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Russia's Arctic strategies in the context of the Ukrainian crisis

Valery Konyshchev^a, Alexander Sergunin^{a,b} and Sergei Subbotin^c

^aDepartment of International Relations Theory and History, St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg, Russia; ^bDepartment of Political Science, Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg, Russia; ^cDepartment of Public Administration, Higher School of Economics, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine Moscow's Arctic policies in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis. Particularly, it tries to explain why the Kremlin – in contrast with its strategies in the post-Soviet space – opted for a cooperative model of its behaviour in the High North. Furthermore, this paper discusses the question whether Moscow has radically changed its Arctic strategies in the context of the Ukrainian crisis or its course basically remained the same? Based on the analysis of Russia's principal doctrinal documents, this article explores Moscow's threat perceptions and its strategic priorities in the Arctic. The authors emphasise the inward-, rather than outward-looking nature of Russia's Arctic strategy which focuses on numerous economic, societal, environmental and socio-cultural problems of the Russian North. In fact, Moscow's international strategy in the region is subordinated to its domestic needs. On the other hand, Russia's preoccupation with its internal problems does not preclude the Kremlin from a rather assertive international course when it comes to the protection of Russia's national interests in the Arctic. In this context, the authors analyse Moscow's renewed claim on the expansion of the Russian continental shelf and military modernisation programmes. In sum, the authors believe that Russia is serious about being a responsible and predictable actor who is interested in fostering regional cooperation and strengthening multilateral regimes and institutions in the Arctic.

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Introduction

The Ukrainian crisis which started in early 2014 has negatively affected the Arctic region. First of all, there were a number of repercussions for economic cooperation in the High North. For example, there was a significant drop in regional trade because of the Western (and Japanese) sanctions against Russian companies and banks and Moscow's counter-sanctions against these countries. The cooperative projects in the energy sector were nearly frozen because of the Western sanctions, despite the fact that some of them had been successful and had good prospects for the future (e.g. the Universitetskaya-1 well in the Pobeda (Victory) oil and gas field in the Kara Sea).¹ With the introduction of the Western sanctions several promising exploration projects were cancelled: Statoil, ExxonMobil and

CONTACT Alexander Sergunin  sergunin60@mail.ru

¹Tully, "Western Sanctions."

British Petroleum with Rosneft; Total with Lukoil, etc. In addition, a dramatic fall of oil prices has happened in 2014 which called into question the viability of the Arctic oil projects (especially the offshore ones).

In turn, the drop in regional trade and doubts in the future of oil and gas industries in the High North led to a temporary fall in the Northern Sea Route (NSR) traffic (especially the transit one): while in 2013 some 635 Russian and 126 foreign ships got permissions to navigate via the NSR,² in 2014 the ratio was only 631:109.³ However, already in 2015 the NSR traffic started to recover (595:120)⁴ and it almost returned to the pre-crisis level in 2016 (575:143) (even exceeded the latter in the case of the transit traffic while the destination trips still remained at a lower level).⁵

The Ukrainian crisis has provoked new Western accusations of Russia as being an aggressive and militarist power not only in East Europe but also in the Arctic.⁶ These accusations have added some earlier charges related to the planting of the titanium flag on the North Pole in 2007, resumption of naval and air patrols in the region (the same year) and military modernisation programmes of the Russian conventional and nuclear forces deployed in the Far North. It was expected that in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis Moscow would dramatically increase its military activities and presence in the region as well as accelerate its military modernisation programmes.⁷

However, these concerns did not materialise. Instead of an expected significant military build-up and increased military activities in the region, the Kremlin made the socio-economic development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF) a priority. In parallel, Moscow managed to bracket out the Arctic cooperation from its current tensions with the West and to keep its relations with other regional players on a cooperative track.

The post-Ukrainian crisis situation in the Arctic contains a certain intrigue. Particularly, it is unclear why Russia – having some controversies with other Arctic powers on the division of the continental shelf, transboundary hydrocarbon deposits, legal status of the NSR, fishing rights around the Svalbard archipelago, the scale of military modernisation programmes, etc., and often operating in the atmosphere of mistrust and under pressure of nationalistic elements domestically – still prefers legal and diplomatic instruments to solve the existing and potential disputes in the region? This type of policy is radically different from that to which Russia is committed in the post-Soviet space. This study will try to produce some reasonable explanations to Russia's seemingly illogical behaviour in the High North. Moreover, this paper aims at examining whether Moscow has radically changed its Arctic strategies in the context of the Ukrainian crisis or its course basically remained the same?

²The Northern Sea Route Administration, *Permissions for navigation 2013*.

³The Northern Sea Route Administration, *Permissions for navigation 2014*.

⁴The Northern Sea Route Administration, *Permissions for navigation 2015*.

⁵The Northern Sea Route Administration, *Permissions for navigation 2016*.

⁶See, for example, Lakshmi, "Is Russia Militarizing the Arctic?"; Poulin, "5 Ways Russia is Positioning"; and Tayloe, "Projecting Power in the Arctic."

⁷Lakshmi, "Is Russia Militarizing the Arctic?"; Tayloe, "Projecting Power in the Arctic"; and Stratfor, *Russia's Plans for Arctic Supremacy*.

Theoretical framework

In terms of theory, this study is based on the so-called liberal intergovernmental approach (LIGA) or liberal intergovernmentalism. Based on the mix of various neoliberal theories by Putnam, Ruggie and Keohane it was designed as a coherent theory by Andrew Moravcsik.⁸ Among other things, the LIGA aims at explaining why states with diverging and even conflicting interests as well as with different systems of government and economies still can cooperate and integrate with each other. Russia's hate-love-type relations with its Arctic neighbours, represent a classical/exemplary case from the LIGA point of view.

States' decisions to cooperate internationally are explained by the LIGA in a three-stage framework: states first define national preferences, then bargain to international agreements, and finally create or adjust institutions and regimes to secure those outcomes in the face of future uncertainty. The LIGA aims at examining what drives national preferences, bargaining strategies and the nature of international institutions and regimes that emerge as an outcome of such a multicausal process. Regional and global integration is understood by the LIGA as a series of rational choices by national leaders. These choices responded to constraints and opportunities stemming from the socio-economic, political and cultural interests of powerful domestic constituents, the relative power of states deriving from asymmetrical interdependence, and the role of institutions in supporting the credibility of interstate commitments.

In this study, we demonstrate that there are powerful domestic and international incentives which encourage the Russian political leadership to opt for a cooperative rather conflictual type of behaviour in the Arctic and seek solutions to the regional problems via negotiations, compromises and strengthening governance mechanisms.

