects have caused Moscow to deviate from its official Arctic strategy, policies and activities. For centuries, the Arctic has played a visible role in Russian history. It has gone from being the land of opportunity and exploration during the Tsarist period, to constituting a vital part of Russia's economic and ideological development, both in the Soviet Union and in 21st century Russia. The current Arctic policy of the Russian Federation has been mainly formulated in four strategic documents since 2008. Based on these documents and websites belonging to key actors within Russian Arctic policy, the thesis makes a comparative analysis between the policy development taking place before and after the outbreak of the war on February 24, 2022. The analysis focuses on the fields of energy and natural resources, transport infrastructure, military security, and international cooperation, as these are considered especially suitable for investigating the influence of foreign affairs on Russian domestic policy. The analysis finds that the strategy conducted in the Arctic since 2008 has been characterized by a great deal of consistency or recurrence, mainly caused by a very slow implementation process.

The thesis concludes that the Ukraine war and the subsequent sanctions imposed on Russia have harmed Arctic development in multiple areas. As a response to this, Moscow has searched for new ways of promoting private investment within the energy sector, increasing state financing of transport infrastructure, strengthening military control and defense, and seeking stronger cooperation with Asian partners. Despite these consequences, Russia still appears determined to deviate as little from its Arctic strategy as possible in a time of great international pressure. Furthermore, it is expected that Russia will continue this course in the future in order to obtain its development goals, both in regard to domestic and international Arctic policy.

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Introduction

On February 24, 2022 Russian armed forces crossed the border to eastern Ukraine and thereby began a war resulting in enormous human and economic consequences on both sides¹. Western countries responded to the invasion by, among other things, imposing a wide range of sanctions on Russia and suspending much of the international cooperation with Moscow. The international effects of the war have thus been felt in many parts of Russian society and politics.

This thesis seeks to understand how the current war in Ukraine has affected Russia's activities in its Arctic territory and to what extent the effects of the war have caused Russia to deviate from its Arctic activities, policies and strategy.

The Russian Arctic, officially defined as the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF), covers 24,150 kilometers of coastline, which is more than half of the entire Arctic coast (53%). This vast territory stretches all the way from the northern municipalities of the Arkhangelsk Region in the west, to the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) and Chukotka Autonomous District in the east (Arctic Council, 2020; Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic, 2022). The reason for examining how the Ukraine war affects this region lies first and foremost in its great importance for Russia in a number of areas. Besides the vast geographical area, the Arctic region also holds natural resources central for the economic development of the whole country. Approximately 95% of Russia's total gas production and 70% of the total oil production comes from the AZRF. Moreover, the region's mining industry produces strategically important minerals and metals such as nickel, copper, gold and rare minerals (Sergunin & Konyshov, 2018: 135). Another area is transport infrastructure, where the Russian government has put a lot of effort into developing the Northern Sea Route (NSR) – which by Russian legislation is defined as the shipping corridor, consisting of multiple shipping lanes from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, and running along the Arctic coast from Murmansk to the Barents Strait and the Far East (barentsinfo.org, 2022; Zysk, 2015: 445). Due to climate change, the NSR has the potential to become an internationally important shipping corridor by significantly shortening the transport time between Europe and Asia.

¹ The thesis uses the “Ukraine war” when referring to Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 and the “Ukraine crisis” when referring to the events connected to the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Beside natural resources and infrastructure, which both hold great economic opportunities, the Arctic is also of vital strategic importance. It has the most direct access to the Atlantic Ocean and is home to the Northern Fleet and most of Russia's nuclear weapons (Laruelle, 2020: 9). Thus, it is very important for Russia to defend the borders of its Northern territory. These are some of the main reasons why Moscow has returned its attention towards the High North since 2008 after neglecting it for several years. Due to the many political hopes and ambitions attached to the AZRF, any event that has consequences for the Arctic, such as the war in Ukraine, might affect the development of Russia as a whole. The question examined in this thesis is important from an international perspective as well. The Arctic is a territory shared by different states and, due to its growing development potential, subject to increasing international interest beyond these as well. Since Russia is the biggest actor in the Arctic, the actions taken by them will almost certainly influence all the other circumpolar states. Thus, the effects of the current Ukraine war on Russian Arctic activities may also influence the activities and policies of other states.

Literature review

The adoption of *Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period up to 2020 and Beyond* back in 2008, marked a return of the political focus to the High North, something that otherwise had not really existed since the Soviet Union. This thesis looks into this development within Russia's official Arctic policy and how it is has been influenced by the ongoing war in Ukraine. Due to the very recent outbreak of the war, no research has been made into the latter, but the development of the Arctic strategy has been followed by scholars both in and outside Russia.

When it comes to Russia's Arctic policy since 2008, both Western and Russian scholars share many of the same arguments. According to Maria Lagutina (2021), Russia's current Arctic strategy in itself is largely consistent, but the consistency goes beyond that by drawing on historical Russian experiences and achievements in the Arctic. The claim of consistency is backed by other scholars, of which some state that not even the change in the international political situation, especially after the 2014 Ukraine crisis, has had any significant influence on the strategy (Sevastyanov & Kravchuk, 2020; Laruelle, 2020; Konyshv et al., 2017).

On the other hand, it is clear that a consistent strategy does not necessarily equal an effective and successful implementation. Blakkisrud (2019) concludes from his case study of the State Commission for Arctic Development, that despite Russia's impressive progress in the High

North in recent years, the government still struggles to establish efficient institutions for Arctic governance. In this connection he finds that this policy area is “characterized by infighting and bureaucratic obstructionism”. The internal fights between various political bodies are not the only obstacle to the implementation process. The heavy bureaucracy in itself also results in many of the decisions never being realized in the region. According to Sergunin and Konyshev (2018) the bureaucracy and the government’s need for control often hinders and undermines any contribution of subnational and civil actors to the development of the AZRF. Besides absence of cooperation and coordination between the different actors, some scholars also point to the lack of financing as an influencing factor. The inadequate funding has, for instance, been visible within the development of infrastructure and the modernization of military capacities in the region (Zhuravel’, 2020; Zysk, 2015; Sergunin & Konyshev, 2018).

The precise question of Russia’s military capacities in the Arctic is one of the most discussed subjects among scholars in recent years. There appears to be a prevailing agreement that Russia has increased and upgraded its military capabilities in the region due to defense considerations, without any ambition to confront the other Arctic states (Zysk, 2015; Laruelle, 2020; Lagutina, 2021; Sergunin & Konyshev, 2018). The main explanation as to why Moscow has increased its military presence in the Arctic in recent years, is that the Russian armed forces, not only in the Arctic, but in general, have been neglected since the 1990s. This has resulted in the armed forces being unable to meet current military standards. To rectify this, the government has initiated a far-reaching rearmament program in order to modernize the army (Konyshev et al., 2017; Lagutina, 2021; Laruelle, 2014b; Zysk, 2015; Byers, 2017).

Despite the predominant opinion among both Western and Russian observers that Russia has no intention of escalating any conflict in the Arctic, the modernization program has nonetheless been interpreted as a potential security threat, primarily by NATO (Zysk, 2011; Sergunin & Konyshev, 2018). According to Zysk (2011), the stark contrast between the decay of the military in the 1990’s and the recently modernization has “attracted a strong international attention toward the hard security sphere in the region and has contributed to overstatements of the scale and significance of Russian military activity”. On the other side, Moscow regards this increase in NATO Arctic activities, that has been going on since 2007-2008, as a threat to their own security (Klimenko, 2016; Zysk, 2015; Zagorski & Todorov, 2021). In her article, Lagutina (2021) also argues that the rise in NATO activities is another reason for Russia’s increased military presence in the Arctic.

Despite the broad consensus among scholars on Russia's peaceful ambitions in the Arctic, it is clear that the Ukraine crisis in 2014 has caused some changes in the view of the country's security policy. It is probably within this discussion that it is possible to detect the most differentiating views on Russia's Arctic policy. Most scholars seem to agree on the fact that the Ukraine crisis has affected Russia's threat perception in the Arctic. It is, for instance, noticed that the new Russian Military Doctrine from 2014 assigned the protection of the Arctic territories in peacetime to the armed forces for the first time (Laruelle, 2020; Konyshev et al., 2017; Klimenko, 2016). From the Western/NATO perspective it is also argued that the increase in Russian military activities in the Arctic, including the modernization program, have been interpreted as a security threat by the other Arctic states to a larger extent after 2014 than before (Klimenko, 2016; Konyshev et al., 2017; Zagorski, 2017). Even though the perception among the states changed, Zagorski (2018) did not find any immediate change in these countries' overall assessment of military threats in the Arctic region or in their own Arctic military development programs.

This more modest approach to the effects of the Ukraine crisis is shared by other scholars, who argue that Russia after 2014 still continued to prioritize soft power instruments (economic, diplomatic etc.) over hard power (military) (Konyshev et al., 2017). In the same way, Eggen (2021) concludes that Russia's strategic goals in the Nordic region have not changed significantly, despite more tension and aggressive rhetoric. This finding is supported by Byers (2017), who argues that due to the already complex relations between the Arctic states, military force has remained of limited relevance to international relations in the region. This slightly more optimistic perspective is not shared by all scholars, though.

Some take up a more moderate position, acknowledging the fact that the increase in Arctic military activity since 2014, on both sides, has likewise increased the risk of conflict in the region (Laruelle, 2020; Zagorski & Todorov, 2021; Zysk, 2015). Zagorski & Todorov (2021) conclude that the situation in the Arctic has returned to a "new old" normal which is characterized by the policy of military deterrence. Finally, there are also those who argue that the tensions after the Russian annexation of Crimea have caused Moscow to focus more on hard power policies instead of international cooperation. Fondahl et al. (2020) state that Russia's strategic goals of maintaining sovereignty and protecting state borders have outweighed previous priorities of transnational cooperation and development. The most negative assessment is put forward by Rotnem (2018), who argues that Russia has conducted a more

confrontational approach towards the West, caused by the increased threat perception from the West and the mistrust resulting from these countries' reluctance to honor Russia's global status.

Despite the differing views on Russia's Arctic security policy in recent years, it can be concluded that it appears that the widespread conviction among scholars on Russia's Arctic strategy is that Russia still prefers to keep the Arctic a region of low tension (Konyshev et al., 2017; Lagutina, 2021; Klimenko, 2016; Sergunin & Konyshev, 2018; Byers, 2017). As demonstrated here, there does not seem to be much divergence between Russian and Western scholars when it comes to the assessment of Russia's Arctic strategy, although it appears that Russian scholars are more inclined to see Russia as a more dedicated and persistent supporter of international law-based cooperation in the Arctic (Lagutina, 2021; Sergunin & Konyshev 2018; Konyshev et al., 2017).

In general, the findings and arguments within this field correspond to the findings of this thesis. For instance, it supports the argument of continuity in the Arctic policy and Russia's preference for low tension in the region. Unlike previous research, this thesis offers new insight into how Russia conducts its Arctic policy under extensive international pressure. The current Ukraine war is unique in the sense that it has caused sanctions and breakdowns in international cooperation to a degree that has not been seen in many years. This thesis investigates how Russia reacts in such a situation and which factors are decisive to how they conduct the Arctic policy under these circumstances. In this regard, the findings point to Russia prioritizing the continuation of socioeconomic development with the participation of foreign partners.

Theoretical framework

This thesis places itself in the theoretical field of International Relations (IR). More particularly, it draws on a theory within the liberal tradition of IR called 'complex interdependence'.

Complex interdependence, which was set forth by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye Jr. in the 1970s, builds upon a strand within liberalism called 'interdependence liberalism'. The main idea of interdependence liberalism is that power is no longer a question of military capacities only. As a consequence of the modernization process that has taken place especially since the 1950s, the ability of industrialized countries to foster economic development and foreign trade has become a more important tool for securing the prosperity and status of a state than armed forces. The reason for the shift is because the costs of using military force today have increased, while the benefits have decreased (Jackson et al., 2019:114). Interdependence between states

arises accordingly from an increase in trade between states and a high division of labor in the international economy. The main arguments for complex interdependence are that, unlike earlier, relations between states now operate not just among state leaders, but on many different levels via many different actors and branches of government (Keohane & Nye, Jr., 2012: 20-21). In addition, many different transnational relations also exist between individuals and groups outside the state. Under these conditions, economic and institutional instruments are more useful than military force. While supporting the liberal approach to IR, complex interdependence does not completely oppose the realist perspective either. The theory acknowledges that even among modern states there can occur conflicts in which the states will use military power. In these cases, the realist approach offers a better explanation, because it argues that all transnational agreements and relations only exist as long as they work in the interest of the individual states. If a state feels threatened on vital interests, such as security, it will always be willing to resort to military forces it deems necessary.

Complex interdependence is relevant to this thesis in the sense that it offers a possible explanation as to why Russia wishes to continue international cooperation in the Arctic, despite the war in Ukraine. It points to the fact that an industrialized country like Russia, due to interdependence, has become highly dependent on relations with other countries in so many aspects and levels of society. In the Arctic case, an example of that is the fact that Russia relies on foreign technology in the development of energy projects and shipbuilding. On the other hand, the theory also acknowledges that strong transnational ties are not always enough to avoid armed conflict between states.

The presence or absence of examples of complex interdependence in the Russian Arctic strategy, both in the policy documents and in the activities conducted within this area after February 24, 2022, will help answer to what extent the Ukraine war has caused Russia to deviate from its overall Arctic strategy. Since the Arctic policy is mainly formulated on the federal level, the best way to answer the research question is, therefore, considered to be an analysis of the policy agenda, implementation, and formulations as they are expressed in official documents. This is in order to identify the development before February 24. Regarding the activities after February 24 websites belonging to the central federal actors occupied with the Arctic strategy have been analyzed with the purpose of finding policy activities, decisions etc. connected to the Arctic. The documents and websites are considered the most direct expressions of the Arctic policy and by that they give an idea of the intentions and rationality behind the

actions taken by these actors. Furthermore, they give an image of how the policy is represented to the public.

Method

The main purpose of this master's thesis is to examine whether and how the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 has influenced Russia's political strategy in the Arctic and to what extent the activities that have taken place in the Russian Arctic zone since the outbreak of the war are an expression of continuity or disruption with the official strategy.

In order to answer these questions, a comparative analysis has initially been made on Russia's official Arctic strategy, which is formulated in the following four policy documents:

- *Foundations of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period up to 2020 and Beyond*
- *Strategy for Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and Guaranteeing National Security up to 2020*
- *Foundations of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic until 2035*
- *Strategy for Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and Ensuring National Security until 2035*

The purpose of analyzing these documents first is to identify how public policy on the Arctic has developed. This thesis uses Howlett's (2019) definition of *public policy*, which says that public policy consists of two interrelated elements: *policy goals* and *policy means*. According to Howlett (2019), "policy goals (...) are the basic aims and expectations governments have in deciding to pursue (or not) some course of action, while policy means the techniques they use to attain those goals". This analysis looks at whether the policy goals, means and priorities of Arctic public policy have been mainly consistent or shifting during the period since 2008 where the first of these policy documents was adopted.

The Russian Arctic strategy covers a wide range of policy areas and analyzing it all will be beyond the scope and focus of this thesis. The analysis has therefore been narrowed down to only cover four main areas, which have been selected on the basis of two criteria. The first criterion is how connected and susceptible the area is to influence from the international sphere. This is important since the focus of this thesis is how international factors, in this case the invasion, influence Russia policy in its own territory. The second criterion is the centrality of

the area to the Russian Arctic strategy, understood as a question of whether this area is present in all four documents which makes it possible to determine how the policy has developed within this field. Based on these criteria, the fields of natural resources, transport infrastructure, military security, and international cooperation have been selected.

Since the analysis covers both the fundamental policies (*Foundations of the State Policy*) and more specific political strategies (*Strategy for Development*), it addresses public policy on all the three policy levels identified by Howlett (2019). The first level, *Governance mode: high-level abstraction*, concerns the most abstract policy aims and the government's general long-term preferences as to policy means. On the second level, *Policy regime: programme-level operationalization*, more operationalizable policy objectives are formulated in order to reach the general policy goals. With regard to policy means, are the specific types of governing instruments chosen here. The third level, *Programme settings specific on-the-ground measures*, identify the specific on-the-ground policy targets needed to reach the general policy goals. Moreover, the policy means are adjusted to make them most capable of implementing the policy programs. Similar levels can be found in Russia's Arctic policy exemplified by their national interests on the first level, more specific goals/tasks divided under each policy fields on the second level, and concrete projects planned for each of the Arctic regions and districts on the third level.

The second step of the analysis has been to compare the policy formulated in the official strategies with the activities and statements concerning the fields in question issued on the chosen official websites. The aim of the comparison has been to first identify the specific consequences of the war for Russia's Arctic activities. On the basis of the political activities and statements derived from these consequences, the analysis has then sought to determine to what extent Russia breaks with, or tries to continue, its official Arctic strategy.

The analysis covers a period of about seven months, from the beginning of the Russian invasion to the partial mobilization in Russia in September. Even though the analysis mainly focuses on the developments after 24 February, it also looks at the general development in policy documents prior to that date. The partial mobilization of 300,000 men announced by Putin on September 21 is the main reason for not including any activity beyond this month². The

² Some of the sources used in the analysis were published in the end of September after the 21st.

mobilization indicates a significant escalation of the war, and because of the strategic importance of the Arctic to Russia, it also opens up a possibly more tense situation and hence more far-reaching consequences in that region. Analyzing the possible consequences of that will be too extensive a study for the scope of this thesis. A more practical reason for this delimitation has been to avoid the time period in focus of the analysis to overlap with the writing process itself.

The fact that the analysis concentrates on current activities and developments creates, of course, a certain amount of insecurity about the findings of this thesis. This is not to be understood as a question of the validity of the analysis but rather concerns the fact that it is simply impossible to predict the future. Many of the statements and activities included in this study still need to be implemented. For instance, it is difficult to determine how much, despite the good intentions, the Asian countries will actually increase their involvement in Russia's Arctic projects. Therefore, this study can only conclude on the immediate effects and reactions, which do not necessarily equal how the war will in reality affect Russia's activity in the Arctic now and in the long term. Aside from being difficult to predict, many of these plans also depend on factors that lie beyond the scope of this thesis.

Sources

The choice of sources for the analysis of Russia's policy and activities in the Arctic after the Russian invasion of Ukraine February 24, 2022, has mainly been based on a criterion of who the key actors within the official policymaking on the Arctic issue are. This is first and foremost the president and his administration, the Security Council, the State Commission for Arctic Development, and the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic. Since Arctic subjects are discussed on many political levels, the State Duma and the Federation Council have been included in the analysis as well. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense are selected as the last two sources, because these ministries manage parts of the Arctic policy which are considered especially relevant to the focus of this thesis. It can be argued that by choosing only websites belonging to agencies operating on a federal level, the analysis fails to give a detailed picture of how the war is affecting each of the Arctic regions in reality. On the other hand, Russia's Arctic strategy is a federal matter in which the president has the main responsibility, and therefore the federal government can be regarded as the main driver of the Arctic strategy. Another reason for choosing only the federal level is that the thesis investigates international effects on the Arctic. It can be expected that this is something that

will primarily be discussed at the highest political level. An analysis including the regional level would also be too comprehensive to be covered in this thesis.

