

GIES HONOURS PAPERS

Volume 1 | Academic year 2021-2022

THE CHINA-ENIGMA IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC

How can Russia best protect its Arctic interests against a rising China?

Berk Vindevogel

Master International Politics – Ghent University^a

Dissertation promotor: Prof. dr. Sven Biscop

*“We need to save the Arctic, not because of the polar bears,
and not because it is the most beautiful place in the world,
but because our very survival depends on it.”*

Lewis Gordon Pugh, 2008

Introduction

On the first day of October 1987, former president of the Soviet-Union Mikhail Gorbachev delivered one of his most underappreciated speeches. In honour of the Arctic city of Murmansk, the speech laid down the basis for the concept of Arctic exceptionalism.¹ A term which refers to the idea that the Arctic is immune to changes in international relations. Thus, making it ‘exceptional.’ Solely peace, cooperation and prosperity would find its way to the far North. At least, that is what the Arctic states had hoped for. In recent years, driven by the impending effects of global warming the Arctic has become not only literally, but also figuratively a hot topic.

Parallel with this rising interest there has been an increasing militarisation and a growing assertiveness within the Arctic Circle. It is almost certain that the Arctic future will be one where tensions prevail, and where Moscow will be of

paramount importance for Arctic governance. The Russian Federation is the state with the longest Arctic coastline and has the biggest territorial claims of the area. They are set to profit the most from the melting ice and permafrost as they have the beneficial prospect of a major shipping route and massive amounts of natural resources and minerals such as oil, natural gas, lithium, copper and many more.² This however makes them also the most vulnerable to the growing militarisation and arrival of all these new prying eyes yearning for the Arctic riches.

The most remarkable and influential of these newcomers is the People’s Republic of China, which is located more than 1.400 km away from the Arctic. Beijing has shown growing interest in the region since the end of the 20th century and has dared to call itself a ‘near-Arctic state’ in 2018 when it released its white paper on their Arctic policies.³ The objectives of Beijing fall under its

^a In the GIES Honours Papers, students who wrote an exceptional master’s dissertation under the supervision of a member of the GIES get the opportunity to present their main argument or findings in a concise paper.

ambitious Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) that aims to connect the China with the rest of the world and manifest themselves as the global hub. With a new fleet of icebreakers and a recent strategic vision, the presence of China is expected to grow.

Two great powers that focus on the same region, routes, and resources. Both have significant military, maritime and economic interests and are increasingly being confronted with each other in institutions as well as on the field. Can Russia still escape the quandary that it has created, in particular now that, following its invasion of Ukraine, it is even more dependent on China? The current predicament is complicated for the Russians who need to balance their beneficial partnership with China together with their own Arctic objectives, specifically to remain the Arctic superpower. Furthermore, the author realizes that this is not a forgiving position to incorporate considering the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Research Questions

The research question of this paper is as follows: *How can Russia best protect its Arctic objectives against the growing presence of China?*

This research question is supported by the following two issues: *How does China influence Russian Arctic policy? What risks does China bring with it in the Arctic relation with Russia?*

Structure and methodology

To define a Russian strategy against China's presence in the Arctic, this paper is divided into three parts. Firstly, an assessment will be made of the current situation, namely both Russia and China's objectives in the Arctic and how these fits within their current Grand Strategies. The second part will be a risk assessment for the Russian government in relation to China, which will form the foundation for the final part. Within this risk assessment, the effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine will also be considered. Last, some policy recommendations will be given as to find out if Moscow has any options at all. A challenging feat, considering the Russian invasion of Ukraine has

deteriorated the Russian government's standing and options. In the conclusion of this paper, the author will draw upon his own observations and offer some thoughts.

Arctic ambitions

To understand the relationship between these two great powers and how they interact with each other in the Arctic, it is first essential to discuss their ambitions. This section will therefore cover the current Arctic strategy of both Russia and China and how it fits withing their own Grand Strategy. Most states release a national security strategy or separate documents or white papers in which the Grand Strategy of that state for the coming years is uncovered, but it remains relevant to analyse their behaviour as well.