Russian Arctic doctrines

There are two basic documents that define Russia's strategy in the Arctic. It should be noted that both doctrines were approved by the Kremlin before the start of the Ukrainian crisis.

The first document titled "Foundations of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic to 2020 and Beyond"⁹ was adopted by then President Dmitry Medvedev on 18 September 2008. This document for the first time in Russian history enumerated the country's national interests in the region and defined major priorities for both the AZRF's development and Moscow's international strategies in the Far North.

The second document titled "Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation"¹⁰ was approved by President Vladimir Putin on 20 February 2013 to update and specify the previous strategy.

These strategic documents highlighted four key priorities for Moscow's mid- and long-term policies in the region, such as climate change mitigation; making the AZRF Russia's "strategic resource basis"; the need for sustainable development of the AZRF, and making the Arctic a "region of peace and international cooperation".

⁸Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig, "Liberal Intergovernmentalism."

⁹Medvedev, "Osnovy Gosudarstvennoi Politiki."

¹⁰Putin, *Strategiya Razvitiya Arkticheskoi*.

Interestingly, these priorities remained almost unchanged regardless the Ukrainian crisis although some minor modifications were made by other governmental and presidential documents.

For example, in April 2014, the Russian Government has approved a state programme on “Socio-Economic Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2020” which aimed at the implementation of specific projects in the AZRF.¹¹ Being based on the concept of sustainable development the programme aimed at further development of the AZRF industrial base, transport infrastructure and solving numerous social and environmental problems. Since the document was approved by the federal government prior to the introduction of extended Western sanctions and oil price drop, it was rather optimistic and ambitious. With the start of new economic recession in Russia and the need to reallocate budget resources to reintegrate Crimea into the Russian economy, accommodate half million refugees from Eastern Ukraine and provide the Donbass break-away republics with humanitarian assistance, some AZRF projects were postponed or underfunded.

The Ukrainian crisis entailed an essential revision of the Russian national security policies’ conceptual/doctrinal basis.

Such a revision has started from Russia’s military strategy. On 26 December 2014, a new version of the Russian military doctrine was approved by President Vladimir Putin.¹² Although the Arctic was mentioned only once in the document, it is remarkable that, for the first time, the protection of Russia’s national interests in the Arctic in peacetime was assigned to the Russian armed forces. Despite the fact that, in general, the new military doctrine retained its defensive character, Russia’s neighbours, including those in the High North, remained concerned with Moscow’s intentions in the region.

In July 2015, President Putin approved a new version of Russia’s maritime doctrine.¹³ The Arctic was identified as one of two regions (along with the North Atlantic) where NATO activities and international competition for natural resources and sea routes continued to grow and required Russia’s “adequate response”. According to the document, along with the naval forces the nuclear icebreaker fleet should be modernised by 2020 and beyond. For example, in June 2016, the most powerful nuclear icebreaker “The Arctic” was pulled on the water at the *Baltiysky* shipyard as a part of this ambitious programme. The icebreaker will be powered by two reactors (175 Megawatt) and able to break three-meter ice.¹⁴ This ship is the first one in a series of three icebreakers of the same type. In 2018, Russia’s Navy will get its first icebreaker “Ilya Muromets”, a diesel-electric vessel which is designed for the Northern Fleet.¹⁵ The need for a military icebreaker is explained by the Russian Defense Ministry by the fact that, currently, the Russian naval forces are dependent on the civilian agencies Rosatomflot and Sovkomflot which own nuclear and diesel icebreakers and which are subordinated to the Ministry of Transport. Presently, the navy should order the icebreaker escort for its purposes well in advance.

¹¹The Government of the Russian Federation, *Sotsial'no-Ekonomicheskoe Razvitiie*.

¹²Putin, *Voennaya Doktrina Rossiyskoy*.

¹³Putin, *Morskaya Doktrina Rossiyskoy*.

¹⁴RIA Novosti, “Samiy Moshniy v Mire.”

¹⁵Bukin, “Ilya Muromets.”

A new national security strategy was approved by President Putin in late December 2015.¹⁶ The Arctic was mentioned three times in this document. Firstly, the region was identified as a potential area where the international competition for natural resources of the world ocean could increase. Secondly, the Arctic was described as an important transport/communication corridor which is crucial for Russia's economic security. And, finally, the High North was depicted as a region of international cooperation, peace and stability.

In November 2016, a new version of the Russian Foreign Policy Concept¹⁷ was signed by President Putin. The Arctic was mentioned two times in the document. Firstly, it was described as a region for potential cooperation with Canada. Secondly, it was mentioned in the special section on the High North. The document underlined the importance of cooperation between the regional players in areas, such as sustainable development of natural resources, transport systems (including the NSR), environment protection and preservation of peace and stability. The concept also emphasised the need to strengthen the regional multilateral institutions, such as the Arctic Council (AC) and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC). The document particularly insisted on the need to keep the Arctic from the current tensions between Russia and the West and prevent any military confrontation in the region.

To summarise, the Ukrainian crisis has affected Moscow's threat perceptions in the region to some extent but has not significantly changed the Kremlin's general attitude to the Arctic where, according to the Russian leadership, cooperation should be a dominant paradigm and which should remain a zone of peace and security.

Sustainable development

Russia has very important national interests in the High North. These interests include access to, and exploitation of, the mineral and biological natural resources of the AZRF. The region is the most prolific producer of Russian gas (95% of total Russian production) and oil (approximately 70%).¹⁸ Russian geologists have discovered some 200 oil and gas deposits in the AZRF. There are 22 large shelf deposits in the Barents and Kara seas, which are expected to be developed when oil and gas prices rise again.¹⁹

The AZRF is also abundant in other mineral resources. Its mining industries produce primary and placer diamond (99% of total Russian production), platinum-group elements (98%), nickel and cobalt (over 80%), chromium and manganese (90%), copper (60%), antimony, tin, tungsten, rare metals (between 50 and 90%) and gold (about 40%).²⁰

Russia is trying to modernise the AZRF's industrial base, which currently accounts for 11% of Russian GDP (even if the AZRF accounts for only one% of the national population) and 22% of Russian export revenues.²¹ The Russian federal and regional governments have, together with the private sector, have articulated plans to restore and further develop the industries and infrastructure of the AZRF, including hundreds of billions of dollars in Russian and foreign direct investment in important sectors of the regional economy, such as energy, mining, transport infrastructure and communications.²²

¹⁶Putin, *O Strategii Natsional'noi Bezopasnosti*.

¹⁷Putin, *Kontseptsiya Vneshnei Politiki*.

¹⁸Dobretsov and Pokhilenko, "Mineral Resources and Development."

¹⁹RIA Novosti, *Prirodnye Resursy Arktiki*.