The investigation only looks into the activities issued on the websites belonging to the official agencies. The decision not to use Russian media in this context is based on the assumption that the websites are the most direct connection to these agencies and therefore provide the most precise image of the intentions of the relevant actors. Although these sources most certainly are not completely true, nor do they present everything discussed or decided on the political level regarding the Arctic, they are still regarded as more objective than the media, which might have an additional agenda that needs to be taken into consideration as well. In general, the war in Ukraine has severely restricted access to Russian sources. Under the current circumstances it is, for instance, no longer possible to go and do research in Russia. The political pressure put on Russian civil society, including scholars, also make interviews of any type nearly impossible. Also, Russian websites, which must be considered to be the easiest accessible type of source at the moment, are subject to restrictions. Some websites are no longer available from some countries outside Russia; this is, for instance, the case for the official website of the Ministry for Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic. Instead, the current analysis has had to rely on what has been posted by the ministry on the Russian government's website. Of course, the war cannot be considered the direct reason for every inaccessible Russian website, but access has certainly been limited since the outbreak of the war.

Disposition

The following chapter provides an historical review of Russia's relation to its northern territories and how this has evolved during both the Tsarist and Soviet period. This is to give an important insight into the different roles that the Arctic has played for the Russian nation over time and how this has resulted in the multifaceted understanding of the Arctic in today's Russia. Chapter two examines the Arctic strategies that have been conducted by Moscow since 2008. It touches upon the overall Arctic strategies as well as the policy programs connected to them. Moreover, it describes the political actors and their role in the decision-making process on Arctic policy. The chapter also looks into the consequences of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 for the Arctic. As background for the analysis, chapter two also provides a brief overview over the effects of the 2022 war in Ukraine, both in regard to the reactions from the international society and activities taking place in the AZRF after February 24, and how these activities have been discussed among Russian experts. Chapter three analyses how the official

Russian Arctic strategy has developed since 2008 within the four policy fields of natural resources, transport infrastructure, military security, and international cooperation. This is then compared with the consequences of the Ukraine war on these areas, to see whether or not the invasion has caused a disruption of the official strategy and how the Russian government has reacted to these consequences. Finally, the findings of this thesis are brought together in a conclusion followed by a look at the future perspectives of Russia's role in the Arctic.

Geographical definition of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation

When referring to Russia's Arctic territories, this thesis uses different terms, such as the High North, the Far North, the Arctic, and, as it is referred to in official policy documents, the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF). The specific geographical area of the AZRF fully or partly includes the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), the Komi Republic, Murmansk and Arkhangelsk Regions, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Nenets, Yamalo-Nenets, and Chukotka Autonomous Districts. It further covers lands and islands specified in the decree "On the declaration of the territory of the USSR of lands and islands located in the Arctic Ocean" from 1926 and other acts of the USSR, as well as the internal sea waters, territorial sea, exclusive economic zone, and continental shelf adjacent to these territories (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2014; Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020a).

Abbreviations

AZRF – The Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation

NSR – The Northern Sea Route

LNG – Liquefied Natural Gas

1 Historical background

The aim of this chapter is to describe the historical development of the Russian Arctic from the tsarist reign of the 1500s to the breakdown of the Soviet Union. During this period the Arctic territories went from being a no-man's land to one of the main engines of the rapid industrialization under Stalin, before returning again to being a neglected and almost forgotten part of the Russian Federation.

1.1 The first steps – Arctic under tsarist reign

Russian interest and progress in the Arctic before 1917 were of a very shifting character, as John McCannon summarizes it in his book *Red Arctic*: “From the days of Ivan the Terrible to the beginning of the twentieth century, Russia’s approach to the North can best be described as sporadic, with long stretches of neglect or ineptitude punctuated by occasional burst of genuine progress” (McCannon, 1998: 12). Despite the lack of attention to the North among both officials and public society, many of the cornerstones of the future Arctic exploration were nevertheless laid in that period.

The first steps towards integrating the Arctic into the Russian Empire were taken back in the mid-1500s, when Ivan the Terrible defeated the Tatars and thereby opened up his realm to expansion towards the east. In 1586 and 1587, the cities of Tiumen and Tobolsk were founded as the first two Russian cities in Siberia (McCannon, 1998: 14). With this expansion, which continued into the 1600s, followed the Russian settlers, who, through Siberia, began to gradually settle in the Arctic regions. Many people came to these areas in search of their own fortune, which most of them found by trading furs. Many also settled in these remote areas for other reasons, such as exile, religion, and land hunger. The unstable political and social situation under Ivan the Terrible also gave a strong incitement for moving east (*ibid.*). The Russian settlers were not the only ones who had an interest in the northeastern parts of the country. Both the Dutch and the British travelled along the Russian north coast during the 1500s searching for the Northeast Passage and thereby hoping to find a shorter trade route between Europe and Asia. Though they never succeeded in doing this, their efforts were not completely fruitless. In 1553, England and Russia negotiated a trade agreement, which years later led to the founding of the Arctic port of Arkhangelsk in 1584 (McCannon, 1998: 13).

Even though people lived in the Arctic part of Russia, vast areas were still relatively unknown land – but with the visionary Peter the Great in power, this was about to change. In 1724, at the very end of his reign, Peter the Great initiated the first Arctic expedition. Under the command of the Danish captain Vitus Bering, the main purpose of the expedition was to find out whether or not Russia was connected to the American continent. After his return in 1730, Bering went on his second journey only three years later, supported by Empress Anna. The expedition, which came to be known as the Great Northern Expedition, lasted from 1733 to 1749. The tasks of the expedition were numerous and comprehensive. They included, among other things, charting the entire coastline between Arkhangelsk and Kamchatka, conducting geographical and anthropological surveys, and, when arriving in Alaska, the crew were to claim any American lands not belonging to Spain (McCannon, 1998: 15). The Great Northern Expedition ended up costing many lives, including Bering's own, but it also produced a so-far unseen amount of information and gave the Russians a much better understanding of their Arctic regions.

The expedition marked a temporary peak in Arctic attention. Even though the Tsarist government acknowledged the potential of the region, they were not willing to invest in the area. They permitted private actors to explore and conduct activities to develop the region, but any national financial support was never on the table (McCannon, 1998: 15). During the first half of the nineteenth century the government did, though, engage in a few polar expeditions, among them Fyodor Litke's journey to explore the coastline of Novaya Zemlya and the White Sea in 1821-1824 (Horensma, 1991: 12). While Europe and America threw themselves into the Race to the Poles during the 1800s, Russia's interest in the Arctic had fallen low. Even though they recognized the great accomplishments of explorers like Roald Amundsen and Fridtjof Nansen, they were in no rush to participate themselves (McCannon, 1998: 17).

Not until the beginning of the 1870's did the Tsarist government again began to show some interest in the North. This time, the focus was on developing a fishery in the Arctic. In 1871 a commission under the Ministry of Finance was formed. The commission should, beside establishing a military presence in the Barents Sea, look into the possibility of constructing a port in Murmansk to support the exploitation of the rich fishing resources in that area. The construction of the port began in 1897 (Josephson, 2014: 24; Horensma, 1991: 18). Still, skepticism prevailed among Russian politicians towards more investments in the North, for example, with regard to developing the Northern Sea Route (NSR). The only infrastructure project east of the Urals that seemed to interest the government of Nicholas II was the

construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, which began in 1891 (McCannon, 1998: 18). In spite of the attitude in this period, Admiral Stepan Makarov still managed to get the Minister of Finance Sergei Witte to fund the construction of the 6,000-ton icebreaker *Ermak*. Makarov wished to reach the North Pole with such a ship, something he never succeeded in, though. When *Ermak* was built in Newcastle in 1898, she was not only the first in a long line of Russian icebreakers, but also the first sea-going icebreaker in the world. The icebreakers have played a significant role in expeditions and rescue missions ever since and are still to be considered the most important Russian contribution to polar exploration (Horensma, 1991: 14).

A few years later, Nicholas II and his government would come to regret giving such low priority to the Arctic and the Far East. The Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) clearly demonstrated the lack of infrastructure in these regions. Not having developed the NSR meant that soldiers, artillery etc. to the warzone had to be transported by the unfinished Trans-Siberian Railway, (the construction was not fully finished until 1916), which in the end resulted in a complete “overload” of the railroad (Josephson, 2014: 27). In addition, the only passable way for the Baltic fleet to get to Japan was by way of the Cape of Good Hope, which meant naval reinforcement arrived far too late (McCannon, 1998: 18). The war was a wake-up call for the Tsarist government which then began making more serious attempts to develop a northern sea route. In 1906, for instance, it was decided that two small icebreakers would be built to chart the route along the northern coast. Two years later, the Council of Ministers decided to give an 80,000-ruble subsidy to any ship making an annual trip from Russian Pacific ports to Nizhnekolymsk in the Kolyma River estuary. In 1911, they also initiated the construction of a number of radiotelegraph stations (Horensma, 1991: 15; Josephson, 2014: 29).

In the aftermath of the war, the government also got involved in various scientific polar expeditions; though only half-heartedly, since the expeditions were not sufficiently funded by the government, and therefore had to seek “voluntary donations” as well (Josephson, 2014: 30). Among these expeditions were the hydrographic expeditions of the Arctic Ocean led by V.A. Vilkitskii. With the task of testing the feasibility of the NSR, the crew made several expeditions between 1910 to 1915. In 1914-1915, they successfully sailed the route from Vladivostok to Arkhangelsk as only the second expedition ever (Josephson, 2014: 30). Unfortunately, not all of the polar expeditions in that period ended as successfully. Private exploratory ventures like Georgy Brusilov’s *St. Anna* expedition in 1912 and Georgy Sedov’s expedition to the North Pole the year after, both ended fatally. This was partly due to the lack of support from the state, but also insufficient knowledge of Arctic conditions had a decisive influence on the outcome

of these ventures (McCannon 1998: 19; Josephson: 2014: 32). During the years of World War I (1914-1918), and the Russian Civil War (1918-1920) following the October Revolution in 1917, not much attention was paid to the Arctic. A few scientists tried to get state support for an Arctic research project, but all the state cared about in the Arctic was of purely strategic and military character (McCannon, 1998: 21).

The overall relationship between the state and the Arctic in this period was characterized by the Tsarist government's very fluctuating efforts to develop its northeastern regions. According to Horensma, Russian attention towards the Arctic mostly occurred under pressure, because imperial Russia felt their sovereignty threatened by other countries, who began to show an interest in the Arctic (Horensma, 1991: 19). But also, awareness of the Arctic among the general population was in sharp contrast to the following years. The low public awareness was partly due to high illiteracy and partly because the state did nothing to show off the polar explorers and their accomplishments at that time; something that changed drastically when Stalin came to power.

1.2 The conquest of the Arctic – Arctic in the Soviet Union

The chaotic years from the beginning of World War I in 1914 to the end of the Russian Civil War in 1920 had, beside putting most Arctic activities on hold, also demonstrated the strategic importance, as well as the vulnerability, of this region. During World War I, the Arctic coast remained the only way into the Russian Empire and thereby constituted an important lifeline for supplies from the British and French allies. During the Civil War, the vulnerability of an unprotected northern coast became clear. This happened when the White commander Yevgeny Miller, backed by American and British troops, managed to take control over the White Sea Region as well as Arkhangelsk and Murmansk, and thereby cut off the Bolshevik's outlet to the Arctic Sea - and in fact, also the last communication between them and the outside world (McCannon, 1998: 20). During these years, most of the Bolshevik concern in the North was concentrated solely on military strategic matters such as troop movements, railroad construction, and fuel shipments (McCannon, 1998: 20).

In the years after the Civil War the Lenin regime had to face famine caused by the war, especially among the population living in the Volga basin and Ukraine. The need for a better and faster transport route, to bring food from the eastern part of Russia to Siberia, led to new explorations of the Northern Sea Route. In 1920 The Great Siberian Bread Expedition

successfully brought over 11,000 tons of grain to Arkhangelsk from Siberia through the Arctic Ocean and the Kara Sea (McCannon, 1998: 21). This expedition was the forerunner of the Kara Expeditions, which sailed once a year from 1921 to 1928. The purpose of these expeditions was to trade raw materials, including grain, from Siberia, with manufactured goods from Europe. With these expeditions, the Lenin government also wanted to reestablish economic and political ties between the eastern-most parts of the USSR and the central industrial region (Josephson, 2014: 44).

The first four Kara expeditions were carried out under the Northern Scientific-Industrial Expedition of the Supreme Economic Council, also known as Sevekspeditsiia. Against the background of a food and trade crisis, Sevekspeditsiia was born in 1920, with a main focus on the scientific and industrial assimilation of the Arctic (Josephson, 2014: 43). Beside the Kara expeditions, Sevekspeditsiia also conducted a lot of scientific research in the Arctic, including exploration of the Northern areas in search of coal. Over the years, Sevekspeditsiia grew into the most prominent research institute on the Arctic and finally, in 1931, became the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute (AARI) (Josephson, 2014: 48). In his years as head of the USSR, after the chaotic period of revolution and war, Lenin actively supported the development of research and development of new technology within all spheres of society, including the Arctic, as he believed that a strong scientific foundation was a prerequisite for a modern economy and the future of the USSR (Josephson, 2014: 44). During the 1920's, the New Economic Policy (NEP) introduced by Lenin in 1921 had, with its more capitalist approach, brought the USSR back from the years of war. The new policy had also fostered a stronger scientific society, and scientists for the first time came to realize the extensive deposits of fossil fuels, minerals, and metals that lay hidden in the Arctic. At the same time, they had to admit that the lack of technology still prevented extraction of these resources (Josephson, 2014: 62).

Joseph Stalin's rise to power in the late 1920's marked one of, if not the, most significant changes to the Russian Arctic: "The Stalinist revolution had a long-lasting impact on the Arctic as a physical space, as a region to be fully incorporated within state economic and military program, and as an ideological construct." (Josephson, 2014: 65). In this connection it can be argued that he is the mind behind the actual conquest of the Arctic. With the first five-year plan in 1928, Stalin quickly replaced NEP with a strongly centralized economic policy. Stalin's plan was to raise the mainly agricultural USSR up to among the leading industrial nations in a very few years. The main means to get there were a rapid industrialization and collectivization of the agricultural sector. This also affected the Arctic, where the state shifted its focus from the

development of more traditional activities, such as hunting, trapping, and fishing, towards heavy industry. Several mining, energy, and transport projects, including prestigious projects such as the White Sea-Baltic Canal, saw the light of day in the northern and far eastern part of the country (McCannon, 1998; Josephson, 2014). Here it deserves to be mentioned that reaching these goals in such a short time was only possible with the comprehensive use of forced labor from the GULAG prison (Josephson, 2014: 65).

In the 1920's the Committee of the Northern Sea Route, Komseveroput, became one of the key actors in assimilating the Arctic within the soviet national economy. The committee was initially created in 1920 from a political discission to put more effort into developing a sea route along the Arctic coast (McCannon, 1998: 27). Over the following years, Komseveroput expanded both in size and authority and got to play an important role in realizing the first five-year plan in the North. To begin with, Komseveroput was only supposed to organize the logistics needed to support different projects within air traffic, sea and river shipping, manufacturing, and mining, but gradually it also got involved in the actual production and development (McCannon, 1998: 30). In the heyday of Komseveroput, it established the city Igarka and the Yenisei river port as well as making significant progress within the transport and communication sector in the North. On the other side, the authorities' attempt to collectivize Arctic agriculture ran into problems, and the government had to downscale or fully abandon their plans of making the northern areas independent of food deliveries from the southern parts of the USSR. Besides that, the collectivization of the reindeer herders resulted in the death of many thousands of livestock. From 1926 to 1933 the number of reindeer fell from 2.2 to 1.6 million (McCannon, 1998: 31). Furthermore, the organization suffered from a lack of expertise and corruption which resulted in supply shortages and shipments ending up the wrong places.

Finally, the end of the first five-year plan in 1932 also meant the end of Komseveroput. The committee had failed to meet the expectations of the regime – a fact that would turn out to be symptomatic for the relationship between the central government and its subordinate institutions for years to come. In the case of the Arctic, the political elite had no sense of reality regarding how such factors as the extreme and unpredictable Arctic climate and the lack of properly trained personnel affected the speed and scope of the development in the North (McCannon, 1998: 32).

In winter 1932, the Stalin government announced the successor of Komseveroput. The newly created Main Administration of the Northern Sea Route, in short Glavsevmorput, was to carry on the task of developing the Soviet Arctic. Glavsevmorput became one of the biggest governmental institutions in the 1930s. The administration was assigned to control an area of two million square miles – approximately one quarter of the whole Soviet territory (McCannon, 1998: 34). And after having outcompeted almost every other public agency operating in the Arctic, the tasks and authority of Glavsevmorput within the North became almost endless. The Stalin government had realized during the first five-year plan that a central authority was needed in order to manage and develop the North. Therefore, Glavsevmorput went from its initial task of managing the security, equipment, and operation of the NSR, to also engaging in areas such as scientific expeditions; polar aviation; agriculture of the Far North; industry; and the daily life of the people living in the Arctic. Besides that, the administration also sought to lay claim on all islands, ridges, and resources in the Arctic. For instance, in 1935 they were to secure full Soviet control over Wrangel and Franz Josef Land (Josephson, 2014: 70-71).

Back in 1932, Glavsevmorput got off to a flying start due to the fact that an expedition on board the small icebreaker, *Sibiriakov*, earlier that year, had managed to be the first ever to navigate the whole of the Northern Sea Route in one single season. The expedition, under the leadership of Professor Otto Yulevich Shmidt, who afterwards was appointed head of Glavsevmorput, had just taken a major step in the development of the NSR. By proving that voyages along the northern coast could be made without having to overwinter, the prospects of the NSR becoming a commercially viable shipping route suddenly improved significantly (McCannon, 1998: 33). This new development was also mirrored in the shipping sector in the following years. In 1935, the freight increased from 14,000 to 65,000 tons and again in 1936 to 271,000 tons. In 1936, fourteen trips along the entire NSR were completed compared to only four the year before (Josephson, 2014: 72). This was, of course, also thanks to the Soviet fleet of icebreakers which, in the late 1930s, was expanded by four new ones (Josephson, 2014: 90).

