

Russia's strategy in the Arctic: cooperation, not confrontation

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ABSTRACT. Russia's strategy in the Arctic is dominated by two overriding international relations (IR) discourses – or foreign policy directions. On the one hand, there is an IR-realism/geopolitical discourse that puts security first and often has a clear patriotic character, dealing with 'exploring', 'winning' or 'conquering' the Arctic and putting power, including military power, behind Russia's national interests in the area. Opposed to this is an IR-liberalism, international law-inspired and modernisation-focused discourse, which puts cooperation first and emphasises 'respect for international law', 'negotiation' and 'cooperation', and labels the Arctic as a 'territory of dialogue', arguing that the Arctic states all benefit the most if they cooperate peacefully. After a short but very visible media stunt in 2007 and subsequent public debate by proponents of the IR-realism/geopolitical side, the IR-liberalism discourse has been dominating Russian policy in the Arctic since around 2008–2009, following a pragmatic decision by the Kremlin to let the Foreign Ministry and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov take the lead in the Arctic. The question asked here is how solid is this IR-liberalist-dominated Arctic policy? Can it withstand the pressure from more patriotic minded parts of the Russian establishment?

Introduction: Russia's debate on the Arctic

Russia's annexation of Crimea and subsequent war in eastern Ukraine in 2014 has ignited a fierce international debate on how to view Russia's foreign policy. Much of the discussion has focused on Russia's alleged 'revisionist position' towards the present international system, which Russia considers too Western dominated, and Russia's supposed 'assertiveness' or 'aggressiveness' (Bartles & McDermott, 2014; Illarionov, 2014; Kasparov, 2015; Piontkovsky, 2015). Some scholars point out that the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine is a 'game changer', arguing that the West must re-assess its threat perception and change its policy vis-à-vis Russia in a more firm direction (Center for Militære Studier, 2014; House of Commons Defence Committee, 2014). Other scholars argue that what we are experiencing is a New Cold War between Russia and the West (Legvold, 2014; Lucas, 2015). Part of this debate has focused on Russia's alleged breaking or bending of international rules and concepts (Allison, 2014; Kupfer & Waal, 2015; Lamont, 2014). Others argue that what we see is a 'resumption of great-power rivalry' (Trenin, 2014), a 'return of geopolitics' (Kotkin, 2016; Mead, 2014; Mearsheimer, 2014). The debate is further influenced by the war in Syria, where Russia is described as establishing itself as 'a player' in the Syrian crisis or as a 'key regional player' (Kozhanov, 2015) in the wider Middle East. A move from Putin that once again has caught Washington 'off-guard' and essentially forces the USA and the West 'to get real' about Russia and forego any plans of another 'reset' (Stent, 2016). Another general argument in the debate has been to highlight a supposed trend towards a narrowing of the circle of people around Putin to mere yes-men, ridding him of critical advice (Galeotti & Judah, 2014; Judah, 2014). Other scholars highlight that 'the chaotic manner in which the operation in Crimea unfolded belies any concerted plan for territorial revanche' as a sign of 'a leader who

is increasingly prone to risky gambles and to grabbing short-run tactical advantages' (Treisman, 2016, p. 48), and who 'is about immediate tactics, not long-term strategy' (Marten, 2015, p. 191). The impression left from these most valid accounts is a Russia that must be confronted and balanced because of its assertive, aggressive and revisionist stand. A country which one cannot cooperate with but must balance because of its rule-changing and destabilising behaviour. And a Russian leader who is short sighted, unpredictable and gambling with the future of his country, who takes all of the important decisions on foreign policy on his own without consulting more than a handful of trusted advisors and friends.

But if one takes a closer look at Russia's policy vis-à-vis the Arctic, Russia does not look like a revisionist power. It looks more like a status quo power following a well-established long-term strategy. Paradoxically, Russia has followed the 'rules of the game' in the Arctic – while all the time 'breaking the rules of the game' in Ukraine. Russia has been a constructive supporter of the Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, and it has strictly followed the process of delineation of the undersea territory in the Arctic under the auspices of the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) – of which it (the Soviet Union) has been a signatory member since 1982 – and met deadlines and requirements of the UN Committee on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). It has not bullied or threatened its neighbours and fellow members of the Arctic Council. How can this be explained if Russia's behaviour is increasingly confrontational, rule breaking and assertive? Is it just a matter of time – a period of 'quite before the storm' – until Russia is strong enough to use its steady growing military power in the Arctic for breaking rules and making territorial gains in that area as well? Or is Russia actually engaging in a rule-governed behaviour that is non-assertive and non-revisionist, at least

in the Arctic? And what implications, if any, might this have on other policy areas? Are there other areas where we might cooperate rather than confront Russia?

In explaining the lack of spillover from the war in Ukraine so far some scholars underline the effects of international organisations and regimes in the Arctic (Ikonen, 2015). Some are more sceptical of what the future brings and suggests establishing new, or enhanced, institutions in the Arctic, especially concerning security issues (Conley & Rohloff, 2015). Others focus on structural factors and point to the lack of conflicting national interests between the Arctic coastal states in explaining the apparent lack of spillover from the war in Ukraine and point to the mutual coexistence of 'moderate military build-up combined with enhanced diplomatic accommodation' in the Arctic (Kristensen & Sakstrup, 2016). Some scholars are sceptical of the alleged acceleration of Russia's military and security posture in the Arctic (Zysk, 2015), others downplay its importance (Konyshov & Sergunin, 2014). Somewhat less studied are the domestic pressures that form parts of the Russian Arctic policy, and in most cases scholars focus on materialistic rather than idealistic factors (Berzina, 2015; Laruelle, 2011, 2012, 2014a). This paper will contribute to discussions on the idealist (or discursive) side of the domestic factors which form foreign policy. Thus, the essay seeks to study Russia's own debate on the Arctic in order to draw the boundaries or the frame of future Russian policies vis-à-vis the Arctic that are logically possible and politically plausible.

We will address two general hypotheses. First, Russia's decision-making process concerning Arctic affairs is to a large extent exempt from the general centralisation of decision-making that seems to have hit other policy areas, such as the decision to invade Ukraine. Furthermore, the decision-making process is institutionalised and seems to be less dependent on personal links. Second, Russia's public debate on the Arctic is mainly divided in two overall discourses. These discourses are based on the basic assumptions of – or at least assumptions that are very similar to – the two theoretical schools of thought within international relations (IR), namely: IR-realism/geopolitics and IR-liberalism. Whether behind these two ways of discussing Russia's policy in the Arctic (and the world) there are underlying forms of discourse is outside the scope of this article. The discourses could be considered to be close to the centuries-old debate about Russia's relationship with the West, above all the debate between *Zapadniki* (Westernisers) and Slavophiles (see, for example, Neumann 1996). On one side, there is IR-realism/geopolitics inspired discourse, which at times is strongly patriotic and partially coloured by national romantic rhetoric. Within the concept of IR-realism here we include both neorealism and realism (also called classic realism), understood as the two schools within international political theory that are characterised by (among others) the theorists Kenneth Waltz (neorealism) and Henry Morgenthau (realism) (see Morgenthau 1948; Waltz 1979). The concept of geopolitics is based upon

the views of, for example, Mackinder (1904) and Russian geopoliticians such as Alexander Dugin and Alexander Prokhanov, who are, to a large extent, inspired by the pre-war German geopolitical traditions of Karl Haushofer, Carl Schmitt and Rudolf Kjellén. This discourse focuses on the need for a security-based, unilateralist approach to the Arctic. It is based on balance of power logic (zero-sum game) and parts of it are permeated with notions such as 'conquest', 'exploring', 'Russia's greatness', 'revival' and 'sovereignty'. On the other side, there is an IR-liberalism discourse, which aspires to accommodate international law, first and foremost the UNCLOS framework and the CLCS process. The term IR-liberalism includes liberalism, idealism or utopianism (the latter term is used mainly by critics), as well as more modern movements such as liberal institutionalism (see Jackson & Sørensen, 2007; Wæver, 1992). Here the emphasis is on institutionalism, regimes and economic development, rather than democracy and democratic peace theory. The proponents of this discourse view IR generally and policies in the Arctic region especially as a plus-sum game, where all actors – and especially Russia – stand to gain more from cooperation and peaceful competition than from unilateralist action and balance of power dynamics. Here the language used is far more technocratic, legalistic or mercantile, with an emphasis on terms such as 'scientific' and 'research'. There are a number of references to international law, such as UNCLOS and especially the CLCS process, as well as a number of joint effort and cooperative expressions, for example, 'joint venture', 'public-private partnerships', 'cooperation' and 'productive cooperation'.

After a short but internationally very visible media stunt in 2007 and subsequent public debate by proponents of the IR-realist/geopolitical side, the IR-liberalism discourse has been dominating Russian policy in the Arctic since around 2008–2009. The research questions asked here are: How solid is this IR-liberalist-dominated Arctic discourse? Can it withstand the pressure from more patriotic minded parts of the Russian establishment, who have gained traction during and after the war in Ukraine, and will this spell the end to Russia's benign policy in the Arctic?