²⁰Dobretsov and Pokhilenko, "Mineral Resources and Development."

²¹Kochemasov, Morgunov and Solomatin, *Ekologo-Ekonomicheskaya Otsenka*.

²²Medvedev, "Osnovy Gosudarstvennoi Politiki"; Putin, *Strategiya Razvitiya Arkticheskoi*; and The Government of the Russian Federation, *Sotsial'no-Ekonomicheskoe Razvitiye*.

Moscow understands well that the country's success in the Arctic theatre depends on the effectiveness of its socio-economic and environmental policies in the region as well as favourable international environment. The Arctic doctrines of 2008 and 2013, the 2014 state programme on the socio-economic development of the AZRF up to 2020, and the 2002 law on environmental protection together suggest a coherent national approach to a sustainable development strategy (SDS) in the AZRF – one supported by the official and academic communities in Russia. Over the last two decades, this approach has included state incentives (investor tax privileges, loans and government guarantees) to develop the AZRF industrial sector. Moreover, the economic sanctions levelled against Russia from 2014 have perhaps had the paradoxical effect of creating significant incentives for national innovation in the Arctic (in place, for instance, of imported foreign equipment and technology). On the other hand, Moscow understands that without foreign technologies and investment it is rather difficult to solve numerous socio-economic and environmental problems of the Russian North. This creates a powerful incentive for the Kremlin to seek cooperative rather than confrontational type of relations with regional players.

As for the content of the SDS, after the decade-long discussions, the Russian expert and academic communities were able to produce the so-called integrated approach to the SDS which took into account the UN, AC and BEAC documents. According to such an integrated approach, the SDS is conceptually broken into three constituent parts: economic, environmental, and social (see Figure 1).

The *economic dimension* of the Russian SDS has the following priorities for the AZRF: sustainable economic activity and increasing prosperity of Arctic communities; sustainable use of natural, including living, resources; development of transport infrastructure

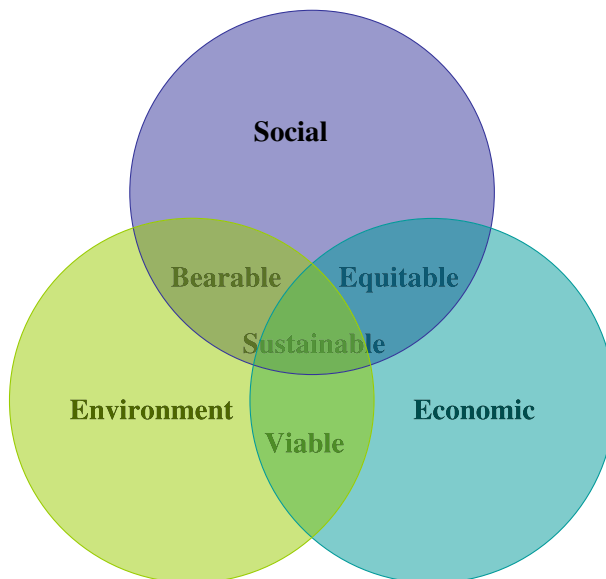


Figure 1. Sustainable development: three dimensions.

(including aviation, marine and surface transport), information technologies and modern telecommunications.

The *environmental dimension* of Russia's AZRF SDS includes monitoring and assessment of the state of the environment in the Arctic; prevention and elimination of environmental pollution in the Arctic; Arctic marine environment protection; biodiversity conservation in the Arctic; climate change impact assessment in the Arctic, and prevention and elimination of ecological emergencies in the Arctic, including those relating to climate change.

Finally, the *social dimension* of the strategy focuses on health of the people living and working in the Arctic; education and cultural heritage; prosperity and capacity building for children and the youth; gender equality, and enhancing well being, eradication of poverty among Arctic people.

The Russian SDS' priorities were slightly revised in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis. First and foremost, Moscow had to adjust its energy policy priorities. In view of the lack of Western technologies and investment, the offshore projects were slowed down or postponed. The emphasis was made on LNG production which is seen as a more promising export-oriented project than the oil-related ones (Yamal LNG plant in Sabetta). To counter the Western sanctions Russia has invited China, South Korea, India and Vietnam, the countries which did not introduce sanctions against Russia, to support its Arctic projects through funding, technology and joint development projects. The Sino-Russian cooperation on the AZRF development, which has already started well before the Ukrainian crisis, is especially impressive one. For example, the *Novatek* company sold 20% of the Yamal LNG plant's shares to the Chinese National Petroleum Company and another 9.9% to the New Silk Road Fund. Moreover, the latter provided *Novatek* with a \$12-billion loan to complete plant's construction.²³ Russia and China are discussing joint plans to improve the NSR infrastructure, including navigation and telecommunications systems.

As for the SDS ecological dimension Moscow is seriously concerned about the environmental situation in the AZRF. As a result of intensive industrial and military activity in the region, many AZRF areas are heavily polluted and pose serious health hazards. Russian scientists have identified 27 so-called "impact zones" where pollution has led to environmental degradation and increased morbidity in the local population. The main impact zones are the Murmansk region (10% of total pollutants for the 27 impact zones), the Norilsk urban agglomeration (over 30%), the West Siberian oil and gas fields (over 30%), and the Arkhangelsk region (approximately five per cent).²⁴ Totally, some 15% of the AZRF territory is polluted or contaminated.²⁵

The AC and BEAC have emerged as the main international fora to discuss and solve Arctic environmental problems. For example, in 2010, the BEAC, based on a report by the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) and the AC's 2003 Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program, identified 42 "hot spots" (where permafrost is vulnerable to collapse) in the Barents Region. All of these hot spots were in Russia. In 2013, an eight-step process to eliminate the hot spots was initiated, with the financial support of the Barents Hot

²³Hsiung, "China and Arctic energy," 250.

²⁴Dushkova and Evseev, "Analiz Techogennogo Vozdeistviyana"; and *Ekologicheskoe Sostoyanie Impactnykh Raionov*.

²⁵Kochemasov, Morgunov and Solomatina, *Ekologo-Ekonomicheskaya Otsenka*.

Spots Facility, which is managed by the NEFCO on behalf of the governments of Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.²⁶

In 2011, the Russian Government launched a programme worth 2.3 billion rubles to clean the AZRF, including the Franz Joseph Land and Novaya Zemlya Archipelagos. By the end of 2016, some 42,000 tons of waste were removed from these archipelagos and 349 hectares of insular land were cleaned.²⁷ In 2015, another AZRF cleaning programme was launched – this time with a 21-billion ruble funding envelope. By the end of 2016, the cleaning of Wrangel Island – including the removal by the Russian military of 36,477 barrels and 264 tons of scrap metal²⁸ – was nearly complete. A comprehensive analysis of the environmental situation in another seven major AZRF areas had been planned, but the federal government was unable to find reliable contractors for this purpose. Similarly, in 2011, the cleaning of the Russian mining villages on Spitsbergen, planned for 2011–2013, was never implemented.