However, this major progress in the Arctic came with a price. Science and research on the Arctic, in particular, faced restrictions. Even though Glavsevmorput was a partly scientific institution and had invested in and organized new research institutions, the scientists were limited in their work in a way they had not experienced under Lenin. This became particularly clear with Stalin's second five-year plan (1933-1937), in which the focus lay solely on research necessary for economic and industrial development in the Arctic. This clearly demonstrated the

regime's attitude, that every investment made had to come back with a payoff; something that left no room for pure scholarly research (McCannon, 1998: 42).

That said, the biggest loser in Stalin's great development plans must be said to be the indigenous people of the North. In the 1930s, the Stalin regime had rejected the quite progressive policy on ethnic minorities he himself had authored in 1914, on the initiative of Lenin. The support for self-determination, the aim to preserve native languages and culture, had been replaced by a far more utilitarian approach (Josephson, 2014: 58). In 1935, Glavsevmorput assumed the task of integrating the native Siberians into the Soviet society and economy. Before them, the task had been assigned to the Committee of the North. The committee had, with a cultural, and rather paternalistic, approach, tried to cultivate and educate the indigenous tribes into becoming proper Soviet citizens (Slezkine, 1994: 156). Their work had limited success, and Glavsevmorput also chose a very different path. Acknowledging the failure of cultural integration, the regime now decided to completely overrule the native people as far as they stood in the way of economic development (Slezkine, 1994: 204-214). For instance, Glavsevmorput was determined to organize the hunting, fishing, fur, and reindeer industries of the natives. They tried to integrate the natives and their methods within these fields into the Soviet economy, but when that failed the authorities chose to completely ignore them instead. With the use of modern fishing and hunting technology, the state outdid the natives and forced them out of their hunting territories (McCannon, 1998: 54).

In general, it can be concluded that the people living in the North were neglected by the Soviet government. While investing heavily in industry and infrastructure, the people who were supposed to drive this development further often found themselves in the blind spot of the authorities. Bad housing conditions, lack of food, and low or no salary was not unusual. Combined with the harsh climate this often led to low morale and alcoholism. Besides that, or because of that, the state had major problems recruiting qualified personnel to the northern regions. Something all areas of society from shipping to science suffered from (McCannon, 1998: 46-48). The lack of trained staff was one of the factors that made Glavsevmorput unable to meet with the increasing demands from Moscow. Once again, the realities did not match the expectations and ideas of the Stalin government.

When the economic development did not live up to the expectations, Stalin could always turn to the great achievements of the Soviet polar explorers and pilots, who, in the years between 1932 and 1939, time after time demonstrated the USSR's leading role in the Arctic – both to the Soviet people and the outside world. The Sibiriakov voyage in 1932 and the Cheliuskin in 1933-1934, are probably the most prominent polar expeditions at sea of that period. Even though the Cheliuskin expedition actually failed in its mission to navigate the whole of the NSR, it became an ideal example of how the Soviet man and Soviet society were able to overcome even the toughest odds. On its way from Leningrad to Vladivostok Cheliuskin got caught in the ice just before reaching the Bering Strait. After having drifted for nearly five months, the ship began to sink in February and more than hundred passengers had to leave the vessel in a hurry, saving only what they needed to set up a camp right there on the ice. The expedition had to overwinter in the Chukchi Sea until they were rescued by polar pilots the following spring. All passengers except one crew member survived (Josephson, 2014: 107). The destiny of the Cheliuskin was followed closely by the Soviet people, as well as Stalin and his inner circle. When they returned, all members of the Cheliuskin expedition received medals. To honor the pilots' achievements, a new medal was even struck: The Order of the Hero of the Soviet Union. This medal was to become the most coveted medal in the USSR (McCannon, 1998: 68).

The polar pilots themselves also received their part of the attention in these years. In 1937 the pilot Valery Pavlovich Chkalov, who became known in the press as “the Greatest Pilot of Our Time”, and two crew members, flew non-stop from Moscow to Vancouver, Canada via the North Pole. The pilots covered the nearly 9,000 kilometers distance, named the “Stalin Route”, in 63 hours and thereby set a new world record (Josephson, 2014: 94).

These expeditions and impressive achievements served as an important ideological and propaganda instrument for the Stalin regime. They became the backbone of the Arctic myth, also known as the “Red Arctic”, with its brave and honorable heroes who went on incredible and dangerous journeys in order to defeat and conquest the harsh and hostile Arctic. The Arctic myth, then, again became a part of the bigger ideological foundation of Soviet society – the so-called socialist realism. Socialist realism had been picked up from literature by the political leadership, and despite its name, had not much to do with the real world. Social realism, which found its way into every aspect of the Soviet society, was intended to depict the bright Soviet future. The future that the Soviet society would achieve through hard work and industrial development. In this modern myth the hero played a central role by demonstrating Stalinist

values such as patriotism and heroism. Their actions also proved that great technological progress would bring the USSR towards an even brighter future (McCannon, 1998: 82). Therefore, these polar heroes were followed closely by the media and stories of their heroic deeds inspired books, movies, and plays (McCannon, 1998: 81). The ideological meaning and value ascribed to the Arctic in the Soviet experienced a revival after Vladimir Putin became president in 2000. Today, the Arctic myth is depicted by the political elite as an important part of what Laruelle calls a Putin-Style Statehood. A statehood that promotes patriotism as an instrument for securing political legitimacy among the people (Laruelle, 2014a: 9).

The Arctic myth was also used to impress and position the USSR among other countries as a leading military and civil force in the Arctic. This especially concerned America, who the Soviets reluctantly respected for their industrial and technological capabilities (McCannon, 1998: 94). In the late 1930's the glory of the polar explorers began to fade. A number of tragic accidents and failed expeditions contributed to a general decline in public attention. The great expeditions had lost their relevance to a nation that slowly began to prepare for a new world war (McCannon, 1998: 80).

World War II forced the Soviet regime to shift focus and the large-scale development of the Far North and East was suspended. In spite of this, some activity did continue. The NSR was still used as an important transport route for getting lend-lease goods to the USSR from its allies. Also, the high demand for coal and nickel made the regime develop mines that were otherwise regarded unprofitable (Horensma, 1991: 69-70). Because the Americans had established a number of military bases in Greenland after the war, the Soviet Arctic had assumed greater military strategic importance as well. This, combined with the increased tensions between the two great powers, made the Soviet leadership intensify the militarization of the Arctic, with an especial focus on aviation. In the following years a number of airfields were built and a department with special focus on aviation was established (Horensma, 1991: 71). The increased political focus on the strategic importance of the North also resulted in the development of military capacities beneath the sea surface. The first Soviet nuclear submarines saw the light of day around 1958, when the *November* class submarines were put into service. Four years later came the *Echo* class. Since then, new generations of more technologically advanced nuclear submarines have continuously been added to the growing fleet (Horensma, 1991: 110).

During the Cold War the Soviet Union also took interest in development above the sea surface. In 1959 the Soviet regime took the first steps in creating a nuclear icebreaker fleet when they put the icebreaker *Lenin* into operation. The main task for this new class of icebreakers was to escort vessels navigating the ice-filled waters in the North. Thanks to the nuclear technology, the navigation period was extended by two months (Belyayev, 2019: 229). The peak of the Soviet icebreakers came in 1977, when the icebreaker *Arktika* became the first above-water vessel to reach the North Pole (Belyayev, 2019: 232). Within Arctic research, the icebreakers also played an important role in leading the research expeditions on their way north. This also applied to the North Pole floating research stations, which played one of the most crucial roles in Arctic research, especially post-war. These stations, which were established directly on the drifting ice, contributed to a wider knowledge about the central Arctic basin and the northern geography. From 1937 to 1991, a total of 31 floating stations were operating in the Arctic (Belyayev, 2019: 226). In general, the Arctic scientists experienced more autonomy and support from the state during the Cold War - particularly during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev period, though the funding almost entirely went to applied research focusing on the development of the NSR (Josephson, 2014: 172).

The breakdown of the USSR, and Boris Yeltsin's assumption of power in 1991, marked the entrance of a very chaotic decade, which also affected the Arctic regions. Basically, all parts of Arctic society suffered from the collapse. The insecure economic situation in all of the Russian Federation meant that many of the subsidies that were so vital for life in the North, disappeared. The same thing happened to the benefits originally initiated to attract more workforce to the Arctic, such as higher wages and early retirement. In the end, the severely worsened living conditions led to an emigration from the Arctic regions. The unstable political situation also affected Arctic research, where almost all projects were suspended (Josephson, 2014: 336). Put simply, the years of Yeltsin and extensive decentralization left the Arctic regions heavily underprioritized and more or less on their own.

2 Russia's Arctic strategy since 2008 – policy and influencing conflicts

Since Vladimir Putin took office as the second president of the Russian Federation in 2000, the country's Arctic territory has once again become subject to political attention. The Arctic has now gained status as a “leading strategic resource base”. The new title refers to the region's big potential for extraction of natural resources in particular, especially gas and oil (Heininen et al., 2014: 19; Laruelle, 2014a: 5). Since the early 2000s, the Russian government has worked out four policy documents that together constitute the official Arctic strategy. The overall aim of the strategy is to develop this region into an economically prosperous region capable of proving Russia's power status to the outside world. This chapter describes the Arctic strategy under Putin with a focus on the various policy documents and political actors to have outlined Russia's plans in the North until now. Next, it looks into what consequences the Ukraine crisis in 2014 had for these plans. The chapter continues with a brief review of the international reaction to the ongoing Ukraine war, followed by an overview of the initiatives and actions taken within Russian Arctic policy since the Russian invasion. Finally, the chapter looks at how these initiatives fit into the overall Arctic strategy and how these are received and discussed among Russian experts.

2.1 Russia's first Arctic strategies

In September 2008 President Dmitry Medvedev approved Russia's first official policy on the Arctic. *Foundations of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period up to 2020 and Beyond* (Foundations 2008) had already been drafted back in 2001 by the Russian government, with the purpose of outlining the main national interests and strategies in the Arctic (Heininen et al., 2014: 18). The document listed the following as the main national interests: a) the use of the Arctic zone as a strategic resource base to secure the socioeconomic development of the country; b) preserving the Arctic as a territory of peace and cooperation; c) conservation of the unique Arctic ecological systems; and d) the use of the NSR as a unified national shipping lane (Arkticheskaya deyatel'nost', 2008). Foundations 2008 also stated six main policy goals within spheres such as science and technology, international cooperation, and strategic security. In short, these goals aimed to develop the extraction of natural resources, technology, and communication in the Arctic zone, as well as secure the functioning of the armed forces in the area, preserve the environment, and ensure international Arctic cooperation (ibid.).

In the years following Foundations 2008, progress was made in a number of areas of Arctic development. For instance, in 2011, the French energy company Total Energies signed the final agreement with Novatek, Russia's largest privately-owned natural gas producer, on developing the Yamal LNG project located in the Yamal peninsula (TotalEnergies, 2011). Also, important agreements within international political cooperation were concluded, such as the final settlement on the delimitation question of the Russian-Norwegian border in the Barents Sea in 2010 and the formation of a legally binding search and rescue cooperation between the members of the Arctic Council in 2011 (government.no, 2010; Arctic Council, 2011).

Foundations 2008 was followed by *Strategy for Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and Guaranteeing National Security up to 2020* (Strategy 2013), which was approved by President Vladimir Putin in 2013. This strategy built upon Foundation 2008, but was a more detailed and updated version which also elaborated on how to execute the government strategy. For instance, Strategy 2013 outlined more concrete initiatives to be executed within the different focus areas of the strategy as well as elaborating on the implementation schedule of the various tasks. The main interests and goals now combined under "Priority directions of the development of the Arctic zone" were still very much the same.

Observers of Russian Arctic policy pointed to some differences between the two documents. Heininen et al. (2014) argued that Strategy 2013 was more open to international cooperation and investment in the Arctic. It also attached more importance to security, though security in this regard was more about "soft" security³, such as social and environmental conditions, than it was about military strategic issues (Fondahl et. al., 2020: 205). Strategy 2013 also devoted more attention to the role of public-private partnerships, in the sense that it was more detailed about how to involve private businesses in Arctic projects. It also focused more on environmental issues by listing a number of priorities to solve problems within this area. Internationally, Strategy 2013 received a more positive reaction than its predecessor due to its priority to foreign partners (Heininen et al., 2014: 21).

³ 'Soft security' refers to all security issues that are not of military character. For instance, economic, environmental and social security.

The first Arctic strategy plotted the course for the development of Russia's northern territories. This course was first and foremost characterized by a great emphasis on extraction of the region's natural resources - something that has also been demonstrated in reality by construction of major LNG projects in the region. On the other hand, the implementation of the policy has been far from ideal. Heavy bureaucracy, lack of financing, and sanctions have delayed many of the policy goals described in the strategy.

2.2 Actors

Since the early 2000s the Russian Arctic policy has, as all other policy areas, undergone a strong recentralization of power – the so called “vertical of power”. This applies especially in the case of Arctic policy, since this area has such a high priority within national politics (Laruelle, 2014a: 6). The current key actors within Arctic policymaking are the President and his administration, the Security Council, the State Commission for Arctic Development, and the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic (Sergunin & Konyshev, 2019: 79). The Presidential Administration is central in drawing the main lines of Russian national and international policy, also regarding the Arctic. It collects information for the President, and drafts legislative initiatives and presidential documents. The Administration also has the ability to intervene in any decision made by other political agencies (Sergunin & Konyshev, 2019: 83). The most recent Arctic policy, both the foundation and the strategy, adopted in 2020, has been drafted by the president and his administration. It is also the president who has the overall responsibility for its implementation (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020a, 2020b). This is a change from Strategy 2013, where the main responsibility of the implementation process was assigned to the federal government (Arkticheskaya deyatel'nost', 2013).

Both the Security Council and the State Commission for Arctic Development serve mainly as coordinating bodies. The Security Council, headed by the President, is in charge of all aspects of Russian state security, including military, economic, and social security. It also drafts presidential decrees on national security issues. The 2008 Arctic strategy was drafted by the Security Council and all other Arctic policies are revised by the Council before getting the signature of the President (ibid.; Laruelle, 2014a: 5). Under the auspices of the Security Council, in 2020 Putin created the Interdepartmental Commission for the Security Council of the Russian Federation on Ensuring the National Interests of the Russian Federation in the Arctic (my translation) (Sovet Bezopastnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2022a). This commission was established with the purpose of assuming the tasks originally assigned to the Security

Council. In general, the commission is supposed to participate in the development and implementation of strategic documents and coordinate activities between the bodies involved in Arctic policymaking. Moreover, its tasks cover a wide range of other things, including drafting proposals to the Security Council on matters such as organizing defense, mobilization readiness and military cooperation with the other Arctic states, socio-economic development, and environmental safety, as well as analyzing the implementation effectiveness of other state bodies responsible for Arctic policies.

The State Commission for Arctic Development was created in 2015 with the purpose of coordinating all the public and private actors dealing with Arctic development. Their main priorities have been the development of the maritime area, such as the NSR, and exploitation of natural resources (Blakkisrud, 2019: 205-206). In 2019 the Ministry of the Far East became the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic, when the responsibility for Arctic affairs was assigned to them. The Ministry, led by Alexei Chekunkov, coordinates the implementation of state programs in the Arctic and Far Eastern regions, for instance the State Program on the socio-economic development of the Russian Arctic Zone (Government of the Russian Federation, 2022; Pravitel'stvo Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2021). It is important to mention here that several other ministries also take part in governing the Arctic zone, for instance, the Ministry of Transport administrates navigation via the NSR (Sergunin & Konyshchev, 2019: 79). The ministries play an important role in the implementation process within each of their areas, but the final decision-making power first and foremost lies with the President and the Security Council. The legislative powers, the Russian Parliament consisting of the State Duma and the Federation Council, are very limited in their abilities to influence the Arctic policy. They have some say in drafting the state budget and may also draft legislation in relation to domestic and foreign policies, but due to widespread use of executive decree and the presidential right of veto, their influence on final decisions is not very significant (Sergunin & Konyshchev, 2019: 83).

As shown, the number of actors within Russian policymaking on Arctic issues is quite extensive, and this is only on the federal level. With new structures and bodies, such as the State Commission for Arctic Development, being created within recent years, it appears that this number will only become higher. The proliferation of actors results in a very bureaucratic implementation process, which severely slows down the development of the AZRF (Blakkisrud, 2019: 193).

2.3 Policy programs on the Arctic zone

Different federal programs and laws serve as instruments for implementing the overall state policy on the Arctic zone. The most important of these is the State Program on the *Socio-economic development of the Russian Arctic Zone until 2020*, which is meant to be the main instrument for implementing the Strategy 2013. The first version of this program was adopted in 2014, but due to a lack of federal financing it was never fully realized (Fondahl et. al, 2020: 206). A new version of the program was adopted in 2017 with an expanded timeframe until 2025. The 2017 program consisted of three subordinated programs, with the objective of creating “support zones” as means to implement development projects in the AZRF, developing the NSR as well as creating the technology necessary for exploitation of mineral resources in the AZRF (Pravitel’stvo Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2017). The document also referred to 14 state programs and 9 federal programs concerning more specific areas such as education, tourism, and nuclear power. Besides this, the program presented an implementation plan, budget, and detailed strategies for every single region and district in the AZRF (ibid.). The latest version of the State Program was approved in 2021. According to the program, about 15 billion rubles over a period of three years will be allocated to the implementation of the new measures. One of the central goals of this program is to increase the contribution of the AZRF to the economic development of the whole Russian Federation. In order to achieve this, the government wants, among other things, to create favorable conditions for businesses operating in the AZRF as well as attract more labor to the area. The program also seeks to install new measures for supporting the indigenous people living in the Arctic zone (Pravitel’stvo Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2021).

In addition to the socio-economic state program, other laws and programs to foster development in the AZRF have been adopted in recent years. For instance, in 2020 the federal parliament passed a law to support entrepreneurial activity in the Arctic. Much like the state program from 2021, this law aimed at stimulating more investments and business activity in the Arctic. One of the means to do that was through more financial support for the creation of better infrastructure in the AZRF. As in the Strategy 2013, public-private partnerships were mentioned as one of the ways of realizing this (Federal’nyy zakon, 2020). The cooperation between the state and private actors is also evident in the new development plan for the NSR. *Development plan for the Northern sea route until 2035* was approved in August 2022. Looking at this document, it is apparent that private and partly private companies also play a role. This is especially evident in the projects concerning exploitation of natural resources, where private companies like Nornickel (production of nickel and other metals) and Novatek (production of

natural gas) are listed as collaborators (Pravitel'stvo Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2022). Taking these examples into account, together with the Arctic strategy documents, it seems like the concept of public-private partnerships has been a central instrument in the implementation of Russian Arctic policy for the last 15 years or so. This fits well into the general development of Russia, where public-private partnerships have come to play an important role (Ivanov & Inshakova, 2020: v). This financing model has especially been applied within the energy sector, but the social field and transport infrastructure have also been subject to a considerable share of these partnerships (Seleznev et al., 2020: 22).