The first section establishes the chosen theoretical and methodological framework. The second section tries to establish who are the principle political actors (institutions and central persons) concerning the Arctic. The third section outlines the overall framework of Russia's foreign policy of which the Russian strategy is part, then goes through the central policy documents concerning the Arctic. The fourth section lays out the general lines of the Russian foreign policy elite's debate on the Arctic from 2007–2014 before the break out of the war in Ukraine. The fifth section follows the debate on the Arctic after the war in Ukraine and tries to establish if there has been a change in the way the Arctic is debated within the Russian foreign policy elite after Ukraine, and whether this will also lead to a change in policy. The final section will draw conclusions.

Theoretical framework and method

This article is grounded in a combination of foreign policy theory and discourse analysis (Berzina, 2015; Wæver, 1990a, 1990b, 2005). Thus, foreign policy here is seen as an outcome of varying overlapping bargaining games among political actors arranged hierarchically inside and outside the national government. Thus, the concept of the state is limited to ‘top officials and central institutions of government charged with external defence and the conduct of diplomacy’ (Taliaferro, 2006, p. 470). The foreign policy elite (or foreign policy executive) (FPE) acts in two arenas simultaneously, namely the international and the domestic:

‘In effect, domestic politics – in particular relationship between the state (FPE) and various social actors – intervenes at each stage of the adaption to outside incentives: threat assessment, strategic adjustment, mobilisation, and extraction of resources’ (Kaczmarek, 2012, p. 8).

Thus, the state is seen as a representative institution, constantly subjected to power struggles. For Russia, representative means representing strong individuals, bureaucratic classes, private/corporate interests and societal ideas, which within the foreign policy area can be framed as ‘foreign policy schools’ (Staun, 2007, p. 37) or ‘epistemic communities’ shaping the world view of the FPE; that is, large discourses or world views (Weltbildern), as Wittgenstein would describe it (Wittgenstein, 1989, § 122, p. 174), on what type of foreign policy Russia should lead. Discourses organise knowledge in a systematic way, and thus delimits what can and cannot meaningfully be said. Thus, these discourses set the frame or the limits of what are politically feasible policy directions (Wæver, 2005). A discourse that has structured political behaviour for some time results in behavioural patterns that are difficult to change. Thus, discourses are seen as structurally layered, where the more sedimented discourses are institutionalised and thus more difficult to rearticulate (or politicise) and thus change (Bertramsen, Thomsen, & Torfing, 1991, p. 30; Phillipsen, 2012). Therefore, discourses are not just free floating words, but are often tied to institutions. The more institutionalised, the more a discourse is formed into ‘persistent and connected sets of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behaviour roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations’ (Keohane, 1989, p. 3), the more stable the discourse, and its policy line, becomes.

This is a mainly inside-out driven model of foreign policy. This does not mean that the international system does not affect Russia’s foreign policy. State preferences reflect patterns of transnational societal interaction, and the position of particular values in a transnational cultural discourse help define values in each society (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 522) – also Russian values. But it means that the configuration of state preferences at least in the short-term are generally more important than capabilities (as the realists would have it) and information/institutions (as the functionalist regime theorists argue) when de-

termining foreign policy. Societal ideas, institutions and private/corporate interests influence state behaviour by shaping state preferences. Capabilities are, of course, also important, and over time probably the most important factor, when determining state behaviour. The reason for expecting this (an implicit realist view) is that societal ideas must be backed by power in order to gain the upper hand in the long term.

Using a discourse analysis-focused foreign policy model on Russia is no easy task. Even if Russia’s Arctic policy is relatively well-documented in publicly accessible documents, compared to for example the decision to invade Crimea in 2014, many parts of Russia’s foreign policy processes are hidden from the public eye. However, since political processes to a large extent are communicative processes, analysis of public discourse is an applicable tool for analysing policy. We do not have access to what Putin thinks or what he says in private meetings, but we do have access to what he says in public, as well as the resulting public directives and laws that guide politics. Since policy documents and speeches are texts, they can be analysed as such using textual or discourse analysis (Barthes 1972; Wæver, 1993; Wittgenstein 1958, 1984, 1989). Thus, the assumption employed here is that political processes to a great extent are constituted by acts of communication, and that the discourses used by the different political actors set the frame of what is imaginable and politically possible. Thus, the general aim of this paper is to identify and compare what are essentially foreign policy discourses on the Arctic as they are employed by Russian officials in Russian public documents and speeches. Please note that I do not distinguish between discourses for internal versus external audiences, like for example Ieva Berzina (Berzina, 2015). The reason is mainly that I find it very hard to distinguish which statements and policy documents are purely intended for internal audiences and which are intended for foreign audiences, and which are for dual use. Furthermore, some statements that may have been intended for internal use, have ended up having a large impact on foreign audiences. An example of one such media event, which, I presume, was intended for internal audiences, was the Russian expedition flag-planting event on the North Pole seabed in August 2007. Furthermore, I have also deliberately avoided trying to discuss instrumental or strategic use of discourses. Not that discourses are not used instrumentally – I believe they most certainly are – but that is another area where the lines are very blurred and a topic which would demand a rather thorough discussion. The ability to determine when certain discourses are used instrumentally with the purpose of, for example, enhancing a state’s negotiation position and when they express a ‘real’ concern or a deeply felt opinion is limited in the theoretical approach used in this paper. Another linked and important subject I leave to others to discuss is the question of whether the foreign policy of authoritarian states is more or less stable than the foreign policy of democratic states. For two interesting

views on this, see Marten (2015) and Umland (2014). In the case of Russia's Arctic policy, I may contribute to that discussion, arguing that Russia's policy is characterised by a high degree of stability and predictability. Another relevant subject I have chosen to leave to others to explore is the discussion on the causal power of discourse (see, for example, Elder-Vass 2011, 2012).

In order to find sources for discourse analysis, I have used the Russian government institutions' official homepages (kremlin.ru, mid.ru, mil.ru, government.ru, mnr.gov.ru) along with a number of international and Russian news sites (especially the government paper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*), and searched using a combination of the political actors surname (or first name and surname if there were too many hits) and the word 'Arctic' (or 'Арктический'). This has been supplied with Google search results, some in Russian and some in English. The selection of which officials' (political actors) speeches to analyse was done after an analysis of which officials are considered to be the principle actors determining Russia's Arctic policy. I have, where possible, provided links to official or unofficial English translations of the original Russian documents and speeches by officials, in order better serve the reader. I also predominantly use these English translations when I quote the Russian texts, even when they are unofficial. In cases where there are no English versions, or they are of poor quality, the translations are mine – and so are the translation errors.

Who are the principle actors determining Russia's Arctic policy

After Putin's accession to the presidency and his almost immediate consolidation of the Russian state at the beginning of his first presidential term in 2000–2004, many observers bestowed the President with a substantial autonomy concerning the shaping of Russia's foreign policy (Charap, 2007). According to Trenin & Lo (2005), Putin is extremely autocratic with regard to foreign policy and is advised by the usual circle of political insiders; that is, by the advisors in the presidential administration, including the National Security Council, and to a lesser extent by the Foreign Ministry. The advice is given on the basis of information provided by the domestic intelligence service (FSB), the foreign intelligence service (SVR) and the military intelligence service (GRU). As Lilia Shevtsova states, it is 'typically a little, hermetically sealed circle of people, who are completely close to Putin and are therefore very loyal to him' who help reach important decisions (Marten, 2015; Staun, 2014). Lately, there has been a debate as to whether this tendency has intensified in recent years. Thus, Ben Judah's – and others' – descriptions of Putin's compartmentalised daily work life, which is divided into 'thousands of units of 15 minutes and planned for months, if not years ahead' (Judah, 2014), give evidence of a president who is increasingly isolated from critical or different (ordinary) parts of the outside world. He most often meets with bowing and scraping, yes-saying

bureaucrats and is hung up in pedantic formalities and presidential protocol. He more and more rarely comes to the Kremlin in Moscow, which he detests with all of its noise and pollution, but stays at his Novo Ogaryovo palace by the Rublevka highway west of Moscow – or at his palace in Sochi – when he is not on his extensive trips out of town or out of the country. He surrounds himself with his old friends from St Petersburg and the KGB years because he trusts them. The debate on the narrowing of the circle of people around Putin has been reviewed since the war in Ukraine (Lo, 2015; Marten, 2015; Treisman, 2016, p. 48). Thus, this trend towards a more closed and much narrower circle of confidants has apparently increased up to, during and possibly after the war in Ukraine (Fishman, 2016; Galeotti, 2016; Galeotti & Judah, 2014).