Nuclear safety in the High North is also a matter that encourages Russia and other Arctic states to cooperate. Notably, more than 200 decommissioned nuclear reactors from submarines and icebreakers from the Soviet period are stored on the Kola Peninsula – a Soviet “legacy” that is especially problematic for neighbouring countries like Norway, Finland and Sweden. It should be noted that the US Russian Cooperative Threat Reduction Program (Nunn-Lugar) of 1991–2012²⁹ and the Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Program in the Russian Federation (2003)³⁰ played a significant role in nuclear waste treatment.

The Russian Government programme on nuclear and radiological safety for the 2008–15 period succeeded in dismantling 195 retired nuclear submarines (97% of the total quantum), removing 98.8% of radioisotope thermoelectric generators from service, and dismantling 86% of these generators. Centralised long-term storage facilities for spent nuclear fuel were constructed. Moreover, 53 hazardous nuclear facilities were decommissioned, 270 hectares of contaminated land was remediated, and open water storage of radioactive waste was ended.³¹

In 2016, Russia launched a large-scale programme to remove nuclear waste from the former Soviet submarine base in Andreev Bay in the Murmansk region. The programme must reckon with some 22,000 containers of spent fuel from nuclear submarines and icebreakers currently stored in three storage tanks in Saida Bay on the Kola Peninsula, as well as approximately 18,000 cubic metres of solid waste and 3400 cubic metres of liquid radioactive waste, which, according to Norwegian sources, are collectively as radioactive as 5000 Hiroshima bombs.³²

Russia has supported and vigorously participated in developing all the UN-related environmental initiatives ranging from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report (2014) to the International Maritime Organization’s Polar Code (2014–2015) and Paris agreement on climate change (2015). Moscow has also actively participated in the AC working and expert groups involved to environmental research and assessment.

²⁶NEFCO, *Environmental Hot Spots*.

²⁷RIA Novosti, *Likvidatsiya Nakoplenogo Ekologicheskogo*.

²⁸Neftgaz.ru, “Usiliyami Rossiyskikh Voennykh.”

²⁹Nikitin and Woolf. *The Evolution of Cooperative*.

³⁰Framework Agreement on a Multilateral Nuclear.

³¹Rosatom, Back-end.

³²Sputnik, All clear!

As for the SDS social dimension, Moscow tried to keep its promises both to the indigenous peoples of the North and the AZRF urban population although budget constraints led to some postponements in social programmes. For example, the problem of the so-called mono-towns or single-industry cities remains unresolved and socio-economic and ecological situation there is still difficult (e.g. Nickel, Monchegorsk, Norilsk, etc.).

There are serious socio-economic problems in respect of the indigenous peoples of the AZRF, including the incompatibility of their traditional way of life with present economic systems and processes, the low competitiveness of traditional economic activities, as well as rising disease rates, a high infant mortality rate and alcoholism. The unemployment rate among Russia's indigenous people has been estimated at between 30 and 60%, which is three to four times higher than that of other AZRF residents.³³ Life expectancy is 49 years, compared to 72 years for the average Russian.

In principle, Moscow's policies aim to foster favourable conditions for the sustainable development of the indigenous peoples – for example, in 2009, the Russian Government approved the concept of sustainable development for the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East.³⁴ Among other things, the concept set the general task of raising the quality of life in these regions to the Russian average, and the specific task of halving the infant mortality rate (as at 2007) by 2025. However, these policies have still not come close to their targets and are harshly criticised by Russia's indigenous peoples and national and international human rights organisations.³⁵ The quality of life for indigenous peoples in northern regions like Khanty-Mansi, Nenets, Koryakia and the Chukotka Autonomous Area remains unacceptably low. The Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Area, perhaps exceptionally, has an indigenous economy built around reindeer herding that is booming, with social programmes being implemented effectively, and with major conflicts between indigenous interests and oil and gas companies generally avoided.

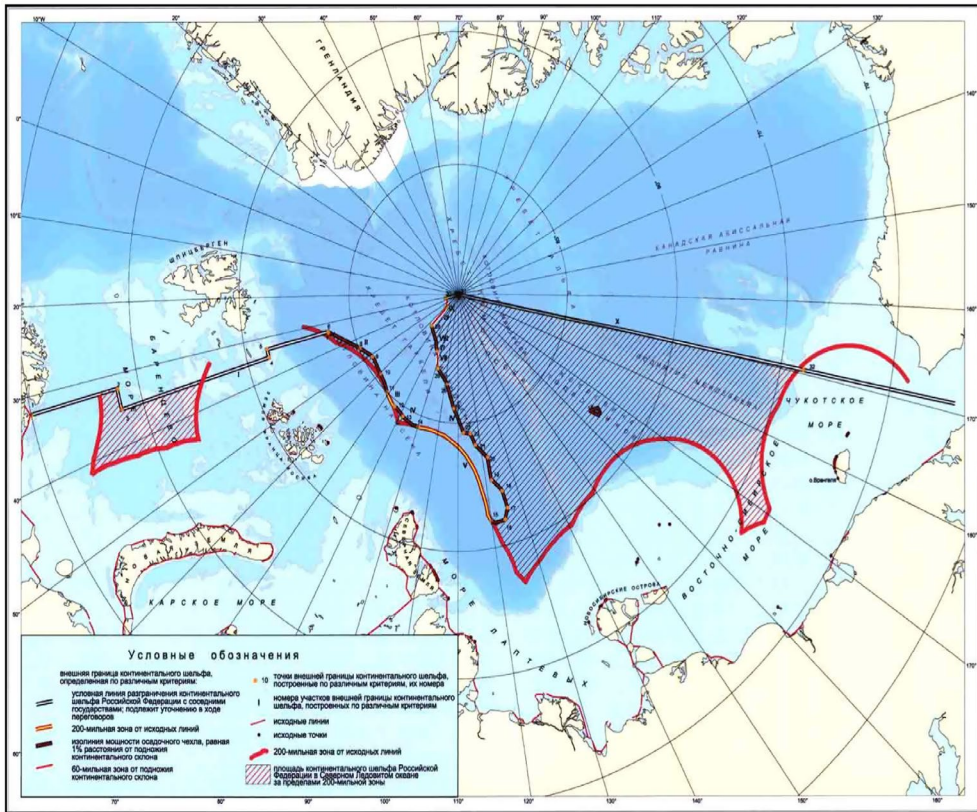
There have also been significant efforts to balance industrial development plans with the needs of indigenous peoples and the Arctic environment. For example, in order not to disturb the herding of reindeer, the construction of the Yamal LNG plant project was coordinated closely with local communities – a dynamic that is, to this day, not without its frictions and complications.