Putin's Arctic Troika

The newest crisis in Ukraine gives us some image of the Russian Grand Strategy and how this translates into their Arctic ambitions, which for some time has consisted of three main aspects, making up Putin's trident or troika. Furthermore, the Russian Arctic ambitions are also made clear in two recent documents: *Basic Principles of the State Policy of the Russian Federation for the Arctic until 2035* and the *Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and for National Security Provisions until 2035*.^{4, 5}

First, ever since the installation of Primakov as the minister of foreign affairs in 1995, there has been an absolute focus on retaining and sustaining the status of Russia as a great power.⁶ Russian leaders are therefore sensitive to attacks on this status, which became clear in the famous 2007 speech of Putin at the Munich Security Conference.⁷ This quest for status also materialises in military-technical aspects where bigger means better.⁸ For example, the RS-28 Sarmat, a liquid-fuelled intercontinental ballistic missile possible of reaching 18.000km in perfect conditions. This rocket is also used to deter Europe and is imaged a lot on Russian news outlets during the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.⁹

Second, the Russian aspiration for a sphere of influence as was the case in the former USSR.¹⁰ This is something made specifically clear in the most recent Russian national security strategy of 2021 where the aim is to become one of the most influential centres of the world. Starting with the ex-Soviet countries. In addition, this sphere of influence is sometimes seen as a buffer zone, which can be seen as one of Russia's ambitions in their current invasion in Ukraine.¹¹ The Arctic, Russia's Northern flank, is of paramount importance for Russia's defence and deriving from Russian officials their rhetoric and policies, the Arctic is theirs to control. The Northern Sea Route is therefore also an internal not international passage. This claim to the Arctic is further manifested in the military field where Moscow goes to great lengths as to protect the Russian Arctic, even training their soldiers to work on sleds¹² and weaponizing their icebreakers.¹³

Last, there is the complicated relationship with the West, specifically the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Driven by the aspiration to be a great power and having spheres of influence, Moscow frequently clashes with the West as a way of dismantling their long-term adversary.¹⁴ This can be manifested diplomatically or on the battlefield as is the case in Mali, Syria and today Ukraine. The relationship is complicated because of the Russian need to cooperate with the West. Seeing that economically, the European Union is still the biggest importer of Russian gas and is the biggest trade partner for Moscow. This becomes noticeably clear in the Arctic where Russia has enormous economic ambitions because of the Northern Sea Route and the present natural resources. For this, Russia needs the West, but they are not always that willing to cooperate because of Russia's practices. Russia wants the upper hand in this relationship, but has a way of dismantling their own standing, because of their aggressiveness.¹⁵

Zhongguo: China

China's Arctic ambitions fall in line with what they have been striving for, almost their entire existence, which is to be the Middle Kingdom, or '*Zhongguo*'. This refers to the aspiration to have a central position in this world and dominate.¹⁶ The Opium Wars ushered in China's century of humiliation, whereby China needed to fall back and recuperate from their losses, but seeing that they are more omnipresent, assertive, and dominant than ever, it could be said they are once again ready to take the throne.¹⁷ This is pushed forward in the following Arctic ambitions:

First, the full expansion and exploitation of the so-called Polar Silk Road. As part of the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), China wants to connect itself with other parts of the world and manifest itself as a global HUB. The melting Arctic is a perfect fit in these plans as they cut transporting routes short by thousands of kilometres.¹⁸ This will positively affect the Chinese economy, which is slowing down in growth, affecting the legitimacy of the CCP in turn.

Second, as China grows, so does their hunger for energy, the fuel of economies. The Arctic stores vast amounts of natural resources which can confidently fuel the Chinese economy for several decades or more. Manifesting in lots of investments made by Beijing in the Russian Arctic, which will be talked about later in this paper. Not only that, but in the transition to more renewable energy sources, the Arctic can be critical, with large potential for wind and geothermal energy.¹⁹

A last Chinese ambition is to remove China's military veil of ignorance concerning the Arctic. Even though the Arctic offers the shortest route from the US to China, Beijing has no concrete knowledge over this region. This is something they are destined to change soon. In addition, a military presence in the Arctic waters adds to their ambition of having a blue-water navy^b,

^b A blue-water navy is a maritime force, capable of operating in deep waters and open oceans, giving it a global reach.

offering them the possibility to protect their precious sea lines of communication.²⁰ This aspiration is also a product of the previous ambitions, which they try to protect.

China's role in the Russian Arctic

Pushed by Western behaviour and several pragmatic considerations, the overall alignment between Moscow and Beijing has also manifested itself in the Arctic. At the advent of China's arrival in the North Pole, Moscow was weary of this new visitor and viewed them with a lot of scepticism. China posed a threat to the Russian status and their capacities for manifesting itself as the Arctic superpower.²¹ Moscow therefore openly lobbied against China's application for observatory status in the Arctic Council.²² China had no business in the Arctic. It took years before Moscow changed its guard towards Beijing and accepted the need and possibilities for cooperation, although they remain prudent in naming their relationship. Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, called China one their priority partners in the Arctic.²³ Former Russian minister of natural resources, Sergey Donskoy, welcomed China but only if they brought along the necessary investments.²⁴