With regard to the formulation of the overall lines of Russia's policies in the Arctic, the picture is markedly different. First of all, the decision-making process is much more prolonged – by the nature of the subject, of course – and much more institutionalised, and the circle of confidants is much larger, just as the policy to a large extent is written down in public documents. According to several scholars, the presidential administration is the leading institution followed closely by the National Security Council, which has been responsible for the Arctic strategies since 2008, and the Ministry of Defence (Åtland, 2011; Baev, 2013; Berzina, 2015). Nikolai Patrushev, together with the then-Minister of Emergency Situations Sergei Shoigu, convinced Putin of the importance of the Arctic, Baev argues (Baev, 2012, 2013, p. 270). Additionally, it is obvious that the Foreign Ministry, at least since 2008–2009, has outlined a large part of the Russian policy regarding the Arctic – within the framework set by the presidential administration and the National Security Council. Concerning development of the Arctic resources and the Northern Sea Route (Sevmorput) the Ministry for Natural Resources and Environment and the Ministry of Transportation are central institutions. Furthermore, Ieva Berzina argues that other central policy-makers concerning the Arctic include Senior Arctic Official Vladimir Barbin, former Senior Arctic Official Anton Vasiliev, Russia's Envoy to NATO Alexander Gruskhov, Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for International Cooperation in the Arctic and Antarctic Artur Chilingarov and Chairman of the Arctic Commission Dmitry Rogozin (Berzina, 2015, p. 284). State energy companies Rosneft (Chairman, Igor Sechin) and Gazprom (Director, Alexei Miller) are also important actors concerning the development of Arctic resources. Furthermore, there is some indication that Russian–Finnish businessman Gennady Timchenko must also be considered as an increasingly important player with regard to the Arctic (Staun, 2015, p. 15). Rowe & Blakkisrud point out that, where the Foreign Ministry and the presidential administration were the dominant voices in connection with the Arctic debate in 2008 and 2009 the field of debaters in the period following became somewhat larger, which is why a number of other

state representatives took part in the debate about the Arctic; for example, Chief of the Border Guard Service General Vladimir Pronichev and Director of the Institute of Strategic Studies and Analysis Vagif Guseinov (Rowe & Blakkisrud, 2014, p. 74). Other political actors that may have an influence on the policies of the Arctic and whose statements should be watched for could be assessed by noting the composition of the members of the Russian Arctic Commission. The composition of the Commission is rather wide, including a range of ministries (for example, the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Economic Development, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Education and Science, and Ministry of National Resources and Environment), federal agencies (for example, Federal Customs, the Federal Agency for State Reserves, and the Federal Agency for the Development of State Border Infrastructure), the Federation Council, state and private energy companies (for example, Rosneft, Gazprom, Lukoil, Novatek), federal subjects from Russia's Arctic zone, as well as public organisations and public figures such as Artur Chilingarov (Government Order #431-p, 2015). However, in my analysis, I have not been able to ascertain appreciable influence of these more peripheral political actors on the two main discourses.

In summary, the policy process concerning the Arctic is characterised by a broad set of political actors, who are part of what looks like a classic institutionalised bargaining game, and seems less driven by personal links to Putin – thus, somewhat different from the apparently heavily centralised and personalised decision-making process surrounding the annexation of Crimea. The overall policy lines on the Arctic are furthermore embedded in an institutionalised cooperation between the presidential administration, the National Security Council, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Russia's foreign policy framework

Russia's strategy for the Arctic is formulated within the framework of the overall foreign and security policy thinking in Moscow. Thus, Russia's ambitions in the Arctic do not stand alone, but form part of Russia's general foreign and security policy, which is influenced by the political system Putin has built up since his assumption of power. The leading foreign policy thinking from the end of Putin's first presidential term can be categorised as great power normalisation or neo-imperialism (Staun, 2007, 2008; Tsygankov, 2007). Thus, the main objective is that the international system should not be dominated by the superpower USA, but should instead be a multipolar system, in which great powers such as China, India, Brazil – and Russia – have their own spheres of influence, within which other powers (especially the USA and the EU) must not interfere. Attached to the objective of a multipolar system is a clear expectation that Russia will again enter into the role of a great power in its own right and is internationally recognised as such. Thus, the idea that Russia is and must be a great power is a

central and permanent element in the Russian political self-understanding (Bassin & Aksenov, 2006, p. 100; Reshetnikov, 2011, p. 154), as Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov expressed in 2007:

'Russia can (...) exist within its present boundaries only as one of the world's leading states' (Tsygankov, 2008, p. 46).

Or as Putin formulated it in his famous Munich speech in 2007:

'Russia is a country with a history that spans more than a thousand years and has practically always used the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy. We are not going to change this tradition today' (Putin, 2007).

The desire to be a great power also figures in Russia's foreign policy concept as an established part of the foreign policy goal setting. In 2000, Russia is mentioned directly as a 'great power, as one of the most influential centres of the modern world' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2000). In the 2008 policy concept, the great power feeling should, on top of that, have consequences for the foreign policy that is demanded to be reformed. Here, Russia is mentioned as 'one of the most influential centres in the modern world', whose 'increased role' in international affairs and 'greater responsibility for global developments' make it necessary to engage in 'rethinking of the priorities of the Russian foreign policy' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2008). In Russia's 2009 National Security Strategy until 2020, the great power dream is present to a greater degree. Here, it is not enough to be a (regional) great power; now the country will also be a 'world power'. In Section 21, the goal of 'transforming Russia into a world power' is defined as a long-term national interest (The National Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2009). The foreign policy concept from 2013 talks of 'profound changes in the geopolitical landscape' and a 'process of transition' that will end with the creation of a 'polycentric system of international relations', where the 'ability of the West to dominate world economy and politics' is rapidly diminishing because 'global power' is 'shifting to the East, primarily to the Asia-Pacific region' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2013, pp. 5–6). In Russia's new foreign policy concept from 2016, Russia's foreign policy is described as 'assertive' and Russia is described as having played a 'unique role ... for centuries as a counterbalance in international affairs' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016, pp. 21–22). Also in Russia's new National Security Strategy from 31 December 2015 the ambition of ensuring Russia's status as one of the world's great powers is highlighted early in the document (President of the Russian Federation, 2015, pp. 7–11). Furthermore, the document also highlights the risks involved in following this 'independent' course:

'The Russian Federation's implementation of an independent foreign and domestic policy is giving rise to opposition from the United States and its allies, who

are seeking to retain their dominance in world affairs' (President of the Russian Federation, 2015, p. 12).

This position is echoed in the 2016 foreign policy concept: 'Attempts by Western powers to maintain their positions in the world, including by imposing their point of view on global processes and conducting a policy to contain alternative centres of power, leads to even more instability in international relations and more turbulence on the global and regional levels' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016, p. 5).

The great power role and the ambition to play a decisive role on the international stage – and the attainment of the matching respect and recognition from the other great powers – are, in other words, entirely central identity markers in Russian self-understanding from which the Russian national interests in the foreign policy area are derived. And if Russia shall have a place as a great power in the international system, the Russian Arctic becomes central.

Russia's Arctic Strategy

Since 2008, Russia has had a coherent National Security Strategy for the Arctic. Russia's increased interest in the Arctic is due, first and foremost, to on one hand commercial interests and on the other hand security interests. Russia has the longest coastline in the Arctic region, which, in the coming years, is expected to become increasingly accessible to ship traffic for a greater part of the year, and people increasingly hope to be able to use the hitherto inaccessible resources in the subsurface; for which there are high expectations. The US Geological Survey (USGS) estimated in 2008 that the Arctic holds more than 30% of the world's remaining underground natural gas resources: 1.7 trillion m³ of natural gas and 44 billion barrels of liquid natural gas. In addition to this, the Arctic holds 13% of the known remaining oil resources, upwards of 90 billion barrels of oil. Nearly all of that (84%) is estimated to be offshore (USGS, 2008). According to the USGS, 60% of the undiscovered oil in the Arctic is in territory under Russian jurisdiction, which corresponds to 412 billion barrels of oil. According to Russian sources, up to 90% of the hydrocarbon reserves are located in the Siberian continental shelf in the Arctic zone with 67% in the western part of the Arctic, in the Barents Sea and in the Kara Sea. The bulk of the known reserves are estimated by the Russian government to be within the Russian 200 sea mile territorial sea boundary. But it is also estimated that there are substantial deposits inside the expanded 350 sea mile sea boundary, which Russia can claim if the country can convince the UN CLCS (CLCS, n.d.) – based on provisions in the UNCLOS – that the Lomonosov and Mendeleev ridges are an extension of the Siberian continental shelf, and subsequently be able to agree with the other littoral states how to divide the underwater territory. In contrast, due to the melting ice, accessibility is also a potential threat for the Russian

military. Thus, the northern flank, which until now in all practicality has been inaccessible for foreign military land and sea forces, in the eyes of the Russian military may become more open when the ice melts. These two overall interests are broadly reflected in Russia's central documents on the Arctic.

Russia's written strategy for the Arctic is essentially based on seven central documents:

- (1) On the general level lies the influential Russian National Security Council's strategy from 2008, 'Foundation of the state politics of the Russian Federation on the Arctic for 2020 and in the longer perspective', hereafter the 'Arctic Strategy 2008' (Government of the Russian Federation, 2008), which links development in the Arctic with Russia's national security. The Arctic Strategy 2008 ties into the overall strategic lines in:
- (2) The Russian Federation's 2009 strategy for national security up to 2020 (The National Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2009, pp. 11, 42, 62). Both documents present the general lines and interests rather than specific strategies for reaching the set goals. The more detailed planning and implementation – but still at a high level – is found in:
- (3) The Ministry of Energy's 2009 'Energy strategy of Russia for the period up to 2030' (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2009), and in:
- (4) The Ministry of Transport 'Transport strategy of the Russian Federation up to 2030' (Ministry of Transportation of the Russian Federation, 2008).