It should be noted that regardless the fact that the good ideas have been articulated, still implementation remains problematic – something true of many areas of Russian public policy. The path to the AZRF's modernisation and innovation charted by the Russian Government must begin to move from policy declarations to actual implementation of specific, realistic projects in the region. The Kremlin appears to understand the need for constructive dialogue and deeper political engagement with all of Russia's AZRF regions, municipalities, indigenous people and non-governmental organisations (e.g. the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, as well as environmental groups and human rights activists). Moscow generally encourages these actors to work with international partners – unless, of course, such engagement assumes a separatist character or involves attempts to challenge Moscow's foreign policy prerogatives. In practice, however, the federal bureaucracy's policies and approaches will often confront the projects of subnational actors and civil society groups. Instead of using the resources of these actors in a creative way,

³³Kochemasov, Morgunov and Solomatin, *Ekologo-Ekonomicheskaya Otsenka*.

³⁴Putin, *Kontseptsiya Ustoychivogo Razvitiya*.

³⁵Rohr, *Indigenous Peoples*.



Map 1. The Russian claim on the Arctic continental shelf (2001). Source: http://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/rus01/RUS_CLCS_01_2001_LOS_2.jpg

Moscow tries to control them. In so doing, the state undermines their initiative, making them passive, both domestically and internationally.

Russian submission to the UN commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf

The Russian doctrinal documents underline that along with the need for enhanced international cooperation, Moscow should protect its legitimate interests in the Arctic region. The Kremlin sees the expansion of the Russian continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean as an important priority for its regional strategy.³⁶ In its 2001 claim, Russia argued that the Lomonosov Ridge and the Alpha-Mendelev Ridge are both geological extensions of its continental Siberian shelf and, thus, that parts of the Central Arctic Ocean, as well as parts of the Barents Sea, the Bering Sea, and the Sea of Okhotsk, fall under its jurisdiction. In effect, Russia claimed sovereign rights over resources on the seabed area of some 1.2 million km² outside the 200-mile line (see Map 1).

³⁶Medvedev, "Osnovy Gosudarstvennoi Politiki"; and Putin, *Strategiya Razvitiya Arkticheskoi Zony*.

However, the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) found the substantiation of the Russian claim on the shelf insufficient and asked for more information. To collect data and make a new submission comprehensive research expeditions have been organised. The expedition of 2007 with flag planting as a by-product was one of them.³⁷

Interestingly, in preparing a new submission Russia used not only the academia but also the military. For example, the objective of the Russian Navy's mission within the framework of the expedition *Arktika-2012* was to prove that its landmass extends to the North Pole by drilling into the sea floor to collect rock samples for scientific analysis. In September 2012, the *Kalitka*, a *Losharik*-class nuclear-powered auxiliary submarine, was used to guide the *Kapitan Dranitsyn* and *Dickson* icebreakers in drilling three boreholes at two different sites on the Mendeleev ridge, collecting over 500 kg of rock samples.³⁸

Prior to the Ukrainian crisis there was a hope that three Arctic powers involved in the dispute (Canada, Denmark and Russia) could either reach an agreement on the division of the Arctic shelf before they make their individual submissions to the CLCS or even make a joint submission.³⁹ Even Moscow, who was working hard on resubmission of its claim, periodically sent messages that it was ready for a compromise.⁴⁰ Addressing an international conference on the Arctic in September 2010 then prime minister Putin told: "Very serious economic and geopolitical interests intersect in the Arctic, but I have no doubt that all the problems existing in the Arctic, including problems over the continental shelf, can be resolved in an atmosphere of partnership."⁴¹

However, these plans were denounced by then Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper who claimed that the North Pole should be the Canadian one.⁴² This position has provoked other countries to act separately. In late 2014, Denmark has filed its submission to the CLCS.⁴³ In August 2015, Russia has officially resubmitted its application for the extension of its Arctic shelf. The CLCS started its reviewing in 2016 (Map 2).

The new application included underwater territories with a total area of about 1.2 million square kilometres and an estimated 4.9 billion metric tons of standard fuel.⁴⁴ Stressing the importance of the Arctic for his country, the Russian Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Sergei Donskoy underlined that 594 oil fields and 159 gas fields as well as two major nickel fields and more than 350 gold deposits had been recently discovered in the entire AZRF. Initial recoverable fuel resources are estimated to 258 billion tons of fuel equivalent, representing 60% of Russia's total hydrocarbon resources.⁴⁵

It appears that Russia and Denmark contest parts of the Amundsen Basin, Lomonosov Ridge, Makarov and Podvodnikov basins, and the Mendeleev Rise. A part of the Makarov Basin and the Mendeleev Rise is contested by both Russia and Canada (although Ottawa is still preparing its submission).

However, Moscow plans to peacefully solve its maritime disputes with its Arctic neighbours. Representing the Russian resubmission at the 40th session of the CLCS at the UN

³⁷Reuters, *Russia Plants Flag on Arctic Floor*.

³⁸International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Russia in the Arctic."

³⁹Byers, "Toward a Canada-Russia"; Byers, "Great Powers"; The Canadian Press, "Canada to File Arctic"; and Studin, "Canada's Four-Point Game."

⁴⁰Putin, *Speech at the Plenary Session*.