2.4 Consequences of the Ukraine crisis in 2014

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and the subsequent annexation of the Crimea, had perceptible consequences for Russia's development plans for the Arctic region. The Ukraine crisis caused mainly the US and EU to impose a list of sanctions against Russia. These sanctions, directed at Russian companies, banks, and individuals, severely affected the energy sector as well, since western businesses were now prohibited from exporting technology essential for Russian hydrocarbon exploitation in the Arctic (Fondahl et al., 2020: 206). In addition, Western energy companies pulled out of various Russian energy projects due to the sanctions. This, for instance, resulted in Statoil, now Equinor (Norway), ExxonMobil (US), and British Petroleum (UK) withdrawing from joint ventures with Rosneft; and Total (France), pulling out of projects with Lukoil. Furthermore, the Ukraine crisis coincided with a drastic drop in oil prices the same year, which made the future for resource exploitation in the Arctic even more insecure (Konyshev et al., 2017: 105).

The changed political situation forced the Russian authorities and energy corporations to look east for new actors to fulfill the country's critical need for technology and investments in the energy sector. In this regard, China has proved to be an essential player. In 2001 the two countries had already signed a Friendship and Cooperation Agreement, and ever since they have formed what has been called a 'strategic-partnership' (Ye, 2022). Regarding the Arctic, Russia has been rather reluctant to include China on a political level, which is why they also initially opposed China's request for observer status in the Arctic Council in 2007 (Laruelle, 2020: 20). Since then, though, and strongly affected by the sanctions in 2014, China has proven to be a vital partner to Russia in the Arctic. The most important Chinese contributions in this regard is its participation in the LNG projects, Yamal LNG and Arctic LNG 2, on the Yamal and Gydan Peninsulas. Besides financing, China also contributed to the technology needed for

developing hydrocarbon extraction in the Arctic (Kobzeva & Bertelsen, 2022: 179). In 2018, a more formal confirmation of the two countries' cooperation in the Arctic came, when Beijing launched the "Polar Silk Road" as a part of their Belt and Road initiative. The Belt and Road initiative, launched in 2013, is a major infrastructure project, which in its final form will stretch all the way from East Asia to Europe (Chatsky & McBride, 2020). From Moscow's point of view, this significantly contributes to developing the NSR into an international shipping route (Laruelle, 2020: 21). China is not the only country interested in the Arctic. Both Japanese and South Korean companies have, within the last years, invested in Russian energy and infrastructure projects in the AZRF (Sevastyanov & Kravchuk, 2020: 16-17). India has also engaged in partnerships with Russia on the Arctic. The NSR holds particular interest for Delhi, since India, like China, depends on the import of Russian energy supplies to uphold their economic growth. In this regard, shipping via the NSR will shorten the transportation time significantly (Khorrami, 2022).

The 2014 Ukraine crisis also impacted Moscow's overall political strategy for the AZRF. The crisis and the subsequent sanctions, combined with falling oil prices, considerably harmed the Russian economy. As a result, the financing for the 2014 Arctic socio-economic development plan was allocated elsewhere in the national budget and most of the planned initiatives were never realized (Konyshev et al., 2017: 107). The tense political situation also caused a change in Russia's defense strategy for the AZRF. The new military doctrine from 2014 assigned the armed forces with the task of protecting the Arctic also in peacetime, something they previously had not been responsible for. The change in Moscow's threat perception was also mirrored in the new version of the maritime doctrine from 2015. In this document the Arctic, along with the North Atlantic, was identified as a region where NATO activities and an increased international competition for natural resources and sea routes, would require Russia's "adequate response" (ibid.). This view was repeated later that year in Russia's new national security strategy. Despite these changes, Moscow's fundamental understanding of the Arctic did not change much. More than once these new policies depicted the Arctic as a region of international cooperation and peace. Furthermore, the Kremlin emphasized the need for strengthening multilateral institutions in the Arctic as well as keeping the region outside the tensions between the West and Russia in its Foreign Policy Concept from 2016, which states Russia priorities, goals, and objectives within its foreign policy (Konyshev et al., 2017: 108).

The political intention to keep the Arctic as an area of peace and cooperation was also reflected in the more day-to-day Arctic governance. In many areas the transnational work between the Arctic states continued as before the crisis. This was, for instance, the case within search and rescue operations, fishery, and navigation. Within the Arctic Council, most of the meetings (except for one in 2014 that was boycotted by Canada) and activities within the Council and its work groups continued (Byers, 2017: 386-387).

More tangible changes took place within the Russian military, both in a national and international context, as a consequence of the Ukraine crisis. On a national level, already scheduled initiatives regarding the military forces in the AZRF were accelerated. The new strategic command “North” was established in 2014, three years ahead of time. In addition, the specially trained Arctic brigade was deployed near the Finnish-Russian border in 2015, a year before the unit was supposed to be operational (Konyshev et al., 2017: 118). On an international level, military cooperation in the Arctic was, in most cases, suspended. Russia was excluded from joint exercises, as well as no Russian representative participating in the Arctic Security Forces Roundtables in 2014 and 2015 (Byers, 2017: 385). The Ukraine crisis clearly intensified military activity and tension between Russia and NATO in the north, but Russia had already resumed its military presence in the Arctic back in 2007-2008. At that time, the reinforced defense of the Northern borders came partly as a response to an already increased NATO interest and presence in the area, but also as part of a more extensive modernization program of the entire Russian military, initiated in 2007 with the third State Rearmament Program (Lagutina, 2021:127; Zysk, 2015: 449; Konyshev et al., 2017: 117).

The Ukraine crisis in 2014 affected many aspects of Russia’s strategy in the Arctic. This, first and foremost, damaged energy development in the region, since several international energy companies left the project in the AZRF due to Western sanctions. This made Russia look east for new partners. On a military level, the changed international situation created more tensions between NATO and Russia in the North, and Moscow chose to bring forward some of its planned military initiatives. On the other hand, the transnational Arctic cooperation remained relatively untouched despite international condemnation of Russia’s actions.

2.5 Russia's Arctic strategy 2020-2035

In 2020, two new policy documents on the Arctic were adopted in order to succeed Foundations 2008 and Strategy 2013, which both expired that year. In March, President Putin signed the Executive Order *Foundations of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic until 2035* (Foundations 2020). This document was followed up in October by the approval of the *Strategy for Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and Ensuring National Security until 2035* (Strategy 2020). Both documents were worked on under the President and he holds overall responsibility for the implementation process. Just as the Strategy 2013 did with Foundations 2008, this document outlines more concrete tasks and measures, as well as the stages and expected result of the implementation of Foundations 2020 (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020b; Lagutina, 2021: 120-124). Comparing the new policy documents with the former indicates a great deal of continuity in the Russian Arctic strategy. For example, the key national interests of Foundations 2008 are very similar to the interests in Foundations 2020, except that the new policy includes among its priorities securing sovereignty and territorial integrity and guaranteeing high living standards and prosperity for the people living in the Arctic zone, as well as protecting the traditional way of life of the indigenous people living in the Arctic zone (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020a).

The document goes on to identify five goals for the state policy in the Arctic zone: a) improvement of the quality of life for the population in the Arctic, including the indigenous people; b) acceleration of the economic development of the Arctic zone and increase of its contribution to the economic development of the entire country; c) preservation of the Arctic environment and protection of the native habitat and way of life of the indigenous people; d) implementation of mutually beneficial cooperation and peaceful resolution of all Arctic disputes on the basis of international law; and e) protection of national interests in the Arctic, including in the economic sphere (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020a). Probably the most noteworthy difference between the new and old strategy is the high priority on the well-being of the population living in the AZRF including the indigenous people, which is mentioned twice in the policy goals. The changed situation between the West (NATO) and Russia, especially after the Ukraine crisis, also seems to have had an impact on the Arctic strategy. The protection of national security in the Arctic has now become a top national interest. The Foundations 2020 also presents the military build-up by foreign states in the Arctic and an increased conflict potential in the region, as threats. In this context, NATO is the main concern (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020a; Lagutina, 2021: 127).

Strategy 2020 demonstrates a high degree of similarity in its priorities with the previous strategy. The only thing that differs is the higher priority given to securing sovereignty and territorial integrity for the indigenous people of the North. It is also clear that the 2014 Ukraine crisis has had an impact on the new strategy that, in addition to the increased focus on military defense, has also added military build-up of foreign states to its list of threats.

2.6 International response to the Russian invasion

Since the outbreak of the war, a broad range of Western countries, especially the US and EU, and their Asian allies, such as Japan and South Korea, have imposed a wide range of sanctions on Russia (Reuters Graphics, 2022). The sanctions, which have been introduced continuously since the end of February, have been aimed at everything from individual Russians to the country's financial system. For instance, the main Russian banks have been excluded from the international financial messaging system, Swift - something that has caused delays in payments for Russian oil and gas (BBC, 2022). Travelling to and from Russia has also been made a lot more difficult, since several Western countries closed their airspace to Russian flights. Russia responded by doing the same to Western flights (RFE/RL, 2022). The invasion has also led the EU and other countries to ban export of a number of goods to Russia, including dual-use goods, that can be used for both military and civil purposes, equipment used in the energy sector, and cutting-edge technology. In addition, the import of Russian commodities such as gold, wood, liquor, and seafood has been sanctioned (European Council, 2022). What has properly caused most attention and discussion is the sanctions on Russian oil and gas, since the country is a main supplier to the European continent. For that reason, the EU has not imposed sanctions on Russian gas, but the union has stopped all import of coal, crude oil, and most refined petroleum products (beginning February 2023) from Russia (ibid.). Several Western companies have also abandoned the Russian market or pulled out of joint projects with Russian partners (Reuters Graphics, 2022).

The invasion has had significant implications for Russia on the political level too. Several Russian diplomats have been expelled from a number of European countries and the US (Gabidullina & Marcos, 2022). Cooperation within transnational organizations has also been affected. For instance, the other member states of the Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council suspended all activities including Russia, back in March (Udenrigsministeriet, 2022; The Barents Euro-Arctic Council, 2022). Russia has also been expelled from the international human rights organization Council of Europe (Ritzau/AFP, 2022), as well as the

Council of the Baltic Sea States (together with Belarus) (European External Action Service, 2022). The fact that the abovementioned sanctions only constitute a minor fraction of what has been introduced by Western countries since February, demonstrates how seriously the situation is being viewed by the West. It further shows a responsiveness that has far outdone the international reactions following the Ukraine crisis in 2014.

2.7 Arctic policy implementation after February 24, 2022

The latest Arctic strategy from 2020 states that the President has overall responsibility for the implementation of the policy. Despite that, though maybe not surprisingly, the President has not been involved in many activities concerning Arctic policy since the outbreak of the war. According to the President's official website, Putin has only participated in one meeting regarding the development of the Arctic zone. At the meeting, which took place back in April, other high-ranking members of the Russian government also participated, such as the deputy chairman of the Security Council, the chairman of the State Commission for Arctic Development, the foreign minister, the minister of defense, the minister of the development of Far East and the Arctic, and various other ministers and leaders of the Arctic regions (Prezident Rossii, 2022a). A wide range of topics was discussed such as development of the NSR and other infrastructure, science, the living conditions of the Arctic population, and energy projects. The main points from the meeting were to lay out a long-term plan for the NSR, and building of more icebreakers and vessels to operate this corridor. Also, the construction and maintenance of an emergency rescue fleet and centers in the Arctic had high priority. Furthermore, the President asked for the development of a federal law on northern importation, which is an extensive plan on the goods needed in the region and how to transport them there. The last matter of high priority mentioned was the need for better living and housing conditions for the servicemen stationed in the Arctic regions (Prezident Rossii, 2022b).

It is evident from this, that the current priorities for the AZRF relate to domestic issues. This was already the case back in 2014, due to the Western sanctions imposed on Russia. The new wave of sanctions in 2022 have further limited the possibilities for international partnerships in the Arctic zone. Although this was recognized and mentioned by several participants in the meeting, it is worth noticing that they still stressed that the AZRF was open to all interested partners, both national and international. Furthermore, the chairman of the State Commission for Arctic Development emphasized the current Russian presidency of the Arctic Council, which expected the other Arctic states to resume work within the council (ibid.).

Since February 24, the State Commission for Arctic Development has mostly been focused on the NSR. In June, the commission reported on a meeting regarding the development plan of the NSR for the period up to 2035. According to Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, the task is first and foremost to secure a regular passage via the NSR. Secondly, the goal is a strategic development of the NSR, including an expansion of the vessel and icebreaker fleet as well as improved rescue and satellite systems (Arktichskaya deyatel'nost', 2022a). Much in line with these tasks the commission has, at another meeting, identified the present main priorities and projects for the AZRF as the following: modernization of shipbuilding and ship repair; development of NSR as well as other transport infrastructure in connection with that; establishment of the international research station 'Snowflake'; and the program of cluster development of solid mineral deposits (Arktichskaya deyatel'nost', 2022b). Moreover, the commission has appointed a science and technology council, whose main task is to formulate a research agenda that will provide a domestic technological foundation for the development of the Arctic zone. The council is supposed to conduct research mainly in relation to the development of the NSR and the creation of equipment that can replace the sanctioned Western technology that is critical to resource exploitation in the Arctic (Arktichskaya deyatel'nost', 2022c).

In August, the state development plan for the NSR until 2035 was finally approved. With this plan, the government intends to invest 1.8 trillion rubles in large-scale projects such as new oil and coal terminals and the development of transport hubs in Arkhangelsk and Murmansk. A large part of the plan is also dedicated to the construction of new icebreakers and rescue vessels, including shipbuilding facilities (Arktichskaya deyatel'nost', 2022d). The war in Ukraine has had a direct effect on the increased focus on the NSR. Several government officials have stated that a key motivation for investing in the Northern infrastructure, is that Russia now has to trade more with Asian countries as a consequence of the sanctions imposed by the West. In this context, the NSR poses one of the shortest transport routes to the Eastern markets (ibid).

Since the beginning of the war until the end of September, the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic has not been very occupied with issues regarding the AZRF. Out of the 23 political activities published on their website only three is directed or partly directed at the northern territories. The first is a decision to annually allocate 560 million rubles to subsidize transport on the NSR. The second concerns an easing of loan requirements to entrepreneurs who wish to start businesses in the Far East and Arctic. The last one refers to the approval of the development plan for the NSR until 2035. All other initiatives are about the

socio-economic development of the Far East, particularly with a focus on improving the living conditions of the population residing in this region (Minvostokrazvitiya Rossii, 2022a). This uneven division of attention is not new, but has been the reality ever since the Ministry for the Development of the Far East became responsible for the Arctic in 2019 (Lagutina, 2021: 122).

The new Maritime Doctrine signed by President Putin in July 2022, also testifies to the effects the current Ukraine war has had on Russian Arctic policy. In the doctrine, the development of the AZRF as well as the NSR has been added to the list of national interests. The Arctic is also perceived as a region with a higher risk of conflict. According to the document, this is due to increased foreign naval presence in the region and other state's attempt to weaken Russia's control over the NSR. Furthermore, the doctrine focuses on the transformation of the Arctic into a region of global competition not only in an economic context but also in a military one. In this connection, it is not surprising that strategic stability in the AZRF is among the doctrine's top priorities. Another priority is more control over foreign naval activity in the water areas of the NSR, as well as strengthening the combat potential of the Northern and Pacific Fleet in order to protect the Arctic zones against military threats. In line with much of the other Arctic policies conducted since the outbreak of the Ukraine war, the doctrine also dedicates a big part of its Arctic section to the development of the NSR (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2022).

All of these statements and initiatives together draw a picture of an Arctic policy that in some regards has been affected by the war in Ukraine. First, Russia has to rely to an even greater extent on cooperation and trade with Asian countries, which has made them focus even more on the development and protection of the NSR. Second, Russia must, due to Western sanctions, concentrate greater efforts into being self-reliant when it comes to creating the technologies they need for exploitation of the natural resources in the Arctic. Third, the Maritime Doctrine indicates a shift in the government's threat perception in the Arctic regions, which might lead to more military presence in that area.

2.8 Expert assessments of Russia's current Arctic policy

The latest development within Russia's policy on its Arctic zone has also been discussed and commented on by Russian observers. They recognize that the war in Ukraine has an impact on Russia's policy in the Arctic. In the case of the NSR and the newly adopted development plan until 2035, a number of experts argue for a more cautious assessment of the potential of the NSR. According to Diana Timoshenko, senior employee of the Center for Arctic Research at the Russian Academy of Sciences, the NSR still suffers from a lack of the necessary transportation and logistical systems. Experts also point to the fact that the navigation conditions of the NSR are still very unpredictable; climate change has made it even harder to predict the movement of ice, and instances of ships getting stuck still occur. This is why Igor Pavlovskiy, Head of the Arctic Development Project Office 'PORA', does not see NSR becoming an internationally important shipping lane in the foreseeable future. Indeed, he also notes that this is no longer part of the government's plan (Alekseyev, 2022; PORA, 2022). For the plan to come true, and to reach the goal of 80 million tons of cargo traffic along the Northern Sea Route by 2024, the government still needs to adopt one single unified law to regulate all aspects of the NSR (Alekseyev, 2022). On the other side, some experts still believe that it is possible to reach the goal of 2024 – maybe even exceed it. According to Elena Egorycheva from the RUDN University, Chinese involvement in the NSR is another important factor that will make the route more accessible to shipping companies (ibid.).

The political turn to the East has also been a subject of discussion among Russian scholars. Although Russia has been looking eastwards for some years now, experts note that, after the new wave of sanctions and the closing of many Western markets, this turn is now not so much a choice as a necessity (Bordachëv, 2022). In the current situation, Russia has to rely on China in particular for many of their Arctic projects. According to Dmitriy Mikhaylichenko from PORA, China is indeed involved in many projects in the Arctic zone, among them the construction of a new icebreaking fleet, but their strategic interests in the Arctic still differ significantly. China, as a self-declared Arctic state, argues for an internationalization of the region. In contrast, Russia is still very reluctant to let anyone, besides the states with actual Arctic territory, govern Arctic affairs (Mikhaylichenko, 2022). However, Sweden and Finland's application for NATO-membership, and thereby the shift in the power balance among the Arctic states, may change Russia's position. From a Chinese perspective, they might be hesitant to enter into deeper cooperation with Russia while the war is still ongoing. This is primarily due to the fear of Western sanctions damaging the Chinese economy (ibid.). For these reasons,

according to Russian scholars, Moscow is right in seeking Eastern involvement in the Arctic project, since they might have no other choice; but it is unclear to them how actively a country like China will engage in the foreseeable future.