China as an investor, producer, and consumer: the energy sector

In line with what minister Donskoy said, China placed its first investment in the Yamal LNG project in 2013.²⁵ The Chinese China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) bought 20% of shares of the Russian company Novatek, the company responsible for the project, for 960 million USD. Later, in 2015, the Silk Road Fund (SRF), created by Xi Jinping, bought 9,9% of shares of the same company. This was after a hefty diplomatic exercise by Moscow, which suffered under Western sanctions. To stay on the topic of Novatek, the company received 12 billion USD in investments by Chinese state-owned banks in 2016.²⁶

Novatek received all these investments and used these funds to invest back in Chinese manufacturing companies that helped build several pipelines, ships, and installations. For

example, there are four LNG-tankers being built in a joint assignment by the Japanese Mitsui O.S.K. Lines and the Chinese COSCO (China Ocean Shipping Company).²⁷ Furthermore, 80% of all material needed for this assignment will be manufactured in Chinese shipping yards. China is the single-most important partner of Novatek, manifesting itself further in the Russian Arctic, whilst they can develop their domestic technology and maritime sector.²⁸

Russia realised early that this level of involvement by China comes with certain power gains for them. It was therefore an ambition that future projects would have a more diversified investors field than the Yamal LNG project. For Arctic LNG 2, Russia would lean towards the Indian ONGC, Saudi Arabian Saudi Aramco and the South-Korean Koga, but once again, the largest chunks of money came from the CNPC and China National Oil Offshore Corporation (CNOOC).²⁹ Together they own over 20% of the project. This time the Chinese BOMESC and Penglai Jutal were part of the taskforce for the project. Future investments made by Russian companies are likely to divert to the above-mentioned Chinese companies because of the expertise they are acquiring.

Other Chinese investments in the Russian Arctic energy sector include a 10% share of the SRF in Sibur³⁰, a company crucial for the extraction processes in several LNG-facilities. An investment of Sinomec in the Russian Karelia, which focuses on windmills and investments by Sinopec in geothermal energy.³¹ These are only a few of the many investments, currently materialised.

China as an investor, producer, and consumer: the Northern Sea Route

As was made clear above, the Arctic is of paramount importance for future Chinese development because of the Northern Sea Route (NSR). Even though the route is far from operational, China has already put aside part of their spending budget to this route.

First, the most important aspect of maritime trade are the ports. The nodes of this globalised

world and the beating heart of the global economy. However, ports in the Arctic currently serve an additional purpose as the route is still so unreliable, namely a (safe) haven. Among other places, China has vowed to invest in ports in Arkhangel'sk, Sabetta and Murmansk, already providing tens of billions of USD.³² In addition, as already mentioned above, China plays a crucial role in the development of new LNG-tankers.

However, China's role in the Northern Sea Route is not only as an investor and producer, but more importantly as a consumer or traveller. As discussed above, the Northern Sea Route, cuts the distance from mainland China to mainland Europe by a third of the total distance, saving up enormous amounts of time and fuel. Although there is no formal arrangement between Beijing and Moscow over the use of the NSR it is sure that China will be one of its main users. To clarify, a deal between both great powers is not necessary for the use of this route, but because Russia considers it as an internal passage, a deal could help forward the Chinese interests seeing that the Russian Northern fleet unofficially oversees the route.³³

The future of the NSR is still unsure. After consultation with the Port of Rotterdam it became clear that most shipping companies are not counting on the NSR for the coming decades and even then, there are doubts about the effect on local biodiversity. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has added an extra dimension, but this will be touched upon later in this paper.

China as an ally?

The last role of China in the Russian arctic, relates to the Chinese military developments in the area, including the Search and Rescue capacities. Here, the Vostok exercises of 2018 play a vital role³⁴. Although the relationship between the two great powers has not evolved to a full-blown alliance, they have held joint exercises together in the Arctic in 2018, but also in the 2019 Tsentr exercises.³⁵ Vostok 2018 was impressive because of the 300.000 troops, making it the biggest Russian exercise ever, but also because China issued over 3.500 troops of the People's

Liberation Army. Thus, ameliorating the military interoperability. The 2018 exercises also made use of the Northern Sea Route for the first time.³⁶ Furthermore, China is also set to take part in the 2022 Vostok-exercises, taking place in the Far East and the Sea of Japan, signalling fear in the West.³⁷

The accession of the PLA in the Russian Arctic and the fact that they had the possibility to operate together with the Russian forces, shows a great amount of trust in their Southern neighbour. Now that Arctic ice is rapidly melting, so does the Russian natural buffer, increasing the dangers for Russia.