The overall Arctic Strategy 2008 was updated in 2013 with:

- (5) The development strategy of the Russian Arctic and national security for the period until 2020', hereafter named the 'Arctic Strategy 2013' (Government of the Russian Federation, 2013a). From this comes:
- (6) 'Regulations on the State Commission on the Development of the Arctic' from 14 March 2015 (Government of the Russian Federation, 2015a) and
- (7) 'The Northern Sea Route Comprehensive Development Project' from 8 June 2015, which is only partly accessible to the public (Government of the Russian Federation, 2015b).

The military and security interests in the Arctic are not singled out in one specific public document, but Russia's interests are reflected in the military doctrines from 2010 and 2014 (President of the Russian Federation, 2010a, 2014), as well as the Russian Federation's National Security Strategy from 31 December 2015 (The National Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2015). However, these documents will not be examined in detail here, since they are part of the overall framework of Russia's foreign and security policies dealt with in the previous section.

If we first take a look at the Arctic Strategy 2008, the strategic imperative for the Russian Arctic policy is to secure access to and development of the energy

resources in the Russian Arctic. It is thus made clear that the ultimate goal of Russia's policy in the Arctic is to make 'use of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation as a strategic resource base' (Government of the Russian Federation, 2008, p. 4). The Russian national interests in the Arctic are defined as follows: (1) to use the natural resources in the region, primarily oil and gas, to promote Russia's own economic development, (2) to maintain the Arctic as a 'zone of peace and cooperation', (3) to preserve the 'unique ecological systems of the Arctic' and (4) to have the Northern Sea Route recognised as a national transportation route (and not as international waters) (Government of the Russian Federation, 2008, p. 4). With regard to military security, the Arctic Strategy 2008 states that the primary goals are to protect the Russian Federation's national frontiers in the Arctic zone, maintain a 'favourable operative regime in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, including maintenance of a necessary fighting potential' of the Russian Federation's armed forces in the region (Government of the Russian Federation, 2008, p. 6). Further, the strategy states an ambition of reaching agreement with the other Arctic coastal states regarding the division of the territory within the rules of UNCLOS, and of ensuring and strengthening the good cooperation with the other Arctic states. However, the timeframe was optimistic and the 2008 version was updated with a new, and more realistic, version in 2013 (Government of the Russian Federation, 2013a). Here, the deadline for the preparatory work concerning submission of claims to UNCLOS for extension of sea territory to 350 sea miles is postponed from 2010 to 2015 – which corresponds well with the actual submission to CLCS which happened on 3 August 2015 (UNCLOS, n.d.). The deadline for the CLCS determination of the delineation of frontiers under UNCLOS and the entering of the subsequent bilateral agreements between the Arctic states has been pushed from 2015 until 2020 (Government of the Russian Federation, 2013a, p. 29). Whether the CLCS can abide by that tight deadline, and whether Russia can go on to reach bilateral agreements with the other Arctic coastal states within this timeframe, is questionable (Lavrov, 2015). In addition, it is clear from the strategy that Russia itself does not have the technological capability to develop the hard-to-access resources in the Arctic, but is compelled to attract foreign investment and expertise (Heininen, Sergunin, & Yarovoy, 2013) – a possibility which at present is unattainable due to sanctions imposed by the West. Some, such as Marlene Laruelle, argue that 'the transition from idea to reality is more complex, longer and more costly than expected, and success will not necessarily be forthcoming' (Laruelle, 2014a, p. 254).

The economic interests in the Arctic – the idea to use the Arctic as a 'strategic resource base' for Russian government spending – clearly have a higher priority than military interests, judging from of the Arctic Strategy 2008 and the Arctic Strategy 2013. Not only are the bulk of the stated interests, projects and initiatives in the

two strategies clearly focused on economic and social development in the Arctic, the security and military interests and the foreseen potential risks and threats are relegated to an inferior placing in the both documents. Russia's Energy Strategy up to 2030 (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2009) also singles out the Arctic as one of the areas that, in the future, will ensure Russia's position as an energy superpower. According to the strategy, development is predicted to move forward in three phases: (1) Until 2015, geological studies are carried out in order to single out new oil and gas fields on the continental shelf and on the Yamal Peninsula. (2) It is predicted that, in the period 2015–2022, extraction of oil and gas can commence in the area so that Russia will be in a position to compensate for the diminishing extraction of oil and gas in western Siberia. (3) From 2022 until 2030, gas will be extracted in the eastern part of the Arctic Ocean.

Russia's Arctic Strategy 2013 (Government of the Russian Federation, 2013a) has, as mentioned above, scaled down on some of the overly optimistic deadlines in the original strategy. Furthermore, the 2013 version has also shifted some weight towards being even more open to international cooperation in order to solve some of the main problems for Russia's energy sector, namely the lack of technology, know-how and practical experience in exploiting energy fields in the hard-to-access offshore areas in the Arctic. The document plainly states that Russia on its own does not have the resources or the technology to exploit the energy fields in offshore parts of the Arctic. The Arctic Strategy 2013 also states the need for better government control of and coordination and monitoring of the many different government projects in the Arctic – thus paving the way for the long awaited establishment of the State Commission on the Development of the Arctic, established 14 March 2015. The Commission is headed by Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, and, as stated in the Arctic Strategy 2013, is set up in order to better coordinate the policies of the vast executive governmental bodies that are involved in the Arctic. The objective of the Commission is to protect Russia's national interests in the region and to oversee the fulfilment of the Arctic Strategy 2008/2013 and coordinate better the efforts from the various actors in the region. The Northern Sea Route Development Project is intended to enhance the progress of the development of the sea route, which has not progressed as hoped in Moscow. In 2010, no more than four transits took place along the route. In 2013, this had risen to 71 transits or nearly 1.36 million tons of cargo. In 2015, the number of transits had fallen to 18, or approximately 39,600 tons of cargo, because of lower fuel prices and the political isolation of Russia due to Western sanctions (Soroka, 2016). As Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev noted about the Northern Sea Route at the official signing of the document in June 2015:

'To put it mildly, its use is not so hot, I admit' (World Maritime News, 2015).

Russia's Arctic debates before the war in Ukraine

The realist/geopolitics discourse

One could discuss whether what I here have termed the IR-realist/geopolitical discourse really is one discourse or whether it is a number of discourses lumped into one. Thus, one could make a valid argument that the more patriotic and geopolitical parts of the discourse, especially the part influenced by for example Alexander Dugin's use of 'life space' (otherwise known as *Lebensraum*), is rather far from standard IR-realism and actually a separate discourse. Thus, instead of having two overall discourses, I could have chosen to operate with three main discourses on the Arctic: geopolitical, realist and liberalist. This would mean, however, that the central actors, such as Putin, Patrushev, Shoigu, Gerasimov and Rogozin, would have their speeches or central concepts divided into two, where parts would belong in the geopolitical discourse and parts in the realist discourse. Thus, I believe that the Russian realist tradition is somewhat different from the Western realist or neorealist tradition, since it is highly influenced by geopolitical arguments – which makes it hard to discern the two. And if the arguments were divided in two, one would lose the internal logic. Please note that the geopolitical arguments used in the Russian debate are also somewhat different from standard Western geopolitical references, since the Russian geopolitical tradition, of for example Alexander Dugin and Alexander Prokhanov, is highly influenced by the pre-war German geopolitical tradition's organic state thinking, as presented by Karl Haushofer, Carl Schmitt and Rudolf Kjellén. This may make the logic seem strange to Western eyes but perfectly suitable in a Russian context. Therefore, I have chosen to unite the realist and geopolitical arguments in one 'realist/geopolitical' discourse. The same goes for the IR-liberalist discourse, which is also a combination of discourses that build upon legalist or international law arguments, discourses on the benefits of international free trade, as well as discourses stressing the benefits of economic modernisation. In dividing the debate into two overall discourses, I follow the path chosen by Marlene Laruelle (Laruelle, 2014a, 2014b, p. 7).