The change in the Russian perspective on the security situation in the Arctic, as demonstrated in the new Maritime Doctrine, is observed among Russian scholars. Member of the Expert Council at PORA Andrey Krivorotov, notes that the cooperation with other Arctic states is no longer among the regional priorities; instead, a stronger emphasis is put on protecting Russia's sovereignty, which, according to him, has a clear connection to the current state of international relations. Others also see the doctrine's focus on defense rather than cooperation as a natural reaction to the increased NATO activity in the Arctic, as well as Finland and Sweden's accession to the alliance (Kadomtsev, 2022). The doctrine also stresses the importance of the Arctic hydrocarbon exploitation to the socio-economic development of Russia. Because of that, there is, according to military expert Igor Korotchenko, nothing surprising in Russia wanting to protect its marine areas where the offshore extraction is taking place. The same thing applies to the growing strategic importance of the NSR. He also states that the doctrine confirms that Russia can only be self-sufficient and strong if its fleet is as well (RIA Novosti, 2022). In general, the discussion about the new Maritime Doctrine among Russian experts does not reveal much skepticism about Russia's more defensive stance in the Arctic. Instead, this is rather seen as a natural and justifiable response to NATO's activities.

The war in Ukraine has definitely had a significant impact on Russia. This is mostly due to Western sanctions, which have affected many different areas of Russian politics and society. Despite these challenges, the country has not stopped engaging in the Arctic territory. The most conspicuous example of this might be the adoption of the development plan for the NSR until 2035, which indicates that Moscow still has great ambitions for this region. The Maritime Doctrine also demonstrates an increased attention towards the North, albeit in a security context. These activities have also been commented on by Russian experts. The development plan for the NSR has mostly caused skepticism regarding its feasibility, while Russia's changed position in Arctic security is seen as an understandable response to increased NATO presence.

3 International effects on Russia's Arctic policy

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has significantly affected Russia's Arctic activities. For instance, several projects and partnerships important to the development of the AZRF have been suspended or completely called off. The following analysis identifies four domains of Russia's Arctic policy that have been most amenable to the changing international situation. These are: energy projects, transport infrastructure, military security, and international cooperation. The analysis focuses on the development within these areas in Russia's official Arctic strategy documents since 2008, compared to the activities and statements made within these fields since February 24 on official websites of the Russian state. The aim is to determine whether activities within these fields, conducted since the outbreak of the war, are expressions of continuity or rupture with the official Arctic policy that Russia has conducted since 2008. Since these fields contain significant elements of both domestic and foreign policy, the analysis will also provide an insight into how Moscow prioritizes these two fields when it comes to Arctic policy.

3.1 Developing a strategic resource base

Russia has based much of its future economic prosperity on the natural resources hidden in the Arctic zone, therefore the country has also put a lot of effort into developing the extraction of these resources. In order to do this, Russia has depended heavily on foreign investment, knowledge, and technology, which is why this field is also susceptible to changes in the international sphere. A closer look at the following policy documents shows that the development of natural resources in the Arctic is characterized by progress in some respects but also stagnation in others.

3.1.1 Natural resources and the Arctic strategy 2008-2020

When looking at both the Foundations 2008 and 2020 it is clear that the large hydrocarbon deposits hidden under the Arctic have been the center of attention right from the beginning. In Foundations 2008, the use of the Arctic zone as a strategic resource base had the highest priority among the national interests, and developing the resource base was the most important objective of the state policy. The fact that these resources were seen as "providing the solution to problems of social and economic development of the country" (my translation) (Arkticheskaya deyatel'nost', 2008), further underlined the great political importance and expectations attached to this area. It was also specified here what the term 'resource base' more precisely covered, which was hydrocarbon resources, water biological resources, and other kinds of strategic raw materials (ibid.). From the subsequent statements on resources in the document it became

obvious that, besides being a top priority, the process of turning the Arctic zone into a leading resource base was in its initial stage. The key tasks included developing the oil and gas deposits in the Arctic, as well as technologies that would allow Russia to start exploiting deposits, especially at sea. Besides this, the document also addressed the need to establish the necessary transport and power infrastructure and economic regulations on the area. In order to meet these goals, the government stated an intention to enter into cooperation with both international and private domestic partners.

From the document it also appeared that a fundamental prerequisite for the development plans still needed to be settled, which was that Russia had not determined the border of its territory in the Arctic Ocean⁴. The delimitation of Russia's Arctic zone was stated as the number one strategic priority and part of the first stage in the realization of Foundations 2008 (Arkticheskaya deyatel'nost', 2008). The great importance attached to this indicates that Moscow at that time saw a settlement of this question as an important prerequisite for the further development of the AZRF. In the context of natural resources, this makes good sense, since Russia, when finally knowing the size of their territory, could begin to uncover the full extent of the natural resource deposits located in the Arctic Ocean. With that in mind, it would be possible for the government to plan the exploitation taking the profitability of each site into consideration. In this context it should be noted, though, that the main part of the hydrocarbon deposits in the High North are most likely located within the 200-mile limit. This means that they are to be found within the already established exclusive economic zones of the Arctic states and thereby there is no legal impediment prohibiting Russia from exploiting its resources (Konyshev et al., 2017).

⁴ In 1997 Russia formally ratified the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which has become the fundamental legislation on continental shelf delimitation in the Arctic Ocean (United Nations Treaty Collection, 2022). Four years later Russia submitted a boundary proposal under UNCLOS to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). The commission refused to make a final decision, but instead returned the proposal to Russia with the requirement of additional evidence supporting their claim (Antrim, 2011: 120). In 2015 Russia submitted its application for the second time and are still waiting for the CLCS to make a decision (Division for Ocean Affairs and The Law of the Sea (UN), 2022).

Strategy 2013 elaborated in more detail what needed to be done in order to turn the AZRF into the leading resource base. In this document the government listed eight initiatives on the use and development of Arctic natural resources. These initiatives also indicated that the exploitation of the natural resources was still in a very early phase. For instance, the organization of a comprehensive study of the continental shelf and preparation of the hydrocarbon reserves for development were top of the list. The construction of the infrastructure required to connect the Arctic regions with the rest of the country was another part of the government's plan, as well as the development of different mineral deposits on the islands of the Arctic Ocean - something that should take place on the basis of large investment projects. The Strategy went on to identify prioritized areas of hydrocarbon extraction in the AZRF, which included the Barents, Pechora, and Kara Seas and the Yamal and Gydan peninsulas. Besides the quite preparatory character of the initiatives, the need for modern technology in order to move forward with these projects appeared as another basic feature of the Strategy 2013. Modern technology was required both in connection to the actual extraction of natural resources, especially offshore, and in order to establish communication and monitoring systems to ensure the safe operation of the various energy and mineral projects in the Arctic. The lack of up-to-date Russian technology was in fact recognized as one of the main risks and threats to the development of the Arctic zone. But it was not only the technology that was missing. The document also mentioned the present and future requirements for more qualified specialists in the field of hydrocarbon extraction and processing (*Arkticheskaya deyatel'nost'*, 2013).

In line with Foundations 2008, the delimitation of the Russia's continental shelf was still considered important, but its position further down the initiative list suggested that the focus had shifted towards developing the areas and deposits which were already within the territory of Russia. That said, looking at the revised implementation plan in Strategy 2013, the determination of the Russian outer borders still came prior to the development of the Arctic into a leading strategic resource base. Something that was expected to happen in the second and last stage of the strategy from 2015 to 2020.

When comparing Foundations 2008 with Strategy 2013 it becomes clear that a lot did stay the same between those years. The government was challenged by the fact that the whole communication and transport infrastructure system required to properly develop the on- and offshore hydrocarbon potential, was out of date or simply more or less non-existent. Besides

that, Strategy 2013 also presented some new additions such as specific priority areas for hydrocarbon extraction and an increased focus on modern technology.

3.1.2 Natural resources and the new Arctic strategy 2020-2035

Compared to Foundations 2008 and Strategy 2013, Foundations 2020 clearly lowered the ambitions and slowed down the pace when it came to turning the Arctic zone into a leading strategic resource base. On the new list of national interests, the development of the Arctic zone into a strategic resource base had been moved from a first to a fourth place out of six (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020a). Taking the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and the subsequent Western sanctions into account, this was no surprise, since they effectively restricted the much-needed foreign involvement in the Arctic hydrocarbon projects with regard to technology, knowledge, and investment. That the focus to some degree had shifted away from natural resources was also evident in other parts of the document. It was neither directly stated as an objective nor as a main area of implementation in the new policy. Going through the document, this fact was further underlined by the relatively few references to hydrocarbon or mineral exploitation.

As in Foundation 2008, the lack of domestic technology was once again defined as a threat to national security, as were the low rates of geological exploration of mineral resource deposits in the Arctic. The fact that the challenges were still identical is further witnesses to a development that had come to a standstill. For that reason, it is hardly a surprise that one of the main tasks within the field of economic development was to increase geological exploration of hydrocarbon deposits as well as the extraction of gas and oil and the production of liquefied natural gas. Generally, the content of Foundations 2008 and Foundations 2020 on natural resources were characterized by a great deal of repetition. It is clear that the ambitions for turning the Arctic into the leading strategic resource base by 2020 did not come true and the area as a whole was given a lower priority, which was also reflected in the tasks and challenges staying very much the same.

The Arctic Strategy 2020 built upon and elaborated the implementation of Foundations 2020; therefore, the document did not add much new to the overall plan for developing natural resources in the Arctic (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020b). In comparison with its predecessor from 2013, the development of hydrocarbon and mineral resources had lost some importance. Where this matter had its own dedicated section in Strategy 2013, it appeared in Strategy 2020 only as minor paragraphs in different sections. Looking through these paragraphs

it becomes evident, though, that the policy measures envisaged for this topic in many ways were very similar to the earlier strategies. The main focus was still on developing the infrastructure, industry, extraction sights etc., needed in order to bring the Arctic to a level where it could meet the requirements of a modern energy and mineral sector. Also, development of new technology still played a central role in the state priorities. The developments from Strategy 2013 to Foundations 2020 give the impression that not much happened within the energy and mineral areas in these years. The tasks and challenges did not really change and, perhaps because of that stagnation, the new strategy lowered its priority of this area.

Something that did happen, though, was that, unlike Strategy 2013, the new strategy attached more importance to the financial aspects. The need for private investment in particular was stated more than once, in connection to everything from geological exploration to transport and energy infrastructure. The low rate of investment in natural resource projects was in fact also listed as one of the risks and challenges in the development of the Arctic zone. Along with private investment, the strategy intended to implement new state support measures directed at the creation of new technology connected to the development of oil and gas fields, both on-shore and off-shore, and the production of liquified natural gas.

The fact that more attention was attached to the financial aspects of developing natural resources in the Arctic most likely had something to do with the influence that the Western sanctions in 2014 had on the Russian energy sector. The state was now forced to put more focus on how to replace the investments, knowledge, and technology, that before was provided to a large extent by European and American companies. Despite this, it is interesting that the strategy still included international cooperation and investment with regard to the exploitation of natural resources, and to an even a bigger extent than in Strategy 2013. In the section on international cooperation, it was specified that the government intended to work out principles for the implementation of investment projects that included foreign investments. Furthermore, they wanted to organize events specifically aimed at attracting foreign investors to projects in the AZRF.

By looking at the policy documents which followed, it is evident that the delimitation of the continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean, which back in 2008 was perceived as an important prerequisite for the transformation of the Arctic into a leading strategic resource base, had lost its immediate importance. In this regard, Strategy 2020 was no exception; although the issue was still listed in the section on international cooperation, it was no longer to be found among

the top state priorities in the AZRF. Part of the explanation for this is that Russia was (and still is) awaiting an answer from the CLCS on their application from 2015, and therefore, the matter was out of Russia's hands.

Another noteworthy difference between Strategy 2013 and Strategy 2020 is the fact that the latter outlined much more concrete projects and plans regarding the development of the Arctic. A considerable part of the strategy was dedicated to describing specific initiatives for each region and district of the AZRF. Initiatives in the field of hydrocarbon and mineral extraction were to take place in all of the nine regions and districts, but the majority of the activities were planned for the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District. Among the activities in Yamalo-Nenets was the expansion of the liquified natural gas production on the Yamal and Gydan peninsulas. In 2014, Novatek began construction of the liquified natural gas plant Yamal LNG. Located in the Yamal peninsula, this is one of the most prominent Russian energy projects executed within the frame of Russia's Arctic strategies since 2008. The project was completed in 2019 as one of the largest LNG plants in the world (Tecnip Energies, 2021; Humpert, 2022a). Not far from Yamal in the Gydan Peninsula, Novatek has been working on its second major natural gas project since 2018, Arctic LNG 2. The construction of this field is still ongoing (TotalEnergies, 2022). Aside from the size and significance of these projects, they are worth noting because they are an example of the continuity that exists to a large degree in the Russian Arctic policy. The projects are a good example in that context because Yamal and Gydan were already pointed out in the Strategy 2013 as prioritized areas of hydrocarbon extraction. It also demonstrates that some projects expressed in the initial foundations and strategy did come true, despite underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of technology, and sanctions.

Besides gas and oil projects, a lot of the regional plans focused on developing and modernizing extraction and processing facilities of minerals and other raw materials. In this connection the establishment and development of so-called mineral and raw-material centers was repeated multiple times. For instance, the strategy planned for a mineral and raw-material center aimed at coal production in the Chukotka district. Looking at the overall development within the area of Arctic natural resources from Foundations 2008 to Strategy 2020, it is possible to identify a significant deal of repetition. The need for proper infrastructure and modern technology has been a recurrent challenge. What varies, on the other hand, is how the different policy goals have been prioritized. For instance, the whole natural resource sector occupied a less prominent position in Strategy 2020 than in its predecessor, and the question of a delimitation of the continental shelf receded into the background, while financing of the sector was more present

in the current strategy than before. The fact that the question of financing has become so relevant can be seen as a direct result of the Ukraine crisis in 2014. The Russian state has never offered to fully finance the hydrocarbon projects in the Arctic; they have always relied on energy companies in which they owned the majority, or private companies. These companies have themselves been dependent on foreign capital and technology. With the connection to Western companies being cut off due to sanctions, Russia has been forced to start developing their own technology and look for partners elsewhere in the world, something this analysis looks into later.

3.1.3 Effects of the Ukraine war on Arctic natural resource development

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine at the end of February 2022, Arctic projects on natural resources have not been discussed or mentioned much at the official level. An overview of the official websites of various state agencies and ministries connected to policymaking in the Arctic zone shows that, apparently, it is only the Presidential Administration and the State Commission for Arctic Development that have directly touched upon matters regarding natural resources in the AZRF since the invasion. The topic was discussed in April at the meeting on the development of the Arctic zone attended by the President and other high-level politicians (Prezident Rossii, 2022a). More generally, this meeting demonstrates that the effects of the Ukraine war on the Arctic have been recognized on a high political level. Putin himself acknowledged that the restrictions and sanctions imposed on Russia had created certain difficulties, but at the same time he stressed that the projects in the Arctic zone cannot be affected by that.

From the statements concerning natural resources it appears that the government is striving to keep up the implementation of the current Arctic strategy. It was reported that almost all of the available natural gas and oil resources in the Arctic were already under exploration, but at various stages. In addition, eight new gas and oil sites have been licensed for geological studies. The same is happening within mineral extraction, where plans originally outlined in Strategy 2020 are now being realized. This includes Tomtorskoye rare earth metal deposit and multiple diamond deposits located in Yakutia. The meeting further discussed support measures to increase investment in mineral extraction. The question of financing appears to have been another central issue since the outbreak of the war. This is backed up by the fact that, since April, more than 130 million rubles have been allocated to a special program, where fuel and

energy companies can receive loans at a preferential rate in order to maintain their activities (Minenergo Rossii, 2022).

The focus on investments and state support was, as already stated, evident in the Strategy 2020 as well. However, the need for investment has been significantly intensified by the war in Ukraine. Immediately after February 24, both British Petroleum and Equinor announced the retreat from their partnership with the Russian state-owned oil and gas company Rosneft (Bouso & Zhdannikov, 2022; Equinor, 2022). The British energy company, Shell, also announced its exit from joint ventures with Russia's other major energy company, Gazprom, which, among other things, affected a project in the Gydan peninsula (Shell, 2022).

In addition to the lack of investments and the withdrawal of BP and other foreign companies, the war in Ukraine has affected the development of natural resources in the AZRF in two other ways. First, the Russian energy export is now to be directed evenly between the Southern and Eastern countries, instead of the diminishing European market. In the Arctic zone this requires an increase in oil transshipment capacities of the ports along the NSR (Prezident Rossii, 2022c). The other major impact on the Arctic hydrocarbon development is the lack of equipment that is now subject to sanctions. In the longer term, the sanctions imposed on Russia by Western countries, as in 2014, will also affect Arctic energy projects. In September, Novatek announced that the Arctic LNG 2 had been delayed by at least a year. This delay is mainly due to the sanctions adopted by the EU in April, which directly prohibited EU companies from exporting any goods or technology for use in the liquification of natural gas in Russia. This also made foreign companies, such as French TotalEnergies and German Linde and Siemens, exit from the project (Humpert, 2022a; Humpert, 2022b). In this instance, the government is working on initiatives to promote domestic development and production of technology to replace what has been put under sanction (ibid.). Partly due to the now urgent need for technology, the aforementioned scientific and technical council has been created with the purpose of, amongst other things, developing new technology and equipment used in mining and hydrocarbon extraction (Arktichskaya deyatel'nost', 2022c).

With regard to the development of natural resources in the Arctic zone, it is possible to trace quite a consistent line in Russia's Arctic strategies. Taking the initial state of this sector into account, the keyword has all the way been 'development', both of the actual projects, and the required infrastructure and technology. The shift away from this course has mainly been due to outside factors in the form of Western sanctions both in 2014 and in 2022, which, for instance,

have forced Russia to rely more heavily on their domestic capacities and look for energy markets outside Europe. This has not been an easy task, though. The need for development of technology was already stated back in 2008 and although this fact has only become more urgent due to sanctions in 2014 and 2022, apparently not much has happened in reality. A good illustration of this, is the fact that the government only recently created a council to deal with this issue. What might have changed is that Moscow sees this matter as more pressing than ever before, and therefore, will be more focused in trying to solve this problem at the same time as pursuing new partners.

3.2 Transport infrastructure

Transport infrastructure is a vital prerequisite for the development of the Arctic zone. Without this, the Russian vision of the Arctic as an important resource base to secure the economic development of the whole country, will never be realized. In this context, the Northern Sea Route evidently constitutes the backbone of the Russian Arctic strategies. For this reason, the following analysis mainly focuses on the NSR and matters directly related to it.