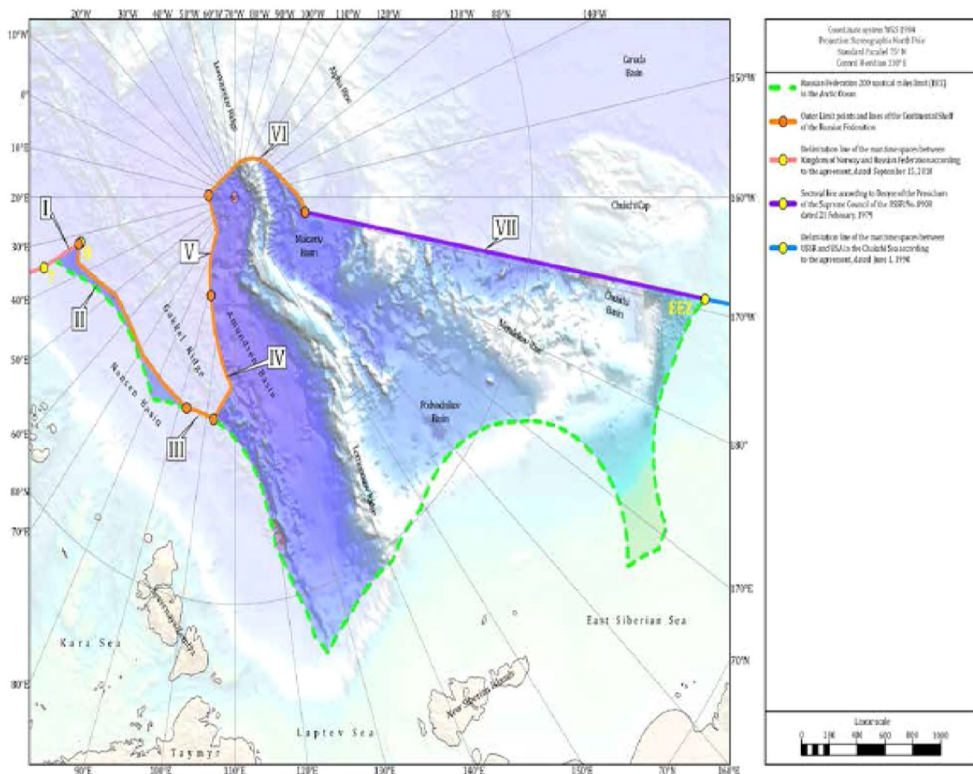
⁴¹Cited in Weir, "Russia's Putin Says."

⁴²Chase, "Myth Versus Reality."

⁴³Danish Foreign Ministry, *Denmark and Greenland Will Today File a Submission*.

⁴⁴Donskoi: UN Commission to Review."

⁴⁵Pettersen, "Application for Russia's Arctic."



Map 2. The Russian claim on the Arctic continental shelf (2015). Source: http://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/rus01_rev15/2015_08_03_Exec_Summary_English.pdf

headquarter, Minister Donskoi mentioned consultations that Russia had with Denmark and Canada. He stressed that the parties had reached an understanding concerning the consideration of applications. The Minister added that the CLCS had received three verbal notes from Canada, Denmark and the US. “None contained an objection to the partially revised Russian application being considered by the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf,” Mr. Donskoi said.⁴⁶

The Russian officials responsible for the claim preparation and presentation in the CLCS are quite optimistic about the Commission’s future decision⁴⁷ while many international experts are rather cautious with regard to any predictions.⁴⁸ Some international legal specialists suggest several scenarios for the further developments if Russia’s second, revised submission be returned by the CLCS. One extreme would be for Moscow to withdraw from the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and just declare unilaterally that its continental shelf reaches up to the North Pole. Russia would still retain the right to a continental shelf, and would find itself in the same position as the US, which remains outside

⁴⁶“Russia Submits Claim to UN.”

⁴⁷“Donskoi: UN Commission to Review”; and “Sergei Donskoi to discuss Russia’s.”

⁴⁸See, for example, Koivurova, Käpylä and Mikkola, *Continental Shelf Claims*, 7; and Pettersen, “UN to Consider Russia’s Arctic”

the UNCLOS, and would have to rely on customary law to support its claim. However, this option is hardly acceptable for Moscow because it would provide a much less secure legal position than would a CLCS' decision which is considered as a legitimising ruling.

The strong nationalistic groupings in Russia would support such unilateralism.⁴⁹ However, the Kremlin's official policy undoubtedly lies within the UNCLOS framework. Russia has much to lose if it undermines the authority of the UNCLOS in the Arctic. Moscow tries to avoid a conflict situation because any conflict would demonstrate to the international community that the UNCLOS does not work and weaken the legitimacy of the Convention. Such weakening is seen by Moscow as dangerous and unacceptable.

Some experts insist on another scenario under which Moscow should accept that even the second submission was too ambitious and not substantiated enough by geological and geophysical research and come back to the CLCS again with a revised, less expansive application.⁵⁰ At the same time, this move would definitely show respect for international law. However, on the other hand, such an initiative would mean large domestic political costs for a Russian leader who would decide to abandon Moscow's ambitious Arctic claim.⁵¹ As the Russian 2015 submission shows, it basically repeats the 2001 claim which means that Moscow would not follow the second scenario.

In principle, international and Russian legal experts did not exclude one more, third, scenario which, they believed, was both possible and the most likely. According to this opinion, Moscow should agree to postpone the revision of its new submission by the CLCS.⁵² First, it will take the CLCS years or even decades to consider the existing and forthcoming applications. Even if it becomes clear that the Russian claims on the Lomonosov and Mendeleev ridges cannot be substantiated, all the Arctic states may decide that it is better to agree on disagreement and continue business as usual.⁵³

In addition to the need to secure the UNCLOS regime in the Arctic, also a realistic assessment of their economic interests and technical capabilities prevent Copenhagen, Moscow and Ottawa from a conflict over the disputed areas in the Arctic Ocean. Since these areas are very deep and distant from the shore, extraction of oil and gas there will not become technically possible and profitable for many decades. Moreover, according to the US Geological Survey assessments, most hydrocarbon resources in the High North are likely to be found in relatively shallower waters, within the 200-mile limit (i.e. within coastal states' exclusive economic zones).⁵⁴ Since most of these uncontroversial continental shelves are relatively unexplored, international experts suggest that the conflicting parties first should develop them.⁵⁵

However, as the recent Danish and Russian submissions demonstrate, this scenario is hardly possible as well.

In principle, the "cooperative/compromise scenario" which was discussed between Canada, Denmark and Russia prior to the Ukrainian crisis is still possible. Based on its

⁴⁹Koivurova, Käpylä and Mikkola, *Continental Shelf Claims*, 7; and Konyshv, Sergunin and Subbotin, "Konstruirovaniye Arkticheskogo Prostranstva," 301–305.

⁵⁰Moe, "Russia's Arctic Continental Shelf Claim."

⁵¹Sergunin and Konyshv, *Russia in the Arctic*, 141, 142.

⁵²Moe, "Russia's Arctic Continental Shelf Claim"; and Zagorsky, *Arkticheskie Ucheniya Severnogo Flota*.

⁵³Sergunin and Konyshv, *Russia in the Arctic*, 142.

⁵⁴U.S. Geological Survey, *Circum-Arctic Resource Appraisal*.

⁵⁵Moe, "Russia's Arctic Continental Shelf Claim"; Sergunin and Konyshv, *Russia in the Arctic*, 142; and Zagorsky, *Arkticheskie Ucheniya Severnogo Flota*.

authority, the CLCS could encourage the three contenders to negotiate a compromise variant of an agreement which could probably include the idea of making the Central Arctic a zone of international cooperation and/or natural reserve governed by the UN. Such idea is still floating among the academic and expert communities of the coastal states.⁵⁶ In any case, as Moscow repeatedly underlined, the Kremlin plans to solve the problem within the UNCLOS framework, peacefully and on the basis of a solid research data.