At the beginning of the 2000s the Russian debate – please note that the terms 'the Russian debate' or 'the Russian public debate' should predominantly be seen as the Russian political elite's debate on the Arctic – on the Arctic was static (Berzina, 2015, p. 284; Laruelle, 2012, p. 566). Russia's view on the Arctic was mainly 'as an area of possible contestation with the Euro-Atlantic community and where its interests were threatened'. Russia defined the Arctic as a region where Putin's ambitions of Russia as a great power could be demonstrated, 'partly due to its long history as a strong presence in the region' (Klimenko, 2016, p. 5). This policy was to a large extent supported by the Russian military as well as the Security Council and the Ministry of Defence. The Russian debate on the Arctic was revived in 2007. And it was revived with a solid patriotic thrust by the IR-realism/geopolitical side of the discourse. Russia sent a privately sponsored

scientific Arctic expedition on the RS *Akademik Fedorov* to the North Pole, supported by the Russian state in the form of the Russian nuclear icebreaker *The Russia*, which could penetrate the thick ice on the route to the North Pole. The expedition included some 350 people, and among them Artur Chilingarov, a famous Russian polar researcher, former vice chairman of the Russian State Duma and Putin's special representative for the Arctic and Antarctica. The official objective of the expedition was, among other things, to collect scientific material for the UNCLOS/CLCS process. At the North Pole, the expedition launched two submersibles, Mir-1 and Mir-2, and planted a Russian flag made of titanium on the sea bed at a depth of 4.261 m symbolically marking that it was Russian territory; pictures and videos of the event were published, which soon went viral. (Russian envoys, who I have spoken with, argue that there was no symbolic claiming of Russian territory in the flag-planting event. Rather, they say, it was not unlike the planting of the American flag on the moon: a symbolic gesture of the achievements of the nation.) It was a media event that, to a degree, addressed the patriotic circles internally in Russia and stirred up memories of historic explorers' voyages in the nation's service, of which Russia's history is so rich. The feat was duly rewarded by Putin, who named Chilingarov a Hero of the Russian Federation – Chilingarov is already a Hero of the Soviet Union. Chilingarov repaid the compliment by underscoring the expedition's patriotic spirit when he declared to the media: 'Russia stopped its activities in the Arctic in the 1990s due to the break-up of the Soviet Union, but after this 13-year absence we have returned to the Arctic. And strictly speaking, we will never really leave the Arctic anymore. Historically speaking, it is Russian territorial waters and islands. Now we are recovering it... As the famous Russian scientist Michael Lomonosov said back in the XVIII century, "Russia would enlarge by Siberia and the northern seas"' (Chilingarov, 2008).

Taking pride in the Russian expedition, and pointing out that other expeditions to the North Pole were not really on the pole as such but on the ice over the pole, Chilingarov argued:

'We are the people who came closer to the centre of the Earth than anybody else' (Chilingarov, 2008).

In another interview Chilingarov claimed that 'the North Pole belongs to Russia', recalled the great work of Ivan Pananin, a Soviet polar explorer, and likened the new expedition to the old Soviet ones (Chilingarov, 2007). In 2009, he bluntly added that 'we will not give the Arctic to anyone' (Progranichnik.ru, 2009).

The patriotic pride was even more evident among Russian nationalists, who may be on the margins of the political debate but are still a rather vocal group and could potentially end up rearticulating the realist/geopolitical discourse. Many of the nationalists draw upon a central myth from Soviet popular culture stemming from the years of High Stalinism. Here the Arctic was presented as a fore post of Soviet civilisation, an unspoiled territory upon

which one could build true socialism. It was an area of true patriotism, heroism and human endeavours, as well as an area of industrial achievement – all portrayed in newspapers, films and popular novels. The nationalists see the high north as the place where Russia could make up for some of the territory lost with the fall of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, they see the Arctic as the region of revival, where Russia could regain some of its strength and once again become a superpower. They also see the Arctic as a possible scene of the next world war. The notorious nationalist and geopolitician Alexander Dugin is one of the most faithful defenders of the Arctic as something inherently Russian. According to Dugin's occultist reading of the Dutch-German race theorist Hermann Wirth (1885–1981), the Arctic is the original homeland of the Aryan peoples:

'Thousands of years ago, our land welcomed the descendants of the Arctic, the founders of the Hindu and Iranian civilisations. We (especially as Orthodox Christians) are the most direct heirs of the Arctic, of its ancient traditions' (Laruelle, n.d., p. 14).

Dugin's geopolitical teachings also give priority to a Russian special relationship in the Arctic:

'The purpose of our being lies in the expansion of our space. The shelf belongs to us. Polar bears live there, Russian polar bears. And penguins live there, Russian penguins' (Schepp & Traufetter, 2009).

In the quotation – which also went viral in the West not least due to its biological blunder (there are no penguins in the Arctic, they only live in the Antarctic) – Dugin draws not only on his Eurasianist readings but also on the German geopolitical tradition of Geopolitik and its concept of 'living space', furthered, for example, by Friedrich Ratzel and Karl Haushofer. In the Dugin tradition, a confrontation with the West is inevitable, and the Arctic is one of the possible scenes of a future conflict:

'To guarantee its territorial security, Russia must take military control over the centre of the zones attached to it, in the south and in the west, and in the sphere of the northern Arctic Ocean' (Dugin, 2015, p. 11).

An understanding that has inspired among others the nationalist writer Artur Indzhiev. In 2010, he wrote a book called *The battle for the Arctic: will the north be Russian?* in which a weakened Russia in a coming world war is compelled to find its heroic inner nature in order to preserve its rights in the Arctic in the fight against the aggressive West (Laruelle, 2012, p. 567). For Aleksandr Bobdunov, former leader of the Eurasian Youth Union, patriotism even has a spiritual aspect. The Arctic is thus 'not only a base of economic resources, our future in the material sense, but also a territory of the spirit, of heroism, of overcoming, a symbolic resource of central importance for the future of our country' (Laruelle, 2012, p. 567). The communist and geopolitician Alexander Prokhanov welcomed the Russian Arctic expedition and likened it to a Russian commando battalion and heralded it as 'an example of Russian imperial expansion' and as a messenger of Russian 'revival':

'The Arctic is once again becoming a source of Russian power' (Prokhanov, 2007).

The pathos induced was even greater in 2008 when he argued that:

'The Arctic civilisation requires an incredible concentration of force in all domains. It will become, then, a sanctified "common good", in which the peoples of Russia will rediscover their unity, conceived by God as those to whom he destines great missions' (Laruelle, 2012, p. 568).

In the IR-realism/geopolitical inspired part of the Russian FPE in Moscow, the use of power in the Arctic was seen as a potential necessity in a possible future scramble for resources. This view is evident in the 2009 National Security Strategy until 2020:

'Under conditions of competition for resources, it is not excluded that arising problems may be resolved using military force...' (The National Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2009, p. Section 12).

Thus, the 2009 National Security Strategy essentially elevates the Arctic region to one of the main 'energy battlegrounds of the future' (Konyshev & Sergunin, 2014, p. 327). Furthermore, Secretary of the National Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, talks of 'growing strategic risks in the Arctic' (Egorov, 2013). The view that Russia must prepare for a possible future scramble for resources in the Arctic, which was noted in the 2009 National Security Strategy, has also been on public display after announcements from the Russian general staff. Thus, in February 2013, the chief of the general staff, General Valery Gerasimov argued that:

'The level of existing and potential military threats for Russia may increase significantly by 2030, and wars for natural resources should be expected' (Gerasimov, 2013).

Furthermore he referred to the Lebensraum concept in arguing that:

'The level of military threats will be linked to the struggle among the world's leading powers for fuel and energy resources, markets and "living space"' (Gerasimov, 2013).

Part of the realist/geopolitical discourse on the Arctic looks in some ways reactive to what the USA/NATO says and does vis-à-vis the Arctic. Especially changes (or perceived changes) in the US/NATO developments on anti-ballistic missile defence (BMD) systems in the area seem to spark reactions. During a meeting with the Ministry of Defence leadership on 27 February 2013, only a week after the adoption of the updated 2013 Russian Arctic Strategy, Putin compared threats in the Arctic with more traditional threats against Russia's national security. Here he stressed that there are,

'methodical attempts to undermine the strategic balance in various ways and forms. The United States has essentially launched now the second phase in its global missile defence system ... and there is also the danger of militarisation in the Arctic' (Putin, 2013a).

In a speech to the Ministry of Defence in December 2013, Putin implored the assembled chiefs to 'pay special attention to the deployment of infrastructure and military units in the Arctic' because 'Russia is actively exploring this promising region, returning to it, and should use all possible channels to protect its security and national interests' (Putin, 2013b). Valery Konyshev and Alexander Sergunin argue that Putin was reacting to the US military strategy in the Arctic, which had been published at the beginning on November 2013, and which, apart from stressing the need for international cooperation in the region and a hope for peaceful development in the region, places strong weight on missile defence in the Arctic region as part of US strategic deterrence (Konyshev & Sergunin, 2014). Thus, the US military strategy states that US national security interests in the Arctic,

'include such matters as missile defence and early warning; deployment of sea and air systems for strategic sealift, strategic deterrence, maritime presence, and maritime security operations; and ensuring freedom of the seas' (Department of Defense, 2013, p. 3).

The view that US and UK submarine activity in the Arctic is so frequent and intense that it needs to be balanced is also clear from statements from Nikolai Patrushev from December 2013:

'Russia cannot just passively watch war preparations by foreign countries near its borders' (Egorov, 2013). To sum up, the proponents of the realist/geopolitical discourse in essence makes a 'security first' argument, claiming that security issues and potential threats to national security must have top priority over other issues since the threats are so severe that they threaten the security of the state. Power is seen as relational, meaning that cooperation in the Arctic may be fine, but only if Russia gains more than the other states. The international system is essentially seen as anarchy (in Waltzian or classical realist terms) and power between states is viewed in balance of power if not zero-sum terms. The other states in the international system are seen as adversaries, especially the other great powers and even more so the USA. Part of the debate is inherently nationalist and patriotic using expressions such as 'exploring', 'winning' or 'conquering' the Arctic in order to further Russia's 'greatness' and secure its 'revival' as a great power – if not outright secure its survival as a state. Parts of the military establishment also furthers a Dugin (or Haushofer) inspired geopolitical rhetoric which sees the Arctic in light of a potential future 'war over resources' as well as over 'living space'.