3.2.1 Infrastructure in the Arctic strategies 2008-2020

Foundations 2008 stated the use of NSR as a single national transport corridor in the Arctic as one of the main national interests. In addition to being used nationally, the document also envisaged developing the potential for international navigation through the NSR, which appeared as one of the strategic state priorities (Arkticheskaya deyatel'nost', 2008). In order to reach these goals, Foundation 2008 outlined a number of tasks to be solved. The first one was a restructuring of the cargo transportation through the NSR and support for the construction of new icebreaking, rescue, and auxiliary vessels. The emphasis on icebreakers is explained by the fact that most of the Russian icebreakers (at that time) were from the 1970s and 1980s, and that cargo vessels still could not navigate the NSR without the assistance of an icebreaker (Laruelle, 2014a: 184). The next priority was to create a monitoring system to ensure safe navigation along Russia's northern coast; this included a set of measures to improve hydro, meteorological, and navigation maintenance in the Arctic zone. In addition to navigation safety, state control over the NSR was a priority as well. Control of the NSR was mentioned in connection with the ambition of generally strengthening border control in the Arctic zone. The state vision of the NSR was summed up in the realization plan. Here it was stated that, in the second stage (2011-2015), "the creation and development of the infrastructure and control system of communications of NSR for solving problems of maintenance of the Eurasian transit"

(my translation) should be provided (Arkticheskaya deyatel'nost', 2008). As in the case of natural resources, it is clear that the plan of turning the NSR into a modern and well-functioning national and international transport route was also in its initial stages.

Strategy 2013 continued and elaborated on the direction described in Foundation 2008. In the section devoted to the Arctic transport infrastructure, the ambition to turn the NSR into a main transport route figured as the top priority (Arkticheskaya deyatel'nost', 2013). It was also still the plan to use the NSR for international navigation within the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation. Besides the initiatives stated in Foundation 2008, a number of other proposals were added. Among these were plans to improve the transport infrastructure with the aim of expanding the number of hydrocarbon export routes to the world market. The government also wanted to modernize the Arctic ports and construct new port-production complexes. Going further into the infrastructure section, another circumstance regarding Arctic sea transport becomes evident, which is the need to improve fundamental structures in almost all parts of this area. This concerned the regulatory framework of navigation in the Arctic territory, including tariff regulation on services provided in connection to navigating the NSR, and insurance mechanisms. Besides transport on water, the strategy also emphasized the development of aviation and railway infrastructure.

The implementation plan for Strategy 2013 suggests that the government might have been a little too optimistic regarding the progress of the NSR, since the deadline for solving the problems of transport support for the Arctic zone and Eurasian transit were postponed from 2015 to 2020. Much like in the case of natural resources, Strategy 2013 revealed significant shortcomings in the Arctic infrastructure that had to be handled before the NSR could become the national sea highway, ready for the year-round operation the government had hoped for. In fact, the strategy identified the general underdevelopment of the basic infrastructure as one of the threats and risks to the development of the Arctic zone. When talking about the NSR in general, it is important to note that the potential of the NSR still very much depended on factors outside of human influence. Climate change have still not made the route ice-free all year round, so even today, navigation via the NSR is only possible for a limited period each year. In 2021, this period lasted from the beginning of July to the end of October, and September was the only month where vessels did not have to be escorted by icebreakers (Sea News, 2021).

3.2.2 Infrastructure plans for the Arctic strategy 2020-2035

In the years between Strategy 2013 and Foundations 2020, it does not look like major progress happened within the transport area. Despite the fact that the development of the Northern Sea Route was still regarded as being key in the national interest, the low level of development of transport infrastructure once again figured as a main threat – this time to national security (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020a). In fact, the non-compliance with the deadlines for the creation of the NSR infrastructure, as well as the construction of new icebreaking, rescue, and auxiliary vessels, were also a part of the list. From the status of the Arctic policy as of 2020, it was also evident that work on the infrastructure of the NSR still was in its infancy. The same was the case for the navigation support system and the modernization of the icebreaker fleet. Because of this, Foundations 2020 repeated many of the initiatives already stated in Strategy 2013. This, for example, included construction of new icebreakers and ports, creation of a system to secure safe navigation, and the development of aviation and railway infrastructure. Taking this into account, Foundations 2020 indeed demonstrated a great deal of continuity from the former Arctic policies, but this was mostly due to the fact that very little progress had been achieved within Arctic transport infrastructure.

Judging by what is absent from Foundations 2020, it seemed like there had been some improvement regarding the establishment of a regulatory framework, since this no longer figured among the main tasks in the section on infrastructure. A few new tasks had also been added, such as the prevention of accidental oil spills along the NSR. Generally, Foundations 2020 did not differentiate from, or add much to, the development of transport infrastructure in the Arctic zone. One interesting thing, though, is that, unlike the two former Arctic policy documents, there was no mention of developing the NSR into an international transport route in Foundations 2020. This might have been a consequence of the Ukraine crisis of 2014 and the subsequent sanctions, which limited Russia's international leeway and caused Russia to shift its attention towards domestic policy issues. On the other hand, in contradiction to this, Foundations 2020 predicted that the implementation of the current policy would increase the volume of national as well as international cargo transport via the NSR. For this reason, it remains a bit unclear how the Russian state viewed the international potential of the NSR.

Strategy 2020 listed the measures required to implement the main tasks related to transport infrastructure presented in Foundations 2020. As in Strategy 2013, the section on infrastructure was one of the most extensive and contained a large number of measures directly concerning the NSR or matters related to transport at sea (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020b). From the list, it was evident that a general development of sea infrastructure was still necessary - something that included the modernization and construction of ports and navigation both at sea and along the rivers in the Arctic zone. Furthermore, the strategy sought to strengthen shipping administration and digitize transport and logistics services in relation to the NSR. Strategy 2020 picked up on another central topic from its predecessor by elaborating on the renewal of the Russian icebreaker fleet. It was the government's intention to construct at least five universal nuclear icebreakers in the 22220 Project and three nuclear icebreakers in the Leader Project in the period until 2035. Besides these, the policy measures also included the construction of several vessel types, such as cargo and hydrographic vessels. This suggested that a quite comprehensive modernization of Russia's civil fleet was also needed on top of all the other issues of Arctic infrastructure.

Despite the similarities, there were elements that differentiated the current strategy from the former. The new strategy had clearly increased its focus on the technological development of sea infrastructure. The use of space systems to provide hydrometeorological data and the creation of satellites in order to secure the stable communication of ships navigating the NSR, emerged from the list of measures. Furthermore, the strategy suggested developing technical solutions to prevent future impacts of climate change on the infrastructure. The fact that many of these plans were dependent on the presence of qualified personnel, was also acknowledged in the strategy, which suggested the development of a vocational education system specially aimed at accommodating the need for people to develop the NRS in the future.

The section regarding the specific development plans for each of the regions in the AZRF, indicated that the construction and modernization of transport infrastructure had high priority. In Murmansk, the government planned an extensive reconstruction of the seaport, including construction of new terminals and transport complexes. The scope of these plans underlined the importance of the Murmansk port as the only year-round ice-free port in the Arctic zone. The strategy contained modernization and construction of ports located in six out of the nine regions covered in the AZRF – from the most western to the most eastern parts of the zone. For instance, it included the modernization of the port in Arkhangelsk, construction of a deep-water port in Indiga in Nenets, and the development of the Pevek port in Chukotka. In addition, the strategy

sought to make the rivers in the Arctic zone more suitable for bigger vessels by dredging them. This, alongside the improvements to road, rail, and aviation infrastructure stated in the strategy's regional section, indicated that the government recognized that the NSR could not stand alone, and that routes to supply and occasionally relieve the NSR needed to be thought of as well. This priority also demonstrates that the transport infrastructure in the Arctic is important not only in an international context, but indeed, also in a domestic one, which makes sense taking the uncertainty of the NSR's international potential into consideration.

The number of port development and construction projects connected to the NSR proved how much the government counted on its potential to become a vital transport corridor. It also showed how much needed to be done before the infrastructure would be able to accommodate the requirements of the companies engaged in navigation via the NSR. It should be mentioned here that Strategy 2020 still considered NSR of international importance, but in line with Foundations 2020, it was downplayed more than in the previous policy. Looking at the development from the first national policy in 2008 to the Strategy 2020, it is possible to identify a lot of the same plans and challenges related to the Arctic transport infrastructure. The main focus on turning the NSR into a vital national transport corridor has by and large prevailed through the years. The attempt to do this has also developed over time. For instance, Strategy 2013 stated the need for a regulatory framework of Arctic navigation, something that was not mentioned in 2008. Moreover, Strategy 2020 focused more on the technological aspects of sea infrastructure. On the other hand, the number of tasks and priorities, such as the construction of a new icebreaking fleet, being repeated in the documents, proves that the implementation of the strategy had not been as successful as had been expected.

3.2.3 Development within transport infrastructure since February 24

Since February 24, the NSR and matters related to it have most certainly been one of the most discussed topics within Arctic policy. The meeting on Arctic development held April 13, touched upon several of the transport infrastructure questions mentioned in Strategy 2020, and here it emerged clearly that the NSR was still the main focus. Among the issues was the modernization of the ports. In this connection, the government had invested in the construction of four new terminals, which were to be finished in 2030 (Prezident Rossii, 2022b). The upgrading of the current emergency rescue system, including establishment of more rescue centers, was presented as a main task, as was the development of a reliable communication system for navigation along the Northern coast. Another highly prioritized area was the

construction of new icebreakers. According to the chairman of the State Commission for Arctic Development, Yury Trutnev, four icebreakers were currently under construction including one of the Leader-class, and additionally six icebreakers were projected until 2030.

Besides from showing great consistency with the overall strategy, the issues discussed at the meeting also demonstrated in which areas the Ukraine war had affected the infrastructure development in the Arctic. First, the sanctions imposed on Russia were hampering the import of equipment needed for the development of Arctic ports, ships, and navigation, and had forced the government to look for alternative domestic suppliers. Second, due to the reorientation of Russia's export to the East, the focus on developing transport routes in that direction had intensified. This also included the NSR, which was supposed to relieve the expected transport pressure from the Baikal-Amur Mainline (railway) and the Trans-Siberian Railway. In addition to the NSR, the meeting also discussed the construction of the Northern Latitudinal Railway linking the western and eastern parts of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District. Despite these challenges it was evident that the government considered the NSR to be an area of considerable development potential. The objective was still to create a new global transport corridor. In this connection, the Russian state nuclear energy corporation, Rosatom, which oversees the NSR, planned to launch a transit line in 2025 that would increase the volume of international transit to 30 million tons by 2030. Also, in 2030 the volume of domestic transportation via NSR would, according to the plan, exceed 200 million tons.

The ambitions of the NSR are also clearly reflected in all the other political activities that have taken place in relation to Arctic infrastructure since the outbreak of the war. Most evidently was the adoption of the *Development plan for the Northern Sea Route until 2035* back in August. In order to finance the plan, which contains more than 150 initiatives, the government has allocated 1.8 trillion rubles. The main objectives of the plan point to many initiatives directly stated in Strategy 2020. This, for instance, concerns the development of the Murmansk and Dikson ports, improvement of rescue centers, and creation of a satellite system to support navigation (Arkticheskaya deyatel'nost', 2022d). Another section of the plan deals with the renewal of the icebreaker fleet, where the government intends to construct icebreakers of the Leader and the 22220 Project. In this connection it must be noted that many of these plans are already in the process of being realized. Both the port of Murmansk and Dikson are under reconstruction and two 22220 Project icebreakers have been navigating the NSR since 2021 (Arkticheskaya deyatel'nost', 2022b). Judging from the plan itself and discussions related to it, it is evident that the war has apparently not made the government tone down its ambitions

for the NSR, on the contrary, they seem quite optimistic about the current situation and the future when it comes to the amount of cargo turnover and revenue of the NSR. According to the State Commission for Arctic Development, cargo transportation via the NSR in 2021 exceeded the state target of 32 million tons by 2.9 million tons (ibid.). With the new development plan, the government expects this number to increase to 80 million tons a year by 2024 and 220 million tons by 2035 (Pravitel'stvo Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2022). In the same period until 2035, the contribution of the revenue of the NSR to the Russian GDP is estimated to be 35 trillion rubles (Gosudarstvennaya komissiya po voprosam razvitiya Arktiki, 2022c).

Looking beyond the development plan for the NSR, there are also indications of the negative effects the Ukraine war has had on the development of Arctic infrastructure. The severe restrictions on Western-Russian cooperation caused by the sanctions, has hit the shipbuilding industry particularly hard. The limited access to foreign equipment and technology has raised the cost of construction and forced the shipyards to redesign many of the vessels and thereby postpone their deadlines. This has also affected the building of icebreakers, though to a lesser extent, since most of the components for this type of vessel is already produced in Russia (Prezident Rossii, 2022d). To counter the sanctions, since February the government has worked on a number of measures. This includes state support programs for shipbuilding and ship repair enterprises and a proposal to eliminate VAT for all civil ship repair services in the Far East and Arctic. In addition, the government has developed a program to subsidize the interest rates of investment projects in the Arctic (Arkticheskaya deyatel'nost', 2022b). In March, a program was adopted under which 560 million rubles have been allocated from the federal budget to compensate for the lost income of the shipping companies. Furthermore, support measures have been implemented to ensure that the volume of cargo transportation develops according to the state targets (Minvostokrazvitiya, 2022b). These actions indicate that, despite all the optimism, the cargo transportation via the NSR also faces pressure under the new conditions. In comparison to the energy and natural resource sector, it is interesting that the state, to a much higher degree, makes direct investment in the infrastructure projects, while within hydrocarbon and minerals they seek to promote private investment instead.

The political activities in the field of Arctic transport infrastructure, mainly the NSR, reveal that this area has not been untouched by the consequences of the war either. Despite the fact that several of the initiatives stated in the Strategy 2020 are in the process of being realized, including the modernization of ports and the icebreaker fleet, the sanctions have caused some visible effects as well. These effects seem to somehow contradict each other in the sense that

they at the same time encourage and delay the development of the NSR. On the one hand, the government has intensified its efforts and investment to develop the NSR and other transport routes towards the East. This is done in the expectation of increased exports to Asia due to the more or less closed European market. On the other hand, the sanctions have harmed and delayed the ship building industry, increased the costs of investment in the Arctic, and, it appears that the current conditions have put the development plan for the NSR under pressure as well. There also seems to be differences in how the government finances the different fields of the Arctic strategy. In the area of energy and natural resources the main focus is on attracting private investment, while the transport sector is mostly financed directly by the state. A possible explanation for this could be that the state is only indirectly involved in Arctic energy projects through their share in energy companies such as Gazprom and Rosneft. It should be mentioned, though, that Moscow is not only relying on state funding for infrastructure but, as shown later in the analysis, seeks partners for that as well in South and East Asia.

3.3 Military security

The security and defense of the Arctic is of critical importance to Russia, since this region is home to the Northern Fleet, most of Russia's nuclear submarines, and two thirds of all its nuclear weapons (Laruelle, 2020: 9). At the same time, the Arctic brings Russia into close proximity with NATO countries, which makes the area more susceptible to tension between Russia and the defense alliance – something that is also visible in the Arctic strategies.

3.3.1 The role of military security in the Arctic strategy 2008-2020

In Foundations 2008 the question of military security in the Arctic did not figure among Russia's basic national interests, but it still had one of the highest priorities among the document's basic objectives. The aims of the Russian Federation within this area were directed at military security and the protection of the state border. This is further specified as "maintenance of a favorable operative regime in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, including maintenance of a necessary fighting potential of groupings of general-purpose armies (forces) of the Armed Forces (...), other armies, military formations and organs in this region" (my translation) (Arkticheskaya deyatel'nost', 2008). Judging only from this, the Russian government in 2008 had no intention for a buildup of military capacities in the Arctic. Although, when comparing this overall formulation with the more detailed description of requirements and measures, it becomes a bit more difficult to establish the exact policy on this area, since it appeared in the more detailed description that the intention was to create not just maintain

military forces in the Arctic. A possible explanation to this could be that the state of the Arctic military forces at that time by no means lived up to modern standards. As stated earlier, Putin had initiated the third State Rearmament Program just a year earlier (Konyshev et al., 2017: 117). So, with this in mind, it was probably necessary to create new forces in order to maintain the forces at an acceptable level.

Aside from the creation of new forces, it was clearly the protection of state borders that was the main national security focus of Foundation 2008. The overall aim was to create a fully functioning border control system covering all of the Arctic zone. This included the improvement of control across the state border as well as better control of seas and rivers in the AZRF. Furthermore, the state wanted to make the border control organs capable of dealing with threats and challenges to the Russian Federation. Among the policy measures, the first priority was to create an effective coast guard system, able to work together with foreign coast guards on issues such as illegal migration and terrorism. In general, the question of military security was clearly not the main priority in Foundations 2008, and when mentioned, the emphasis was on civil security issues rather than on threats from other states.

There was not much focus on military security in Strategy 2013 either, even though the military was listed among the priorities of the strategy (*Arkticheskaya deyatel'nost'*, 2013). The section on military security contained some of the same priorities as Foundation 2008, but the focus seemed to have shifted a bit away from border control and civil security challenges to focus more on the function of the armed forces and protection of Russia's territory. Beside from its headline, the section did not mention border control issues at all. The first priority in the section still resembled the objective of Foundation 2008, in the sense that it wished to maintain the readiness of the forces in the Arctic. The following paragraph, though, indicated that Russia's general threat perception might have changed since 2008, as it focused on the combat readiness of the armed forces, and their ability to handle threats towards Russia and enforce the country's sovereignty in the Arctic zone – none of which were as prominent in Foundations 2008. The strategy also became more specific on how to improve the military capacity in the Arctic. In this regard the government wanted to develop the infrastructure of the Arctic military bases and improve equipment dedicated for operations in the Arctic, with an eye to the possibility of deploying a special military unit trained for performing tasks in the polar region. The implementation of dual-use technology, meant for serving both defense and civil purposes, was also presented here for the first time, something that later became a central instrument in the Russian Arctic defense policy (Boulègue, 2022: 7).

Besides the section on military security, the Arctic defense was, unlike infrastructure and natural resources, mentioned very little elsewhere in the document. This is explained by the fact that the specific implementation measures in regard to military security and border protection in the Arctic were not a part of Strategy 2013, but were instead provided in the State Armament Program for 2011-2020 prepared by the Ministry of Defense. Since the state armament programs are classified, it is difficult to identify which specific measures the government planned to implement in this area. For this reason, the Arctic strategy cannot be assumed to give the full picture of the policy conducted within the field of military security in the Arctic.

3.3.2 Military security in the Arctic strategy 2020-2035

In Foundations 2020 the security policy dimension did, evidently, become more present than in Foundations 2008. The question of securing Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity had now replaced the use of the Arctic as a strategic resource base as the highest priority of the main national interests (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020a). That the Arctic was perceived as a more insecure region became visible in the section on challenges to national security, where the greater military presence of foreign states and the increase of conflict potential in the region were listed. From this altered threat perception, it was evident that the tense relationship between Russia and the West caused by the annexation of Crimea in 2014, had affected the security situation in the Arctic as well.