Military strategies

Over the last quarter century, a radical shift in Russia's threat perceptions in the Arctic region took place. There was a clear tendency towards the increasing role of the soft rather than hard security-related concerns such as ensuring Russia's access to and control of the natural resources and transport routes in the region, climate change mitigation, and cleaning up the environmental mess. At the same time, as some Russian strategists believe, there are a number of security threats and challenges in the region that require preservation and further development of a certain military potential and presence in the North. They took notice that the ongoing Ukrainian crisis has negatively affected overall Russia's relations with NATO and its member states, which unilaterally suspended several cooperative projects with Russia, including military-to-military contacts and the development of confidence- and security-building measures.

In contrast with some pessimistic expectations, there was no any substantial change in Russia's perceptions the military power's role in the Arctic. As before, Moscow's military strategies aim at three major goals: first, to demonstrate and ascertain Russia's sovereignty over the AZRE, including the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf; second, to protect its economic interests in the High North; and third, to demonstrate that Russia retains its great power status and has world-class military capabilities.⁵⁷ In a sense, Russian military strategies are comparable with those of other coastal states (especially the US and Canadian ones).

It should be noted that since the Soviet-time military machine in the Arctic has significantly degenerated in the 1990s and early 2000s, the Russian nuclear and conventional forces badly needed modernisation to effectively meet new challenges and threats. The main idea behind the modernisation plans is to make the Russian armed forces in the Arctic more compact, better equipped and trained. The Russian armed forces' modernisation has started well before the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis, namely, with the launch of the third State Rearmament Program (2007–2015) which covered both nuclear and conventional components.

The modernisation programme of Russia's strategic forces in the North includes the renewal of its fleet of eight strategic nuclear submarines and it is not affected by the Ukrainian crisis. Currently, only six Delta IV class submarines undergo the process of modernisation. They will be provided with a new sonar system and new submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) Sineva (Skiff SSN-23) which entered service in 2007.⁵⁸ The only Typhoon-class strategic submarine, the *Dmitry Donskoy*, has been modernised and deployed

⁵⁶Finne, "You can't own"; Kharlampieva and Lagutina, "Transnatsional'naya Model"; Medvedev, "Zapovednaya Territoriya."

⁵⁷Konyshov and Sergunin, "Is Russia a Revisionist Military?"

⁵⁸Zhukov, *Ballisticheskaya Raketa "Sineva"*.

to the Northern Fleet in 2008. It serves to conduct test firing for the *Bulava* system, a new generation solid-fuel SLBM, designed to avoid possible future US ballistic missile defence weapons, and which can cover a distance of more than 9000 km.⁵⁹

It is planned that in the future, the Typhoon- and Delta IV-class submarines should be replaced with the new Borey-class fourth-generation nuclear-powered strategic submarines. The first Borey-class submarine, the *Yuri Dolgoruky* has been in operation by the Northern Fleet since January 2013. Three other Borey-class submarines, the *Prince Vladimir*, the *Prince Oleg* and the *Prince Pozharsky* designed for the Northern Fleet should be operable in 2018–2020.⁶⁰

In contrast with the strategic component, Russia's conventional forces' composition and posture were affected by the Ukrainian crisis. To reorganise in a more efficient way the Russian land forces in the AZRF there were initially plans to transform the motorised infantry and marine brigades located near Pechenga (Murmansk Region) to the Arctic special force unit, with soldiers trained in a special programme and equipped with modern personal equipment for military operations in the Arctic. The Arctic brigade should be operational by 2016. All conventional forces in the AZRF should form an Arctic Group of Forces (AGF) to be led by the joint Arctic command (to be established in 2017).⁶¹

However, the Ukrainian crisis has made adjustments to Russia's military planning. While two Pechenga-based brigades were left in place, the Arctic brigade was created ahead of schedule (in January 2015) and deployed in Alakurtti which is close to the Finnish–Russian border. Another move was that given an “increased NATO military threat” in the North, President Putin has decided to accelerate the creation of a new strategic command “North” which was established in December 2014 (three years ahead of the schedule). It was also announced that the second Arctic brigade will be formed soon and will be stationed in the Yamal-Nenets autonomous district (east of the Ural Mountains in the Arctic Circle).⁶²

The Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said also that two new Arctic coast defence divisions re to be established by 2018 as part of an effort to strengthen security along the NSR. One of them is likely to be stationed on the Kola Peninsula (in addition the existing military units), the other in the eastern Arctic (Chukotka Peninsula). The new forces can be tasked with anti-assault, anti-sabotage and anti-aircraft defence issues along the NSR.⁶³ They will both interact closely with law-enforcement authorities like the Ministry of Interior, the National Guard and the Border Guard Service (BGS).

The growing tensions with NATO have forced Russia to pay more attention to its air-defence force units which are stationed in the AZRF – on the Kola Peninsula, near Severodvinsk (Arkhangelsk region), Chukotka, and on a number of Russian islands in the Arctic – Novaya Zemlya, Franz Josef Land, the New Siberian Islands and Wrangel Island. Some of these units have re-established many of the old Soviet airfields and military bases in the Arctic. In October 2014, these units have been united into a joint task force. These units are equipped with, among other things, RS-26 Rubezh coastal missile systems, S-300 air-defence missiles and the Pantsyr-S1 anti-aircraft artillery weapon system. The measures to increase Moscow's military potential in the region include the creation of a new air-force and air-defence army, including regiments armed with MiG-31 interceptor aircraft, S-400

⁵⁹*Rekord Dal'nosti.*

⁶⁰Dimmi, *Project 955 – Borey/Dolgorukiy.*

⁶¹Sergunin and Konyshchev, *Russia in the Arctic*, 152.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 152, 153.

⁶³Staalesen, “New Russian forces.”

air-defence missile systems (to replace the S-300 systems), and radar units.⁶⁴ One task is to restore continuous radar coverage along Russia's entire northern coast, which was lost in the 1990s. To that end, a total of 13 airfields, an air force test range, and 10 radar sites and direction centres would be established in the Arctic in the coming years.

The BGS' strengthening is one of the most important priorities of Russia's national security policies in the High North. An Arctic border guards unit was created as early as in 1994. Its aim was to monitor the circulation of ships and poaching at sea. The unit was reorganised in 2004–2005. In 2009, it was announced that new Arctic units had been established in border guard stations in Arkhangelsk and Murmansk.