The liberalist discourse

Outside Russia, Chilingarov's planting of the Russian flag on the sea floor of the North Pole in August 2007 was not well received and many in the West interpreted the media stunt as evidence of Russia's renewed, quasi-imperial realpolitik. The Canadian foreign minister, Peter

MacKay, dismissed the event as 'a Russian show' and declared:

'This isn't the 15th century. You can't go around the world and just plant flags and say, "we're claiming this territory"' (Reuters, 2007).

In contrast to the Chilingarov flag-planting event and the immediate surge hereafter of Russian patriotic statements from the realist/geopolitics side stands the more IR-liberalism-oriented track which Russia has de facto followed in its actual policies vis-à-vis the Arctic since around 2008–2009 (Åtland, 2011; Laruelle, 2011). Thus, instead of following a realist/geopolitical course, in 2008–2009 Russia chose to turn to the discourse of the Arctic region to a space of international cooperation and rule-bound behaviour. Russia chose to support the Danish government's initiative in the Ilulissat Declaration from May 2008, in which the co-signatories commit themselves to abide by the provisions of UNCLOS and CLCS (Arctic Council, 2008, p. 1). In fact, Russia moderated its requests to what, according to UNCLOS rules, is possible to claim, and Russia chose to follow the practice of the CLCS, including the procedure for legitimately making claims of jurisdiction over territory beyond the 200 mile sea limit. Thus, Russia chose not to pursue the Soviet maximalist demands of past times (Dittmer, Moisiu, Ingram, & Dodds, 2011, p. 208). In addition to that, in 2010, Russia – after more than 40 years of standstill in the negotiations – entered into an agreement with Norway over the delineation of the border in the Barents Sea; in which Norway and Russia have divided the area equitably between them 'in two parts of approximately the same size' (Government of Norway, 2010). Even though the agreement was not particularly popular in realist/geopolitical circles in Russia – right-wing firebrand Vladimir Zhirinovskiy asked rhetorically whether Russia had 'lost a battle in the war against Norway' (Rowe & Blakkisrud, 2014, p. 74); Putin, who was Prime Minister at the time, officially distanced himself from the agreement (Baev, 2013, p. 267); and, in the Russian media, it has since been debated what Putin can do to 'get the Barents Sea back' (Hønneland, 2014, p. 3) – Medvedev, during a visit to Oslo in April 2010, chose to announce the compromise. And Putin himself, followed by Sergei Shoigu, Sergei Lavrov and Dmitry Medvedev, started to 'cultivate a discourse pointing up a "dialogue of cultures" in the Arctic' (Laruelle, 2011). This can be seen as evidence that, in any case, a part of the foreign policy establishment in Moscow perceives that Russia, too, can have a clear interest in being a party to a well-ordered course of negotiations that result in peaceful settlement of disagreements. In 2010 (Harding, 2010) and 2013 Putin publicly supported a process that is bound to the UNCLOS and the Arctic Council:

'I would like to stress that this country is interested in the region's sustainable development based on cooperation and absolute respect of international law... Within the framework of the Arctic Council, we resolve issues pertaining to cooperation in

border areas, maritime transportation ...' (Putin, 2014a).

And even though the foreign policy concept from 2013 mentions scarcity of essential resources as a potential threat, as mentioned earlier, that threat is far down on the list of potential transnational threats. The document stresses, above all, 'practical cooperation with northern European countries' and development of 'joint cooperation projects' for the Barents Sea and Euro-Arctic region within 'multilateral structures' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2013, p. 65). Thus, it is underscored that Russia believes that the,

'existing international legal framework is sufficient to successfully settle all regional issues through negotiations, including the issue of defining the external boundaries of the continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2013, p. 73).

At the same time, it stresses that it is Russian policy to strengthen the 'strategic partnership with major producers of energy' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2013, p. 34f). Cooperation is also emphasised in Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's speeches. In a speech at an Arctic Council meeting in Kiruna on 15 May 2013, he stressed that he 'with satisfaction' could note that all of the Arctic coastal states' Arctic strategies that are anchored in the Arctic Council 'may be fully secured only through close cooperation with partners in the region'. Further, he underscored the Russian view that all of the topics and questions with regard to the Arctic region that are not yet handled 'will be resolved by the Arctic countries based on the existing and rather sufficient international and legal basis and, of course, good will' (Lavrov, 2013). This corresponds well with the evaluation from Rowe & Blakkisrud, who examined, in all, 323 articles about the Arctic in the government newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* from May 2008 to June 2011. Their observation is that:

'In our material, Lavrov has consistently argued that all problems in the Arctic can be solved peacefully and without a "confrontational approach"' (Rowe & Blakkisrud, 2014, p. 73).

The UN-focused, cooperative line has also been followed by the Ministry of Transport, for example in a feature article in *Arctic Info*, in which Deputy Transport Minister Sergei Aristov repeatedly refers to UNCLOS in connection with the argumentation for why the ministry considers the Northern Sea Route to be Russian territorial water (Aristov, 2013).

To sum up, the proponents of the IR-liberalism discourse in essence makes a 'cooperation first' argument, arguing that the Arctic should be seen (and kept) as a 'zone of peace and cooperation', where it is 'more effective' to pursue national interests together with the other countries than 'doing it alone'. Thus, the other states in the Arctic region are seen as 'partners' rather than adversaries, and power and gains are seen more as absolutes rather than as relatives, thus making cooperation worthwhile even if the other states (or companies) receive greater benefits

from a specific agreement than Russia. The discourse puts emphasis on international institutions, rules and regimes, and the rhetoric used stresses 'respect for international law', 'international legal framework', 'joint cooperation projects', 'negotiations', 'development' and recommends cooperation within 'multilateral structures'.

The debate after the war in Ukraine

Russia's invasion and subsequent annexation of Crimea followed by its war in eastern Ukraine in 2014 resulted in an intense international debate on how to view Russia's foreign policy. Thus, as noted earlier, the crisis in the relationship between the West and Russia led to a debate on possible negative 'spillover' – or rather 'spill-in' – effects of the war in Ukraine on the Arctic region, which until then had been seen as a region of stability and cooperation (Kristensen & Sakstrup, 2016; Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2015; Zysk, 2015). The question arose whether the so-called Russian 'hawks' – that is, proponents of the realist/geopolitical discourse on the Arctic – would come to the foreground of the Russian FPE debate on the Arctic and change the course of Russia's policy. Thus, some of the realists/geopoliticians did aggravate their rhetoric. Dmitry Rogozin in April 2015, shortly after being appointed chief of the Russian Arctic Commission – in itself a sign of shift towards a more assertive, possibly nationalistic policy to come – in an interview for Russian state TV Channel One, said:

'Last year, we had the historical reunification of Sevastopol and the Crimea. This year, we present a new view and new powerful stress on the development of the Arctic. Basically, it is all about the same' (Staalesen, 2015).

On 19 April 2015, Rogozin tweeted from the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen:

'We arrived in Longyearbyen in Spitsbergen' ... 'The Arctic is Russian Mecca'.

The tweet angered the Norwegians, since Norway follows the EU sanctions on Russia and Rogozin therefore is a person non-grata on Norwegian soil. At the beginning of May 2015, Rogozin's plane was denied entry over the territory of Romania – he had visited the neighbouring Transnistria Republic – after which Rogozin tweeted:

'Upon US request, Romania has closed its air space for my plane' ... 'Ukraine doesn't allow me to pass through again. Next time I'll fly on-board TU-160.'

That is, in a supersonic Russian strategic bomber designed to carry nuclear weapons (Illie, 2015). On 25 May 2015, he said on national television, after the host had asked him whether Europe and the USA are concerned about Russia's presence in the Arctic:

'So what if they won't give us visas and put us on sanctions list ... tanks don't need visas' (Rogozin, 2015).

This was followed in October 2015 by a call by Rogozin that Russia 'should come to the Arctic and to make it hers,' arguing that Russia should not care what other countries would think of its behaviour (Vzgljad, 2015).

However, Russia's official policy vis-à-vis the Arctic still follows an IR-liberalist course. Russia has consistently prioritised a pragmatic course of cooperation in the Arctic Council (Kristensen & Sakstrup, 2016). While the crisis between Russia and the West in spring 2014 was at its peak, Canada, which at that point had the rotating chairmanship in the Arctic Council, decided to boycott a working group meeting in Moscow along with the US (Pettersen, 2014), and Canada's Minister of the Environment, Leona Aglukkaq, chose to criticise Russia's behaviour in Ukraine while chairing a Council meeting – in violation with common practice. The official Russian reaction to both incidents was markedly restrained. Rogozin did not send out any anti-Western tweets. Instead, Russia's Minister for Natural Resources and the Environment, Sergei Donskoi, said at the meeting:

'We are sorry that Canadian chairmanship used consensus forum which the Arctic Council is, to promote its home policy agenda in the context of events in Ukraine. It creates obstacles for the promotion of international cooperation in the Arctic' ... 'Russia proceeds from the fact that the Arctic is territory of dialogue, not platform for political quarrels and settling scores' (Wade, 2015).