Despite the change in Russia's international relations, there appeared to be a rather good coherence in the development of military security in the Arctic. For instance, Foundations 2020 stated that the aim of Strategy 2013, of creating a group of general-purpose troops operating in the Arctic and a functioning coast guard, had been achieved within the timeframe. The fact that a policy goal from the strategy was actually realized indicates an implementation process on the military area that has worked significantly faster than within the energy and infrastructure fields. The new tasks listed in the section on military security did to a large extent build upon the tasks listed in the previous strategy. The ambitions had now moved from creating to increasing the combat capabilities of the general-purpose forces, as well as other military bodies in the Arctic, and to establish and modernize the military infrastructure ensuring the operation of these groups. Improvement of control over airspace, surface, and underwater conditions in the Arctic made up yet another repetition from the former strategy.

One thing that was different, though, was the increased focus on border control, which was no longer included under military security but constituted its own separate policy area. Within this field the focus was on further improving the control of border activities by, among other things, developing information technology and technical equipment of the border authorities. Furthermore, the government wanted to invest in the construction of modern ice-class vessels and a renewal of the aircraft fleet, as well as improving the federal intelligence system and control of the Russian airspace. The increased focus on border control further suggests that Russia regarded the Arctic as being a more insecure region that called for an increased attention on military capabilities and the protection of state borders.

Strategy 2020 demonstrated the fact that Russia's Arctic strategies first and foremost dealt with the civil development of the region (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020b). Even though the growth of conflict potential in the Arctic was listed as a threat to development and national security in the Arctic zone, military security was hardly mentioned elsewhere beside from the short section on measures directly concerning this issue. The section itself did not add anything new or differ much from the measures already stated in the former strategy. The measures listed in Strategy 2020 still included the improvement of the structure of the armed forces and other military groups operating in the Arctic, as well as ensuring a favorable operational regime and maintenance of combat readiness of these groups. Moreover, the strategy aimed at developing the infrastructure of the military bases and enhancing the logistical system of the Arctic forces. The employment of dual-use technologies and the development of military infrastructure was also repeated in the new strategy. The only small difference compared to Strategy 2013 was a more concrete paragraph on modern equipment, in which the government intended to provide the armed forces with new models of weapons and other military equipment.

The section on development projects for each region demonstrated the same absence of military security issues. Among the projects, only one figured with direct connection to the military capabilities in the Arctic. The initiative concerned an extensive development of military administrative bodies and settlements, as well as infrastructure and dual-use technologies located in the Murmansk Region. In contrast to other areas of the Arctic strategy, like infrastructure and natural resources, this is the only specific example of development within military security in the whole document. Taking the tensions between Russia and NATO into consideration, it is probably not a coincidence that the only initiative taking place is in Murmansk. The region serves as both the location of the Northern Fleet and is in close proximity to the border of NATO territory. The apparently lack of focus on military issues is

once again explained by the fact that the main part of the military policy initiatives is provided for by other state programs, including the state armament program. What is also missing from the Strategy 2020 is the focus on border control. Contrary to the general absence of military issues, this is quite a striking difference from both the previous strategy and even Foundations 2020, on which the current strategy otherwise builds. Going from being its own separate section in Foundations 2020, border control was not even included in the strategy's section on military security. The reason for this is most likely the same as the reason for the overall absence of military policy, since the strategy stated that the policy measures on border protection were also included in the state armament program. In this context, the Ukraine crisis might have been a decisive factor. As stated earlier, the protection of the Arctic in peacetime was, for the first time, assigned to the armed forces in the Military Doctrine from 2014, which indicates that since then the military might have taken on new security tasks of a more civil character, such as border control.

The policy on military security formulated in the Arctic development strategies demonstrates a considerably degree of consistency. The focus has always been on developing and maintaining the combat readiness of the forces stationed in the Arctic, as well as improving the technological level of the defense in that region. It is also evident that the Ukraine crisis in 2014 has affected Russia's threat perception in the Arctic by increasing its focus on potential conflict with other states. On the basis of these strategies, though, it is impossible to draw any final conclusions regarding the military policy in the Arctic, since the implementation measures in this area are mainly formulated in other classified state programs prepared by the Ministry of Defense.

3.3.3 Activities within Arctic military security after Russia's invasion of Ukraine

Since February 24, activities or discussions regarding military security in the Arctic have been relatively few compared to other areas of Arctic policy. At the meeting on Arctic development held in April, the subject was only briefly discussed in connection to the development of military housing in the Murmansk Region (Prezident Rossii, 2022b). This discussion on developing housing, schools, and other social infrastructure for the camps and bases in, first, the Murmansk Region, where the Northern Fleet is located, and later, the rest of the Arctic zone, directly relates to the Strategy 2020. The topic was also discussed in a meeting between Putin and the governor of Murmansk, Andrey Vladimirovich Chibis, in June (Prezident Rossii, 2022e). The focus on infrastructure suggests that this part of the Arctic strategy has not been affected by the invasion. However, taking into account that the actual projects have not been

fully developed yet and still need funding, there is no guarantee that the implementation of this policy will not be affected in the future. Some of the other statements and activities related to military security in the Arctic made since February may not say anything on how the current situation has specifically influenced this area, but they clearly underline the fact that Russia feels increasingly threatened by the other states present in the region. Several times, the concern for the increased military activities of the US and other NATO members in the Arctic region, including the growth of large-scale exercises, has been mentioned. This, for instance, appears in a discussion between the secretary of the Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, and the commander of the Air Force (Sovet Bezopastnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2022b). This issue is expressed most clearly by the Ambassador-at-large of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: “The inclusion of the Arctic in NATO’s sphere of interest only complicates the military-political situation in this region, increases the degree of conflict, and creates serious challenges for other countries, including Russia, in high latitudes” (my translation) (MID, 2022a). When talking about NATO, the prospect of Sweden and Finland joining the defense alliance is evidently one of the things that causes Moscow the biggest concern. The accession of these two countries to NATO constitutes an additional threat to Russia’s position in the Arctic, since the country then will become the only Arctic state who stands outside the alliance (MID, 2022b).

How Russia will react to the changing security situation in the Arctic is, on the other hand, more difficult to answer. Regarding the expansion of NATO, Moscow will refrain from issuing any concrete measures until the application of Sweden and Finland has been finally approved. The character of Russia’s response also depends on how NATO chooses to deploy their forces and weapons in these two countries (MID, 2022b). The common reaction of Russian politicians to the generally increased presence of NATO in the Arctic has been that they are ready to take any necessary measures, both political, economic, and military, to protect the country’s activities in the High North. This also includes the protection of civilian shipping via the NSR (MID, 2022a; MID, 2022b). Even though many of the statements on this issue are rather vague it is still possible to identify some concrete policy measures to strengthen Russian military security in the Arctic.

The first measure is a bill adopted by the State Duma in September, which requires foreign warships and other state vessels to notify the Russian state 90 days before an expected passage along the NSR. This requirement also applies to other internal waters of the Russian Federation. Moreover, the bill allows the state to suspend the passage of foreign non-commercial vessels in internal waters via navigation warnings (Gosudarstvennaya Duma, 2022; TASS, 2022).

The minister of defense, Sergei Shoigu, has also announced a number of initiatives to strengthen the defense of the AZRF. This includes the continued increase of combat capabilities and rearmament of the forces stationed in the area, who will receive more than 500 modern weapons (Minoborony Rossii, 2022a). According to the minister, these initiatives further include an increase in combat strength of the coastal troops and other military groups, the creation of a continuous radar field, and an improvement to the capabilities of the anti-aircraft missile system to control the airspace of the AZRF. Contrary to the bill on the passage of foreign state vessels, these measures to a larger extent appear to be a continuation of the Strategy 2020, since it states the increase in combat strength as one of its priorities. Another priority of the strategy which apparently has not been affected by the current war, is the modernization of the military infrastructure. According to Shoigu, the ministry has planned 28 projects to be implemented in 2022 (ibid.). This is another example of how the implementation within the military area seems to be moving faster than in other fields of the Arctic strategy. A possible explanation for this could be that this area belongs to another ministry that works differently and with another budget. A budget that might also be bigger, due to the higher priority of Arctic security on the national agenda caused by the increased Russian threat perception in that region.

Even though these statements confirm a continuation in Russia's Arctic strategy, the minister on another occasion states that the current situation will require a revision of the military policy in the Arctic. A part of this changed approach is stated in the Maritime Doctrine 2022 (Minoborony Rossii, 2022b). This doctrine reflects Russia's increased threat perception in the Arctic zone in a number of ways. This is evident in the fact that the area is ascribed a higher risk of conflict caused by greater presence of foreign navies. To counter this development, the doctrine wants to raise control of foreign naval activity along the NSR as well as strengthen the combat potential of the Northern Fleet (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2022). In this regard, the new Maritime Doctrine constitutes one of the more direct changes in military policy caused by the Ukraine war.

In September, the Russian armed forces conducted two military exercises in the Arctic zone. The first one, which included the Northern Fleet, was carried out in the seas along the NSR with the purpose of ensuring the economic safety of Russia's maritime and economic activities (Minoborony Rossii, 2022c). The second exercise, which was joined by two of the nuclear-powered submarines, took place as part of the navy's Arctic expedition 'Umka-2022' and aimed at testing the capacity and readiness of the Arctic forces to defend the area (Minoborony Rossii, 2022d). Despite the fact that 'Umka-2022' was carried out partly in connection with the

Maritime Doctrine 2022, it is unclear whether these exercises were planned ahead of the Russian invasion of Ukraine or came as a reaction to it, though the aim of the exercises might suggest the latter.

Even though military security is one of the areas of Arctic policy that has been most affected by the war in Ukraine, it is still difficult to determine exactly how the conflict has influenced defense policy in the Arctic. Due to the classified nature of the field, it is not possible to draw as definitive conclusions as in other areas of the Arctic policy, when comparing the Arctic strategy and the actual activities carried out since February 24. The information available, though, demonstrates continuation of the Strategy 2020 in the form of a continued development of the combat readiness of Arctic forces, as well as the improvement of military infrastructure in the region. On the other hand, the war, which has caused an increased NATO presence in the Arctic, has clearly heightened Russia's threat perception to a level above that of the Ukraine crisis in 2014. This has caused Russia to intensify its military defense of this region by, among other things, strengthening the Northern Fleet and increasing control of foreign naval activity in the Arctic.

3.4 International Arctic cooperation

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February has significantly changed international cooperation in the Arctic. Political intergovernmental organizations involving Russia, such as the Arctic Council and Barents Euro-Arctic Council, have suspended their activities as a reaction to the war. The sanctions have further damaged the bilateral relations between Russia and European countries and caused Russia to look for closer cooperation with partners in other regions of the world.

3.4.1 The role of international cooperation in the Arctic strategy 2008-2020

Looking at Foundations 2008 it is evident that cooperation in the Arctic has been in Russia's focus right from the beginning. Preservation of the Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation was listed as the second priority among the national interests (Arkticheskaya deyatel'nost', 2008). Cooperation in the Arctic was further elaborated in the basic objectives, where it was stated that cooperation with the other Arctic states should be based on international treaties and agreements. The ambition of intergovernmental cooperation founded on formalized principles was clearly visible in the section on strategic priorities. The section, which was dominated by matters connected to the international dimension, contained priorities such as strengthening the

bilateral cooperation on a number of areas within the framework of organizations like the Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. Another priority that demonstrates some of the same tendencies, was to get Russian state agencies and public organizations more involved in international fora working with Arctic issues, including a closer cooperation in the Russian-European partnership. The wish to advance more formal cooperation within the Arctic fits well into another essential part of Foundation 2008, namely Russia's aspiration to settle the delimitation question of the maritime areas of the AZRF. Since this is a question that has to be decided on the basis of international conventions (UNCLOS) in order to be internationally recognized, it is no surprise that Russia has generally supported this kind of international agreement, to the extent that they help to secure Russia's national interests in the Arctic. The importance of this issue was also demonstrated by its position as the first among the strategic priorities.

It was not only on the delimitation question that Russia was interested in international cooperation. Another high priority was to create a united search and rescue system between the Arctic states. Besides this, Russia also sought international involvement within domestic policy areas such as science, environmental protection, and management of natural resources. The wide range of fields demonstrates what has become a central theme to Russian Arctic policy, which is the extensive need for foreign investment, knowledge, and technology in order to develop the region. This is, moreover, demonstrated in the implementation plan that listed expansion of international cooperation with a special reference to the development of natural resources as part of the first stage. In general, Foundation 2008 attached relatively greater importance to international cooperation and involvement in the development of the Arctic zone.

With regard to international cooperation, the content of Strategy 2013 was by and large a continuation of Foundation 2008. International cooperation still figured as a prioritized area of the Arctic policy (*Arkticheskaya deyatel'nost'*, 2013). The section dedicated to this field also resembled many of the same goals stated in Foundations 2008. Interaction between Russia and the other Arctic states on the basis of international treaties and agreement still played a central role, as did the aim of involving these states in work within fields such as science, environmental protection, and the development of natural resources. Russia also sought international assistance in another vital area, which was the development of transport infrastructure, namely cross-polar aviation and the Northern Sea Route – something that was also mentioned in Foundations 2008. Considering the many similarities, it is interesting, though, that the delimitation question, which figured on top of the list in the former document,

is now only mentioned briefly in connection to international cooperation. Another noticeable difference is that environmental protection and climate change in the Arctic has received much more attention. These issues went from not being mentioned to being the focus of three out of eleven priorities listed in the section on international cooperation. These priorities clearly show that it was first and foremost knowledge Russia lacked within these fields. To compensate for this, the government, for instance, wanted to establish a foundation for information exchange between countries on environmental issues, as well as organizing transnational scientific research expeditions aimed at studying the environment and impact of climate change in the Arctic.

3.4.2 International cooperation in the Arctic strategy 2020-2035

Compared to Foundations 2008, the attention on international cooperation in the Arctic did not decrease in Foundations 2020. Maintaining mutual beneficial partnerships and peace in the region remained one of the top priorities in the national interest. Cooperation was also still a part of the basic objectives, but this time the objective also counted “peaceful resolution of disputes on the basis of international law” (my translation) (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020a). This statement suggests that the international relations in the High North were not untouched by the Ukraine crisis of 2014, in the sense that Moscow had become more aware of the increased conflict potential in the Arctic due to more tension in the region and increased NATO activity. This was also visible in the section on challenges to national security in the Arctic, which listed attempts by some foreign states to alter the international treaties governing the Arctic, as well as creating new national regulations disregarding these treaties and regional cooperation among the challenges. Moreover, Russia regarded its activities in the Arctic as being obstructed by foreign states and international organizations. In that connection, it might seem a bit paradoxical that the document in another section stated that Russia, in the preceding period until 2020, enhanced its cooperation with the other Arctic states.

The tasks stated in Foundations 2020 regarding international cooperation, in many aspects continued the course outlined by the former policy documents. Highest on the list was to strengthen relations with the other Arctic states, both on a bilateral basis and within regional institutions such as the Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. Even more emphasis was put on the Arctic Council, as the document stated one of its tasks as being to secure the council’s position as a key regional association. Some other repetitions of Foundations 2008 count ensuring Russia’s presence and cooperation with Norway in

Spitsbergen and establishing a unified regional search and rescue system. In connection to the last-mentioned, it should be remembered that the eight members of the Arctic Council already, back in 2011, signed a legally binding agreement on search and rescue cooperation in the Arctic (Arctic Council, 2011). The areas in which Russia sought international partnerships also continued to cover a wide field, including natural resources, study of climate change, and technology.

A few new tasks were also added to the list. For instance, the groups of indigenous people living in the Arctic zone were mentioned in connection to international cooperation for the first time. In this area, the ambition was to improve cross-border cooperation between the indigenous peoples in Russia and other groups living in the circumpolar area, as well as enhancing their representation in international Arctic cooperation.

Another addition that is especially interesting with regard to Russia's international relations in the Arctic anno 2022, is the mention of 'extra-regional' states, which refers to states who do not have territory in the Arctic region. Russia wanted to get these states, as well as the Arctic states, more actively involved in economic activities in the AZRF. In this connection, it seems obvious to assume that the document by extra-regional states especially referred to China and other Asian and South Asian countries, which had already proven to be important partners in times of Western sanctions. The inclusion of non-Arctic countries in the official strategy in connection to economic cooperation marked a development in Russia's Arctic policy, that has only become more visible during the years. From Foundations 2020 it is evident that Russia, despite the deterioration in relations with Western countries after 2014, still attached high importance to law-based, well-functioning, international cooperation in the Arctic – maybe even more than before.

The policy on international Arctic cooperation outlined in Strategy 2020 continued many of the same aspects from Foundations 2020. From the scope of the section on international cooperation it is evident that the Ukraine crisis had not made Moscow focus less on the international dimension of the Arctic, let alone lower their ambitions in the area. The section, which included no less than sixteen priorities, covered already known tasks such as ensuring Russia's presence and cooperation with Norway in Spitsbergen, improving cross-border relations between the indigenous people living in the High North, and increasing the efforts of the Arctic states in creating a unified search and rescue system (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020b). The highest priorities of Russia in this policy area did not really change

either; they still included preserving peace and cooperation based on international agreements and conventions, and determining the delimitation question of Russia's territory in the Arctic Ocean.

Aside from continuing many aspects of previous policies on international Arctic cooperation, Strategy 2020 also added many new measures to further develop the role of international partnerships in Russia's Arctic policy. The areas where the new strategy increased its focus on foreign participation, includes investments, science, and education. Unlike its predecessor, the current strategy formulated more concrete initiatives on how to attract and manage foreign investment in the AZRF. In order to obtain this, the government, for instance, wanted to organize events aimed at attracting foreign investors to the Arctic zone. A concrete example of this is the establishment of a congress and exhibition in Murmansk showing the possibilities of investing in the AZRF. Within education, the ambition was to create, with the assistance of foreign partners, educational programs focusing on the development and exploration of the Arctic. These measures point directly to some of the most fundamental challenges to Russia's development of the Arctic zone, namely the lack of financing and qualified personnel – two factors that have been common to Russia's Arctic policy right from the beginning. Another focus of Strategy 2020 was Russia's chairmanship of the Arctic Council 2021-2023, during which the government wanted to prioritize projects aimed at the sustainable development of the Arctic and protecting the cultural heritage of indigenous groups. Generally, the new measures reflected an increased focus on Arctic civil society, especially its indigenous peoples, and how to improve their status and living conditions with the assistance of foreign partners. Beside the extensive list of measures, international cooperation was not mentioned much elsewhere in the strategy. With the exception of the congress in Murmansk, the section on regional initiatives did not mention international cooperation. This absence demonstrated clearly that international affairs primarily adhered to the federal level.