Furthermore, two new border guard commands – one in Murmansk for the western AZRF regions, and one in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky for the eastern Arctic regions – were established. Now the border guards are assigned with the task to deal with the new – soft security – threats and challenges such as the establishment of reliable border control systems, the introduction of special visa regulations to certain regions, and the implementation of technological controls over fluvial zones and sites along the NSR. It is currently controlled from the air by border guard aircrafts and on the land and sea by the North-Eastern Border Guard Agency; the Russian border guards further plan to establish a global monitoring network from Murmansk to Wrangel Island. All in all, Moscow plans to build 20 border guard stations along the Arctic Ocean's coastline.⁶⁵

Another structural change is an ongoing reorganisation of the Russian Coast Guard (part of the BGS). Now the Coast Guard has a wide focus in the Arctic: in addition to the traditional protection of biological resources in the Arctic Ocean, oil and gas installations and shipping along the NSR are among the agency's new top priorities. There are plans to equip the Coast Guard in the AZRF with the brand new vessels of project 22,100. The Okean-class ice-going patrol ship, the *Polyarnaya Zvezda* (Polar Star), is currently undergoing sea trials in the Baltic Sea. Vessels of this class can break up to 31.4-inch-thick ice. They have an endurance of 60 days and a range of 12,000 nautical miles at 20 knots. They are equipped with a Ka-27 helicopter and can be supplied with Gorizont drones.⁶⁶

The attention which Russia pays now to the Coast Guard is in line with what other coastal states do (especially Norway and Denmark). Moreover, Russia actively partook in the creation of an Arctic Coast Guard Forum which was established by the coastal states in November 2015.

Moscow argues that this build-up is defensive in nature, and that the numbers of armed forces added are small. The Kremlin posits that these activities are prudent, given the importance of the North to Russia's future economic development plans, the increasing permeability of Russia's vast northern borders, and the anticipated increase in commercial shipping along Russia's north as Arctic sea ice melts.

Conclusion

To summarise, there was a negative impact of the Ukrainian crisis on the level of cooperation and – what is especially important – trust between Russia and its Western and Japanese partners in the Arctic. The drop in the volume of regional trade and traffic via the NSR,

⁶⁴The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2016*, 165, 166.

⁶⁵Zagorsky, *Arkticheskie Ucheniya Severnogo Flota*; and Klimenko, *Russia's Arctic Security Policy*, 14, 15.

⁶⁶Staalesen, "Navy Fills Up With New Ships."

disruption of several ambitious energy projects and military-to-military contacts are the most exemplary negative consequences of these dramatic developments. Some of these implications are short-lived but others (e.g. cancellation of energy projects and especially the lack of trust) tend to be of mid- and long-term character. However, in general, the Arctic countries managed to keep major areas of their regional cooperation out of the current tensions between Moscow and the West and focus on the collaborative agenda.

While some Western mass media and – to a lesser extent – politicians and experts portray the modernisation programmes and changes in Russia's military capabilities in the High North as a significant military build-up and even a renewed arms race in the region, the real situation is far from this worse-case scenario. One can speak only about limited modernisation and increases or changes in equipment, force levels, and force structure. Some of these changes – for example, the creation of new Russian Arctic army and BGS units, commissioning more sophisticated and better armed warships, air defence systems and the establishment of new command structures in the north – have little to do with obtaining new offensive capabilities or power projection into the potentially disputed areas (for example, where the Russian sea-bed claims overlap with the Canadian and Danish ones) or region at large. Rather, they are for the patrolling and protecting of undisputed national territories and exclusive economic zones that are becoming more accessible, including for illegal activities, such as poaching, smuggling and uncontrolled migration. Others changes – such as modernisation of the Russian strategic nuclear submarine fleet – may have more to do with maintaining a deterrent potential against NATO/US rather than with developing first strike potential and other offensive capabilities.

To put it differently, these military modernisation programmes do not provoke an arms race or undermine the regional cooperation. It should be also noted that similar modernisation programmes are being executed by other Arctic coastal states. What is also important is that both Russian and Western modernisation programmes started well before the Ukrainian crisis and the latter had little effect on them.

The Ukrainian crisis had little impact on Moscow's perception of the Arctic as a region of international cooperation and peace. Russia clearly demonstrated that it has a preference for soft power instruments (diplomatic, economic, and cultural) in the Arctic theatre, as well as activity and discourse via multilateral institutions.

From the theoretical point of view, the LIGA suggests a plausible explanation why Moscow prefers a cooperative, non-confrontational policy line in the Arctic. In terms of national preference formation, it should be noted that the Kremlin has a rather busy domestic agenda which should be given priority over the international problems in the region. Russia's leadership realises that most of the threats and challenges to the AZRF originate from inside rather than outside the country. These problems are rooted in a confluence of factors, including the degradation of Soviet-made economic, transport and social infrastructure in the region, the current resource-oriented model of the Russian economy, and the lack of funds and managerial skills in Russia to properly develop the AZRF. It follows that Russia's current Arctic strategy is of an inward- and not an outward-looking nature. It aims to solve existing domestic problems rather than focus on external expansion. Moreover, in developing the AZRF, Moscow seeks to demonstrate that it is open for international cooperation and to foreign investment and know-how.

It should be noted that Russia's national preferences result in a quite pragmatic international strategy which aims at using the Arctic cooperative programmes and regional

institutions for solving first and foremost Russia's specific problems rather than addressing some abstract challenges. Russia's pragmatism should be taken into account by other regional players and should not be misinterpreted by them. Currently, there is no Russia's "hidden agenda" in the Arctic. Moscow insists that its strategy in the region is predictable and constructive, rather than aggressive or improvised. The Kremlin is quite clear about its intentions in the region saying that Russia does not want to be a revisionist power or troublemaker in the Arctic. To achieve its national goals in the region, Russia will use peaceful diplomatic, economic and cultural means, and act through international organisations and forums, rather than unilaterally.

The Russian leadership believes that the Arctic cooperative agenda could include the following areas: climate change mitigation, environmental protection, emergency situations, air and maritime safety (including the Polar Code implementation, charting safe maritime routes and cartography), search and rescue operations, Arctic research, indigenous peoples, cross- and trans-border cooperative projects, culture, etc. In order to prevent potential conflicts, avoid misunderstandings, and facilitate regional cooperation, Russia suggests that the Arctic states should be clear about their military policies and doctrines and should include arms control initiatives and confidence- and security-building measures in their bilateral or multilateral relations in the Arctic. To materialise this ambitious agenda, a solid institutional support is needed. For this reason, the regional (the AC and BEAC) and global (International Maritime Organization, UN Environment Program, UN Development Program, etc.) governance institutions, which slowed down their activities in the Arctic because of the recent tensions between Russia and the West, should be revived.

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