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who until then had not missed a meeting in the Arctic Council since 2004, had not attended the meeting in Iqaluit because of 'prior commitments' – a fact which has made some commentators speculate whether Lavrov stayed away in anticipation of a tougher line from the Canadian chairmanship (Exner-Pirot, 2015). Furthermore, Russia has been supportive of a number of initiatives in the Arctic led by intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations. In March 2014, the members of the Arctic Council agreed on the establishment of an independent forum for economic questions and business-to-business activities, the Arctic Economic Council (<http://arcticeconomiccouncil.com>). In September 2015, the organisation established a permanent secretariat in Tromsø, Norway. In 2015, Russia took part when the Council established a 'framework for action on enhanced black carbon and methane emissions reductions', established a 'framework plan for cooperation on prevention of oil pollution from petroleum' and agreed on a regulation of 'maritime activities in the marine areas of the Arctic' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2015). Furthermore, in July 2015 the five Arctic coastal states, including Russia, were able to agree on a deal prohibiting unregulated commercial fishing in the central Arctic Ocean until there is an international standard that regulates the fishing (US Department of State, 2015). Furthermore, Russia has kept up its cooperation with Norway concerning commercial fishing in the Barents Sea, just as it has kept up its collaboration with Norway on coast guard cooperation (Pettersen, 2016). Norway and Russia has also conducted joint search and rescue exercises in the Barents Sea (Karlsbakk, 2015).

Furthermore, Russia has followed the recommendations and regulation by the UNCLOS/CLCS. Thus, on 3 August 2015, Russia sent in its final material for its application to the CLCS. After an expedition in 2012 and another in 2014, the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment declared that samples had been collected from the sea floor by the Mendeleev Ridge and that the samples supported the Russian claim (The Associated Press, 2015). The Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment, Sergei Donskoi, said in a press statement:

'An area of the sea floor beyond the 200 mile zone within the bounds of the entire Russian Arctic sector, including the North Pole zone and the southern tip of the Gakkel Ridge, is being claimed. This territory covers 1.2 million square kilometres with a forecast hydrocarbon resource of 4.9 billion tonnes of oil equivalent' (Russia beyond the headlines, 2015).

Sergei Lavrov has continued to employ the IR-liberalist discourse while speaking on matters of the Arctic. In October 2014, commenting on tensions between the West and Russia, and the effects of the EU sanctions on Russia and on cooperation in the Arctic, Lavrov said:

'No sphere of a country's international activity is immune to unilateral sanctions or the influence of events taking place outside that sphere or region. Still, I think that Arctic cooperation is fairly stable' (Lavrov, 2014a).

He then underlined the Arctic states' experience of being mutually interdependent in the Arctic, promoted the Russian slogan of the Arctic as a 'territory of dialogue' and underlined that the littoral states in the Arctic share the same interests and goals:

'We have a shared interest in cooperating for the promotion of our bids with the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf' (Lavrov, 2014a).

In an interview for the government paper, *Rossiia Segodniya*, Lavrov once again argued that there were no 'spillover' effects from the war in Ukraine on the Arctic region:

'There is no "race to the Arctic" and cannot be in principle. The international legal regime of the marine Arctic spaces clearly sets down the rights of the littoral Arctic states and other states. That applies also to access to the development of mineral resources, oil and gas, and the management of marine biological resources. International law regulates the possible extension of external boundaries on the continental shelf of the littoral countries. The current complicated international situation does not bring any cardinal changes to the established order' (Lavrov, 2014b).

Commenting on the Danish application to the CLCS in December 2015 – which surprised most observers since it makes a claim on the underwater territory all the way to the Russian 200 sea mile limit – Lavrov stressed that overlapping areas would be decided upon through negotiations and according to international law:

'Possible adjoining sections of our countries' continental shelf in the high Arctic latitudes will be

demarcated on a bilateral basis, through negotiations and in line with international law. However, the CLCS should first confirm that the seabed sections to which Russia and Denmark are laying claim are part of the continental shelf. This issue cannot be solved in a day or two. Considering the CLCS's current work load, the Danish claim will be reviewed not earlier than 10 to 15 years from now, according to current estimates' (Lavrov, 2015).

In a special issue of *Shared Voices*, Lavrov underlines the progress of the Arctic Council in the following way:

'The Arctic states have managed to combine their efforts in elaborating and implementing a positive, unifying and future-oriented agenda largely due to the constructive work performed by the Arctic Council, a unique forum which is not divided into "clubs"' (Lavrov, 2016).

Furthermore, in Russia's new foreign policy concept from 2016, it is stated that:

'The Russian Federation believes that the existing international legal framework is sufficient to successfully settle any regional issues through negotiation, including the issue of defining the outer limits of the continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016, p. 76).

However, the IR-liberalist discourse is – despite the official recommendation by Putin, the Foreign Ministry's IR-liberalist line and the stated goals in the various Arctic strategies – frequently challenged by partakers in the public debate, something which has accelerated after the war in Ukraine. Thus, the patriotic-influenced realism/geopolitics line, which Chilingarov presented back in 2007, is followed up on in an interview for *Argumenti i Fakti* in October 2014, where Chilingarov argues that 'Russia's future is inextricably linked with the fate of the polar regions' since in the coming years it will be 'the basic resource base of the country'. Furthermore, in 10–20 years the development of the Arctic shelf will play the same role for the identity of the Russian state as the space explorations did for the Soviet Union, Chilingarov argues (Rikin, 2014). Thus, pride in Russia's Arctic achievements is still a marked feature of this part of the realist/geopolitical discourse on the Arctic. On the other hand, Chilingarov has also, on several occasions, towed the official line. Thus, at the Arctic Frontiers conference in Tromsø, Norway, in January 2015, Chilingarov stated:

'In the Arctic there are no problems that cannot be solved on the basis of mutual understanding and constructive dialogue' (Pettersen, 2015).

The aggravated atmosphere between Russia and the West seems to have affected the security situation in the Arctic, even if only in a minor way. Thus, for the first time, the Arctic is mentioned as a specific area of interest in the military doctrine from December 2014, where it is stated that it is the task of the Russian armed forces 'to protect national interests of the Russian Federation in the Arctic

region' (President of the Russian Federation, 2014). In line with this, Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu stated on 25 February 2015 that a 'broad spectrum of potential challenges and threats to our national security is now being formed in the Arctic'. Thus, Shoigu has issued orders to further develop the Russian military infrastructure in the area (Interfax, 2015). Furthermore, Shoigu, in April 2015, claimed that:

'NATO countries are seeking to seize the geopolitical space by building military potential in eastern Europe and approaching Russia's borders. The geographical concentration of their drills only at the alliance's eastern flank and in the Arctic region point to the anti-Russian orientation' (Tass Russian News Agency, 2015a).

The chief of the Russian navy, Admiral Viktor Chirkov, in March 2014, said that the Arctic areas 'potentially can be used in order to create new security threats for the whole of the Russian territory' (Zysk, 2015, p. 80).

The risk of a surprise nuclear attack from US forces in the Arctic seems to have some weight in the world view of the realist/geopolitical side of the foreign policy establishment in Moscow as well as in Putin's public discourse on the Arctic. In a speech at the Seliger 2014 National Youth Forum for young Putin supporters, Putin reminded listeners that:

'United States' attack submarines are concentrated in that area, not far from the Norwegian coast, and the missiles they carry would reach Moscow within 15–16 minutes, just to remind you. But we have our navy there and quite a big part of our submarine fleet' (Putin, 2014b).

As Pavel Baev sees it, Putin's interest in geopolitics in the Arctic has 'a pronounced military-security character' (Baev, 2012, p. 4). One reason could be that Putin, along with other supporters of the realist/geopolitics discourse in the foreign and security policy establishment, fears a situation where an ice-free Arctic lets the US/NATO permanently deploy a nuclear submarine fleet and sea-based anti-BMD systems close to the northern border of Russia, possibly undermining Russia's second strike capability (Zysk, 2015, p. 80). At least, that is what seemed to be feared by Dmitry Rogozin in 2009 when he was still Russia's ambassador to NATO:

'They have been planning it for a long time, and under the very bad circumstances the US strategic missile defence would arrive there on board these ships' (Khramchikin, 2009).

This is supported by the military analyst, Viktor Murakhovskiy, Editor-in-Chief of the *Arsenal Otechestva* (Arsenal of the Fatherland) magazine:

'According to US plans drafted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, one of the main strikes is to be dealt across the Arctic... The United States is currently working on a so-called Prompt Global Strike concept, and the Arctic region will be one of the main areas of operations. Also, the US Navy's submarines are invariably present in the region' (Tass Russian News Agency, 2015b).