Overall, Russia's strategies on international Arctic cooperation give the impression of being quite consistent. Many of the measures outlined in Foundations 2008 are still a priority in 2020 and demonstrate Russia's special emphasis on international treaties and agreements in Arctic cooperation. It is also evident that foreign partners constitute a vital element in many areas of Arctic development, and therefore this has remained a central focus for Russia even after the sanctions of 2014. On the other hand, there have also been some adjustments to this part of the Arctic strategy. For instance, it is clear that, in its policies from 2020, alongside the wish for cooperation, Russia also felt its Arctic territory increasingly threatened by other states.

3.4.3 International Arctic organizations after February 24

The suspension of most international cooperation in the Arctic happened not long after the Russian invasion at the end of February 2022. On March 3, all member states of the Arctic Council, except Russia, announced that, as a reaction to the invasion, they would withdraw from council activities until further notice⁵. The example of the Arctic Council was followed shortly after by members of both the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and Northern Dimension, two institutions also facilitating intergovernmental cooperation in the Arctic, who suspended all activities involving Russia as well (The Barents Euro-Arctic Council, 2022; Northern Dimension, 2022).

For Russia, the suspension of activities in these organizations has, of course, significantly limited their activities within international cooperation in the Arctic. The suspension of activities in the Arctic Council has gotten especial attention due to Russia's current chairmanship. In this context it is noteworthy that the Russian government has decided to continue the work within the council and implement the Chairmanship program as far as possible. The only change is that they now only concentrate on domestic issues. This has been stated several times since February, both at the meeting on Arctic development in April and by the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maria Zakharova (Prezident Rossii, 2022b; MID, 2022c; MID, 2022d). Already, in March, the Chairman of the Committee of Senior Officials of the Arctic Council, Nikolai Korchunov declared that "All activities of the Russian chairmanship, except for official meeting of the Arctic Council and its subsidiary bodies, are planned to be held in accordance with the approved schedule. (...), the Russian chairmanship will be reoriented to solving national task of developing its northern territories" (my translation) (MID, 2022e).

That the continuation of the Russian presidency has a high priority is clearly demonstrated by the number of events that have been conducted since February within the framework of the Arctic Council chairmanship. Both the St. Petersburg International Forum and Eastern Economic Forum have, after the suspension of activities in the Arctic Council, hosted events related to Russia's chairmanship program. This includes the 'Think Arctic' project, which seeks to develop interstate cooperation in the High North, a conference on investment and trade in the Arctic, and a meeting of the Arctic Economic Council (Gosudarstvennaya komissiya po

⁵ Some of the projects not including Russia were resumed in June (Udenrigsministeriet, 2022)

voprosam razvitiya Arktiki, 2022d; Gosudarstvennaya komissiya po voprosam razvitiya Arktiki, 2022e). The Arctic Economic Council was created by the Arctic Council in 2013-2015 as an independent organization facilitating business-to-business activities (Arctic Economic Council, 2022). Considering the fact that the promotion of the Arctic Economic Council is also a task of Strategy 2020, this council meeting demonstrates how closely the projects planned under the Russian chairmanship are connected to Russia's own Arctic strategy. This is also shown by the focus on indigenous people, which is a main priority of both the strategy and the chairmanship (Informatsionno-analiticheskiy tsentr Gosudarstvennoy komissii po voprosam razvitiya Arktiki, 2021). For instance, development of closer ties between the younger generations of the circumpolar indigenous groups is a priority in both policies (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020b; MID, 2022d).

Judging from the official sources it is evident that of all the Arctic institutions, it is the Arctic Council that has been the primary focus of the Russian government since February. Only once has the cooperation within the Barents Euro-Arctic Council been mentioned, and this is in way that, contrary to the Arctic Council, is far more negative regarding this format's future. In an interview in September, the director of the Second European Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs questioned whether or not Russia will continue its engagement in the council if Sweden and Finland become NATO members (MID, 2022b).

Looking at the overall development in activities and statements on international Arctic cooperation since the outbreak of the war, it becomes evident that Russia is determined to continue the Arctic strategy despite the current conditions, and that Russia's chairmanship, with or without the other Arctic states, works as an important instrument to implement some of the measures outlined in the country's Arctic policy. In this connection, it must be noted that most of the activities apparently remain on the level of discussions, conferences etc., and it is therefore difficult to determine how much is actually being realized at the moment. On the other hand, it is a fact that much of the Arctic cooperation has been suspended, something that the Russian politicians also recognize will have a perceptibly negative impact on future projects (MID, 2022a; MID, 2022d; MID, 2022e). For that reason, it can be concluded that the institutionalized international cooperation in the Arctic is one of the areas that has suffered the most from Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

3.4.4 Cooperation with Asian countries after February 24

Cooperation with Asian countries is not directly mentioned in the Arctic strategies, and therefore, cannot be compared to these documents in the same way. Despite this, it is still an important area to look into, since it is an area that has been considerably influenced by the war in Ukraine.

Russia's turn towards the East in its Arctic policy is definitely not a new phenomenon, but the new wave of sanctions imposed on Russia after February 24 have influenced this area by significantly increasing the interest and, not least, need, for cooperation with the Asian countries in developing the AZRF. This fact was stated by Putin himself at the meeting on Arctic development in April, where he stressed that under the current conditions the extra-regional states should be more actively involved in the Arctic activities (Prezident Rossii, 2022b). That there is an increased interest in involving Asian countries has been demonstrated a number of times since February. One example of this is the Eastern Economic Forum, which is an annual event hosted by Russia to promote foreign investment in the Far Eastern region of Russia. Judging by the official sources, it appears that one of the main focuses of this year's forum has been to promote Asian investment in the High North. For instance, a session between Russia and India on cooperation in the Arctic took place during the forum (Gosudarstvennaya komissiya po voprosam razvitiya Arktiki, 2022e). Just a month before, this matter was also discussed during a meeting between Korchunov, Chairman of the Committee of Senior Officials of the Arctic Council, and the Indian Deputy Prime Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sanjay Verma, who both saw the potential for closer cooperation in the Arctic zone within areas such as economy, transport, and science (MID, 2022f). Another example of Russia's increased interest in Asian countries is an agreement that was signed during the Eastern Economic Forum between the Russian Cooperation for Development of the Far East and the Arctic and the Vietnamese company V-EXIM Solutions. With this agreement, the two sides have stated their intention to work more closely together in Russia's Arctic and Far Eastern regions within areas such as investment, trade, and science (Gosudarstvennaya komissiya po voprosam razvitiya Arktiki, 2022f).

China still constitutes Russia's most central partner in Arctic affairs. Something that was also demonstrated after the outbreak of the war. For instance, the Chairman of the State Duma Committee for the Development of the Far East and the Arctic state, at a meeting on Russian Chinese cooperation, stated that he considered these two regions to be the most promising for

future socio-economic collaboration between the two countries (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Dumy po razvitiyu Dal'nego Vostoka n Arktiki, 2022). Chinese politicians, including the Chinese President Xi Jinping, have also participated in both the Eastern Economic Forum and St. Petersburg Economic Forum (Prezident Rossii, 2022f; Prezident Rossii, 2022g). The magnitude of Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic has even caught the attention of NATO. In this context, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg expressed concern and stated that the cooperation is a reason to increase NATO presence in the region. Russia, however, has maintained that the partnership only revolves around civil issues like investment, science, and education (MID, 2022a).

It is interesting to see that Russia uses the framework of the Arctic Council and Arctic Economic Council chairmanship in their attempt to attract Asian partners, who are not valid members of the organizations. An example of how Russia has used these bodies to promote relations between Russia and Asian countries is the Think Arctic Project, which is participated in by both Chinese and Indian universities (Gosudarstvennaya komissiya po voprosam razvitiya Arktiki, 2022d). Russia has also held a meeting under the auspices of the Arctic Economic Council solely dedicated to discussing future prospects of cooperation with Asian partners in the AZRF (Gosudarstvennaya komissiya po voprosam razvitiya Arktiki, 2022e). The role of the Arctic Council and organizations connected to it, after February 24, is especially interesting, because it suggests that these international fora are regarded by Moscow as a strong “brand” that can be used to either attract foreign non-Arctic partners or to offer legitimacy to domestic political events, such as those mentioned previously. From the statements and activities in this area, it is evident that Russia’s attempts to engage Asian countries in Arctic projects has intensified since February 24. The projects of particular interest to Asian countries seem to be aimed at developing new transport corridors, especially the NSR (Prezident Rossii, 2022f). This is an area that is also of particular interest to Russia, since this will help increase trade with countries in the East.

The activities that have taken place in the field of international cooperation since February 24 show that, on one hand, the suspension of activities within intergovernmental organizations such as the Arctic Council, has obviously put a halt to many of Russia’s ambitions within Arctic international cooperation. This is, for instance, the case for cooperation within climate and environmental research. On the other hand, it is clear that Russia has tried to continue as much of their Arctic policy in this area as possible under the new conditions. They still uphold activities within the Arctic Council, though in a much-altered format, and they seek new Asian

partnerships to replace the Western ones in areas such as technology and science, which have always been vital for the development of the AZRF. The fact that the suspension of cooperation within the Arctic organizations did not happen on the initiative of Russia, also suggests that the country still adheres to mutually beneficial cooperation on the basis of international agreements in the Arctic.

By comparing the activities that have taken place within the fields of energy and natural resources, transport infrastructure, military security, and international cooperation since February 24, to the Russia's overall Arctic policy, it becomes clear that Moscow has tried to follow this policy as far as possible. However, this does not mean that the Ukraine war has not affected these areas at all. Within energy, the war and the subsequent sanctions have caused an urgent need to attract new, private, especially foreign, partners able to contribute with investment and technology to the projects in the AZRF. The sanctions have also hit infrastructure, but in this context the state has chosen to offer financial support through state programs in order to keep up the development. The war in Ukraine has definitely increased Russia's awareness of the Arctic as a potential conflict zone, which has made them strengthen their military capacities, including the Northern Fleet, and introduce more control on foreign naval activity in the region. In the international sphere, Russia has intensified its search among Asian countries for new partners in their Arctic development.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to examine how the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 has influenced Russian activities in the Arctic and whether or not this has caused the country to deviate from its official Arctic strategy. The historical review of the role of the Arctic during the Tsarist and Soviet periods shows that the Northern territories cannot be ignored when talking about the history of Russia. Going from the first settlements and expeditions during the reign of the Tsars, to the rapid industrialization and assimilation of the Soviet period, the Arctic has been an ever-present factor, though subject to varying degrees of attention. Throughout history, the Far North has served as both the unknown land of opportunity and a useful ideological and propaganda tool, in the creation of first a Soviet national identity and later, under Putin, a Russian national identity.

The Russian “return” to the Arctic in 2008, marked by the adoption of Foundations 2008, demonstrated that the goals and challenges have to a large degree stayed the same since Soviet times. The main focus is still on natural resources and infrastructure (NSR). In the same way, the government still struggles with an unpredictable climate, lack of trained personnel and technology, as well as heavy bureaucracy. This continuity (or recurrence) is also reflected in the official Arctic strategy conducted since 2008. On the other side, the strategy has not been completely unsusceptible to outside influence, which is demonstrated by the Ukraine crisis of 2014. In this case, sanctions slowed down Arctic development, mainly due to the lack of foreign technology and knowledge, as well as forcing Russia to look east for partners to replace the western ones in Arctic projects. The analysis of this thesis demonstrates some of the same effects from the current Ukraine war, albeit in a more intensified manner.

When comparing the strategies to the official statements and activities that have taken place within the areas of natural resources, transport infrastructure, military security, and international cooperation since February 24, it becomes clear that the government has tried to continue their policy in spite of the war. This is, for instance, proven by the development plan for the NSR and the continued work within the Arctic Council chairmanship. Despite these attempts, it is also obvious that the invasion and subsequent sanctions have had a perceptible impact on Russia’s activities in the Arctic as well. With regard to natural resources, the Western sanctions have impeded Arctic energy projects and forced Russia to look for new buyers and investors. In the matter of transport infrastructure, the new conditions have redirected the development of infrastructure towards the east and at the same time decreased the possibilities

for doing so by, for instance, limiting the shipbuilding industry's access to foreign equipment and suppliers. It is more difficult to determine exactly how the war has affected the military strategy in the AZRF, though it can be concluded that the conflict has heightened Russia's threat perception in that region and caused increased Russian control of foreign naval activities. The influence of the invasion is, on the other hand, visible within international Arctic cooperation, where most activities have been suspended. Despite this, Russia still strives to conduct as many activities as possible. Furthermore, the government has intensified its search in the East for partners to replace Western countries regarding financing, technology, and science – all areas vital to the development of the AZRF. Many of these measures and actions also serve as good examples of how complex interdependence plays a role in Russia's Arctic policy. This is for instance proven by the necessity for Moscow to find new buyers for their hydrocarbon production as well as partners in Arctic energy and infrastructure projects.

The way Russia has reacted to the war's impact on the Arctic suggests a mixture of both already planned initiatives and more immediate patch-up solutions. For instance, the optimistic forecast put forward in the development plan for the NSR suggests that this plan was already in the making before the invasion. Financial support measures in the infrastructure sector and the bill to control foreign naval activity seem, on the other hand, to be a more direct reaction to the war. With regard to the relatively low influence of the Ukraine crisis on the Arctic, it seems unlikely that Moscow had a ready-made plan for how to handle the effects of the current war; probably they had not expected such a harsh and consequential response from the West. War in itself is an expensive affair and it certainly has not made the development of the AZRF cheaper – indeed, quite the opposite. The question is whether Moscow will be able to keep following the Arctic strategy by means of new partners and state financing, or whether the war will force them to slow down or ultimately make a u-turn in the policy. Whatever the outcome, it already appears as if the war has made Moscow return to some of the more fundamental issues of its Arctic policy – as exemplified, for instance, by the appointment of the science and technology council with a focus on developing domestic technology. Arguably, this should have been done years ago.

To conclude, the findings of this thesis demonstrate that Moscow is very keen to uphold the continuity of the Arctic strategy as far as possible during a time of great international pressure. This resolution to stick the course is maybe clearest demonstrated by Russia's continuation of activities within the Arctic Council chairmanship – something that, due to the current circumstances, should otherwise not be possible.

Future perspectives – will Russia remain a reliable partner in the Arctic?

Taking the current state of the war into consideration, it does not seem likely that Russia and Ukraine will reach a resolution any time soon. This also means that the situation in the Arctic will probably stay unchanged as well, with little or no chance of the other Arctic states resuming political cooperation with Russia in the region. Thus, Russia has to keep increasing its involvement with other (Asian) partners, if they want to continue their Arctic development. Increased Russian and Chinese presence in the Arctic has also been noticed by the West. NATO's Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has more than once expressed concern over the Russian and Chinese military presence in the polar region. In August, he stated that NATO would have to respond to these actions by increasing NATO presence in the Arctic as well (Birchard, 2021; DW, 2022). As this thesis shows, the military build-up of NATO and Russia in the Arctic is far from new, but has been going on since 2007. The Ukraine war has certainly added more fuel to the flames, and if this development continues, with each side interpreting the other's actions as a threat, this has the potential ultimately to escalate into an open conflict.

This scenario is, of course, the most pessimistic of them all, and it is reasonable to presume that neither NATO nor Russia, or for that matter China, are interested in such an outcome. China's position in the Ukraine war has been a balancing act ever since its outbreak. Beside their mutual partnership, both Russia and China are also against the dominant world position of the US. Furthermore, Beijing shares Moscow's concern about the expansion of NATO, one reason why they also partly blame the West for the conflict in Ukraine. On the other hand, China has no interest in supporting Russia too openly, since this could damage their ties with the European markets (Kusa, 2022). President Xi Jinping's call for "respect of the territorial integrity" of Ukraine at the G20 summit in November, might suggest that Beijing is inclined to the latter (Quadri, 2022). Therefore, it will be interesting to see whether China will increase its engagement in the AZRF in the future, particularly if the economic opportunities outweigh the fear of damaging Beijing's economic relationship with the West. Due to this position, the scenario of a Sino-Russo military alliance in the Arctic does not seem likely any time soon.

China's stand on the Ukraine war also shows that they cannot be relied upon as Russia's sole partner in the Arctic. It also needs to be remembered that Russia is still unwilling to give China any political influence in the polar region, something that Beijing might demand if they are to invest even more in Russia's Arctic projects. Therefore, it is in Moscow's interest to continue

relations with other partners, including the circumpolar states. Russia's willingness to do this is supported by the findings of this thesis, which first, show that the international cooperation in the Arctic was not suspended at the request of Russia, and second, that Moscow has proved willing to resume this cooperation at any time, and if not, then as quickly as possible form new partnerships to replace the old. Another example of Russia preferring cooperation over conflict is that Moscow, since February 24, still adheres to a law-based solution to its delimitation question of its Arctic maritime borders. This is stated in the latest Maritime Doctrine, which otherwise presents a quite pessimistic view on the security situation in the High North (Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2022).

On the other hand, it has been proved that the Arctic is not immune to conflict taking place elsewhere in the world. This was confirmed in 2014, when the spill-over from the Ukraine crisis resulted in increased tension and mistrust between Russia and NATO. This time, in the light of the statements of the NATO Secretary-General and the cutting of political ties in the Arctic, the region appears even more vulnerable. Of course, it must also be kept in mind that there is often a great difference between what politicians say and what they end up doing. Thus, the intentions expressed in policy documents and political statements may not necessarily be the ones that those in power act according to. Hence, a conflict in the Arctic cannot be completely ruled out. Nevertheless, taking Russia's challenges in the Arctic into consideration, and the fact that these have remained practically unchanged since Soviet times, it seems quite obvious that Russia simply cannot afford to be anything other than a reliable partner to all parties engaged in the AZRF – both western and eastern countries. This applies to both economic co-operation and political institutions such as the Arctic Council.

The council constitutes a valuable forum for the sharing of knowledge and creation of stability between the Arctic states. It also serves as an initiator of important measures like search and rescue cooperation – all of which benefit Russia. With this in mind, in addition to Russia's reaction to the current suspension of council activities, it is hard to imagine why Russia would abandon these kinds of organizations. The only thing that speaks in favor of such an action, is if Moscow deems it futile to be part of these types of co-operations as the only non-NATO member, after Finland and Sweden's expected accessions to the treaty. The thing that, at this moment, threatens the future of the council and similar institutions the most, is the remaining members' continuing refusal to cooperate with Russia. In conclusion, Russia has significantly more to lose than to gain from abandoning any kind of partnership in the Arctic, as they

constitute a crucial instrument in achieving the goal of turning the AZRF into the country's leading strategic resource base.

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