

# Chapter 4

## Arctic Regional Security

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter examines an emerging regional security system in the Arctic. There was a significant shift in the Arctic powers' threat perceptions and security policies in the High North. In contrast with the Cold War era when the Arctic was a zone for the global confrontation between the USSR and the U.S./NATO, now this region is seen by international players as a platform for international cooperation. The Arctic countries now believe that there are no serious hard security threats to them and that the soft security agenda is much more important. The military power now has new functions, such as ascertaining coastal states' sovereignty over their exclusive economic zones and continental shelves in the region; protecting the Arctic countries' economic interests in the North, and performing some symbolic functions. The Arctic states believe that the regional cooperative agenda could include climate change mitigation, environmental protection, maritime safety, Arctic research, indigenous peoples, cross- and trans-border cooperative projects, culture, etc.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

There are two contradictory trends in the contemporary scholarship as regards an emerging Arctic regional security system. One strand, dominated by the traditional geopolitical and realist ways of thinking, prefers to represent the High North as a region of growing confrontation between major world players because of the competition for the Arctic's rich natural resources and control over maritime routes. This group of experts predicts remilitarization of the Arctic and arms race in the region, not excluding the possibility of armed conflicts in this part of the planet (Blunden, 2009; Borgerson, 2008; Huebert, 2010; Huebert, Exner-Pirot, Lajeunesse, & Gullede, 2012; Indzhiev, 2010; Khramchikhin, 2013; Kraska, 2009; Lukin, 2010).

The Western experts are especially critical about Russia's Arctic policies portraying it as expansionist, aggressive, and an example of "gunboat diplomacy" (Kraska, 2009, p. 1117; Lakshmi, 2015; Schepp & Traufetter, 2009; Smith & Giles, 2007; Stratfor, 2015; Willett, 2009, p. 53; Zysk, 2008). According to Western analysts, due to Russia's economic weakness and technological backwardness, it tends to

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emphasize coercive military instruments to protect its national interests in the Arctic which sooner or later may lead to a direct military confrontation with NATO member-states. China is also mentioned as another potential regional spoiler because, on the one hand, it is interested in the Arctic natural resources but, on the other hand, Beijing has no proper legal and political representation in the region to ensure a reliable access to the local resources (Flake, 2013; Struzik, 2013; Wishnick, 2017).

Another extreme school believes that the Arctic is an exceptional “zone of peace” and a “territory of dialogue”. Today’s exceptional political vision of the Arctic emerged with the end of the Cold War. The end of superpower rivalry meant that the region lost most of its geostrategic and geopolitical relevance, even though strategic military assets, such as nuclear capabilities, remained in the region. In fact, the geopolitical dynamics of the Arctic had already started to transform in the latter years of the Cold War. In the famous 1987 Murmansk speech, the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev laid down the vision of the Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation and initiated the gradual process of “desecuritization” of the Arctic as an element of the broader Soviet reorientation (Atland, 2008).

In this sense, the Arctic has become understood as a “distinctive region in international society” (Young, 2009); a region detached from world politics and characterized as an apolitical space of regional governance, functional cooperation, and peaceful coexistence (Heininen, Exner-Pirot, & Plouffe, 2013, p. 25).

The most radical version of this school believes that an international legal regime similar to the Antarctic Treaty should be established in the Arctic to make it a “region of peace and cooperation” (Dodin & Kovalev, 2003; Perelet, Kukushkina, & Travnikov, 2000). The proposed new Arctic regime should prohibit any economic and military activities in the region. Only subsistence economies of indigenous peoples of the North and research activities should be allowed in the High North. Some globalists suggest establishing a UN-based governance regime in the Arctic which should replace the existing national sovereignty-oriented model (Kharlampieva & Lagutina, 2011).

However, other authors argue that, as the contemporary Arctic is becoming increasingly global, it may face similar geo-economic and politico-strategic dynamics as other regions. This point has been recently highlighted by various spillover effects of world politics into the region, such as the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria or the United States’ withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement.

That’s why along with two extremes – pessimistic/alarmist and optimistic strands – there are numerous hybrid/moderate schools that share some common principles with regards to the existing and emerging security system in the Arctic (Sergunin & Konyshev, 2016; Vylegzhanin, 2003).

These moderates argue that all regional players should act as responsible international actors who behave in the international arena in line with international law and commitments. According to this school, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Ilulissat Declaration (2008), AC-sponsored agreements, particularly, on search and rescue (SAR) operations (2011), oil spill response (2013) and Arctic science cooperation (2017), International Maritime Organization’s (IMO) Polar Code, etc. should be the legal basis for international relations system in the High North. Although the moderates do not believe that the institutions engaged in the Arctic affairs – the UN (and its specialized bodies, such as the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS), IMO, UN Environmental Program (UNEP), etc.), AC and BEAC – will be able to exercise real supranational governance in the region in the foreseeable future, they think that some institutional reforms are possible. They suggest, for instance, empowering the AC with more rights, including the right to conclude binding agreements (similar to the SAR, oil spills response and science cooperation documents) and further institutionalization of the

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