An important reason for the prevalence of the choice of the IR-liberalist discourse is, as Russia's former Senior Arctic Official now Ambassador to Iceland, Anton Vasiliev, argued:

'According to Danish experts, up to 97% of proven reserves are located in the exclusive economic zone of the Arctic states. In other words, there's nothing to divide, everything has been already divided' (Vasiliev, 2013).

Therefore, first, it is 'much more effective to pursue national interests in the Arctic together as compared to doing it alone'. Second, if 97% of the proven reserves are located within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), Russia has a clear interest in securing the other Arctic states' backing of the UNCLOS regime which regulates and legitimises the EEZ. Another reason for the choice of the UN path is obviously that Russia, in doing so, hopes to secure support from the other Arctic coastal states regarding UNCLOS's recognition of Russia's request for a 350 mile sea limit.

One could ask what it would take to disrupt this apparent status quo. One subject, which seems to have an effect on the Russian elite's feeling of security is the US/NATO plans for anti-BMD. As noted earlier, parts of Putin's nuclear rhetoric may be linked to developments (or perceived developments) of BMD. And it would be logical to expect a strengthening of the realist/geopolitical discourse on the Arctic and a subsequent strengthening of Russia's military posture in the area, if US/NATO BMD developments lead to an enhanced presence of US/NATO forces in the area. Furthermore, one could ask under what circumstances would the Kremlin decide that Russia no longer had enough to gain from cooperating with the West in the Arctic, no longer had an interest in securing a backing of its territorial claims through the UNCLOS procedure and/or through bilateral agreements with the littoral states? Well, reversing the logic of the chosen theoretical framework, one could speculate and imagine a situation where Putin chose to deinstitutionalise the decision-making process and sidestep most or all of the central institutions and persons involved in Arctic policy making and instead narrow the group down to a few close siloviki-confidants – like Shoigu, Patrushev, Bortnikov – not unlike the decision to go to war in Ukraine. This would most probably be highly contested, since it would sidestep the careful balance of the different elite groups, ministries and influential individuals that at present have a say and an interest in Arctic policy. Thus, it would most probably only happen if the regime felt severely threatened from internal forces and needed a public 'diversion' that could enhance regime security and they could not come up with a better place to 'start a fire'. Or if Russia felt existentially threatened, for example by extensive US/NATO military activity in the area or elsewhere and military planners deemed it necessary to take precautions to secure the northern flank and Russia's nuclear forces in the area. Otherwise, Russia has, in the view of the present elite, too strong interests in securing the

status quo in the Arctic and in following the IR-liberalist line.

Conclusions

The trend towards a steadily narrowing and increasingly one-sided circle of political confidants around President Vladimir Putin who take part in deciding on all or most of the central issues on a personalised rather than institution-based and rule-governed foundation, seems *not* to be the standard decision-making process concerning Arctic affairs. Here, the policy process seems much more institutionalised and rule-based. Furthermore, the circle of officials and institutions involved is large, and the policy is, to a large extent, written down in 'white papers' or documents of strategic importance. The overall strategic lines on the Arctic are furthermore embedded in an institutionalised cooperation between the presidential administration, the National Security Council, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and thus seem less exposed to the 'turf wars' of the often factionalised and conflicted administrative regime of Russia. Discourse theory would therefore argue that this institutionalisation makes Russia's Arctic policy less prone to change, since sedimented discourses are harder to politicise and change.

Furthermore, Russia's FPE debate on the Arctic can be divided up in two overall discourses. These two discourses are based on the basic assumptions of – or at least assumptions that are very similar to – the two theoretical schools of thought within IR, namely: IR-realism/geopolitics and IR-liberalism. The IR-realism/geopolitics discourse generally makes an explicit or implicit security first argument, seeing power as relational and the international system as anarchic. Thus, the other states in the Arctic, especially the great powers, are seen as potential adversaries – the more patriotic or geopolitically focused see the other great powers, especially the USA, as inherent adversaries. The discourse follows a unilateralist approach and focuses on balance of power and zero-sum game logic, and is often patriotic and nationalistic. Some of its proponents seek to further Russia's 'greatness' and 'revival', and talk of 'exploring', 'winning' or 'conquering' the Arctic. This side of the debate is supported by official announcements of the need for an increased Russian military activity in the Arctic – due to a perceived threat from the US/NATO or a general perception of an inferior Russian position in the overall global competition – if Russia is to become a regional (or even extra-regional) great power in a multipolar international system, which is one of the stated goals of Russia's FPE. If the Arctic is mentioned in connection with a discussion of relations with the West, the realist/geopolitical discourse is frequently influenced by anti-Western rhetoric, anxiety about isolation, fear of outright Western containment and coloured by disappointment about the lack of international (Western) recognition of the (desired) Russian status as a great power.

On the other hand, the IR-liberalism discourse generally makes a cooperation first argument, viewing the

other Arctic states as ‘partners’ and the proponents speak of the Arctic as a ‘zone of peace and cooperation’. Indeed, one political actor argues that it is ‘more effective’ to pursue national interests in the Arctic together with the other Arctic states than alone. Power and political or economic gain is seen as an absolute, there is an emphasis on ‘respect for international law’, ‘multilateral structures’, rules and regimes, and its proponents highlight ‘international legal frameworks’, ‘joint cooperation projects’ and ‘negotiations’ as valuable instruments in Arctic affairs. The proponents of this discourse often highlight a Russian need for market economic modernisation and optimisation of Russian companies – including an emphasis on the involvement of international (Western) companies with the right technology and expertise to develop the hard-to-access resources in the Arctic.

So far, the overall Russian foreign policy in the Arctic has been guided by the IR-liberalist discourse since around 2008–2009. And this has not changed since the war in Ukraine in 2014. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation has been tasked by the President and the Security Council to lay out the policy lines regarding the Arctic – presumably because of Putin’s pragmatic acknowledgement that the UN path is the most productive way to secure support for the Russian desires to obtain jurisdiction over expanded underwater territory out to the 350 sea mile limit. This is possible if CLCS, under the terms of UNCLOS, recognises that the Lomonosov and Mendeleev ridges are extensions of the Siberian continental shelf, and if Russia is subsequently able to enter into bilateral agreements with the other Arctic coastal states that claim parts of the same territory – the USA, Canada and Denmark (Greenland), respectively.

When Putin, who is the most important foreign policy actor in Russia, supports the IR-liberalism course, even though he primarily speaks about the world within the framework of an IR-realism/geopolitical world view, it is not only because of a pragmatic acknowledgement of which means best serve the Russian goals, it is also because the two foreign policy discourses in the Kremlin – of which Putin is the ultimate judge – despite their disagreement on the means, are quite in agreement about the objective: that the Arctic is to become the main resource base of the Russian economy – a resource base that will make the continuation of Russia’s restoration as an internationally acknowledged great power possible.

All in all, one can conclude that Russia in the Arctic, so far, has acted as a status quo power and is following a non-assertive foreign policy in regards to that region. There are good reasons for this. Thus, Russia’s ambition in the Arctic – as stated in Russia’s public policy papers, directives and strategies on the subject and constituted and legitimised in speeches and public statements – is first and foremost of an economical nature. On one hand, there is a desire to develop the enormous natural resources expected to be found in the region – especially oil and gas. The development of the natural resources has thus enjoyed first priority since they shall guarantee Russia’s

future position as an energy superpower when the capacity in the existing oil and gas fields in Siberia diminishes in the coming years. On the other hand, Russia, at least on paper, sees great potential in opening an ice-free Northern Sea Route between Europe and Asia across the Russian Arctic, with the hope that the international shipping industry can see the common sense in saving up to nearly 4,000 sea miles on a voyage from Ulsan, Korea, to Rotterdam, Holland, so that Russia can make money servicing the ships and permitting passage through what Russia considers Russian territorial waters.

However, although some of the proclamations of intent from the IR-realist/geopolitical discourse on ‘making the Arctic Russia’s’ in the eyes of Ieva Berzina in their essence are discourses for ‘internal consumption’ or discourses for domestic audiences rather than for international audiences (Berzina, 2015, p. 290) – note that I do not distinguish between discourses for internal versus external audiences – the pressure from them could have an effect on the overall stability of the IR-liberalist discourse. Especially as the IR-realist/geopolitical discourse is closer to the way Putin usually expresses himself. Furthermore, in a situation where the Kremlin believes that there is nothing to be gained from cooperating with the West or believes it to be more useful to push the patriotic forces forward, the IR-realist/geopolitical discourse could become dominant again. In other words, the IR-liberalist discourse is not inherently stable, even if it is rather institutionalised and sedimented and the IR-liberalist side can claim strong, economic interests in the region – underground resources, as well as the Northern Sea Route. However, concerns for national security could lessen the importance of these interests, thus undermining the stability of the IR-liberalist discourse.

Acknowledgements

Parts of this paper draw from my previously published report: Staun, J. (2015). *Russia’s Arctic strategy*. Royal Danish Defence College, Institute for Strategy. Copenhagen: Royal Danish Defence College. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my dear colleague at the Royal Danish Defence College, Dorthe Nyemann, for reading and commenting on this article.

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