China's role in the Arctic is miscellaneous. Beijing functions as a moneylender, manufacturer, consumer and very prudently as a military partner. Although these are beneficial functions, the trained eye realises that there is another side of the medal. Certain risks have been touched upon briefly, but there is a wider analysis to be made. The following chapter aims to identify the current and future risks Russia is being confronted with in their current Arctic relationship with China.

Risk assessments

Dangerous rhetoric

A first risk that Moscow is being confronted with is the narrative it adopts about the Arctic. Although this is no direct risk, it can confront Moscow with certain difficulties. To put it briefly, Russia talks about larger parts of the Arctic, not only the Russian territory as it is theirs to control and that they are the Arctic superpower who establishes the rules of the game. This is a rhetoric that can backfire fiercely since it can only be backed up with powerful and independent policy actions. Can Russia do this? Spoiler alert: No.

Growing financial and material dependence

It has already been discussed that Russia has enormous economic motives in the Arctic. The NSR, extraction of natural resources and rare earth minerals and the creation of infrastructure

for renewable energy. All very lucrative, but expensive infrastructure needs to be built first. This brings enormous costs with it. In addition, because of the melting permafrost, existing infrastructure is slowly crumbling apart. Regions such as Chukotka, West-Siberia and the Kara-coast possess valuable energy-infrastructure, but when the temperature rises, the carrying capacity drops. The Norilsk oil disaster of 2020 was caused by this effect.³⁸ Furthermore, many of the existing infrastructure needs to be modernised and over 80% of ports along the NSR are currently not connected to the transportation network.³⁹ The estimated cost of the port that Moscow wants to build on the Taymyr peninsula would be over 110 billion USD. A striking example of the inadequacy for domestic financing is the build of a floating dock by Rosatom for nuclear icebreakers. No Russian wanted to do it because of the low-price offering. Consequence being that the Turkish Kuzey Star and Chinese Jiangsu Dajin Heavy Industry Co. Ltd were competing for it.⁴⁰

Even though the profits are higher, costs first must be made, and the simple fact remains that Russia simply does not have the money to pay for all of this. Notwithstanding that Moscow keeps announcing these large-scale projects. Moscow created a favourable taxing regime to attract financing, which ended in vain⁴¹. That they needed to look elsewhere was clear. Foreign investors and manufacturers are now driving the development of the Russian Arctic and China plays first violin in this story. China's presence was already discussed above, but there are numerous projects that can be added. China's presence is rising. Russia realises this, but the quest for diversification is blocked by Russia's own foreign policy.

After the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, companies left the Russian Arctic, though temporarily. Furthermore, the economic sanctions also hurt Russia in the Arctic policy. Because China did not participate in handing out these sanctions, Russia turned eastwards for finances. With the consequence that they now have significant economic power in the Russian Arctic and that

the Russian share in their own area is shrinking. Consider the fact that China has a history of using their economic leverage as they have done in Africa and risks arise.

Although this does not mean that they have become a 'junior partner' on their own turf, the increasing dependence on China is near embarrassing for a state claiming to be the Arctic superpower.

A growing and obtrusive PLA(N)

In addition, there are growing military concerns. First, espionage and the gathering of information for Chinese intelligence services. Because of the sensitivity that Russia manages the Arctic with and the economic and military ambitions it cherishes, Moscow pursues a policy of military dominance, which it has in the Arctic. Espionage however is a ubiquitous issue of which Russia cannot escape. In 2020, Valery Mitko, former president of the Arctic Academy of Sciences in Saint-Petersburg was sentenced for sharing sensitive information to the Chinese, relating to hydro-acoustics making it easier to track submarines.⁴² A comparable situation occurred in 2016 with Vladimir Lapygin.⁴³

Furthermore, China, unannounced, sent a Dongdiao-class spy ship to the Vostok-2018 exercises.⁴⁴ This fits in the Chinese ambition to acquire knowledge over the Arctic. It is however important to recognize that this knowledge can also be gained via scientific expeditions.

Lastly, China is becoming more independent of the Russian defence-industry and is acquiring larger capacities to operate in the Arctic. China is steadily building the J-20 fighter jets, Z-8G and Z-20 helicopters, but also the larger type-039A submarines and new aircraft carriers.⁴⁵ China's military unpredictability is growing, adding to Russia's risks. Although a military conflict soon is highly unlikely these developments are certainly things Russia needs to keep an eye. Also keeping in mind that the Arctic buffer is melting, China is treading on thin ice.

Effect of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

As is made clear above, Russia has some serious economic interests in the Arctic. For this to be fully exploited they are required to invest heavily in the necessary infrastructure, since they cannot cover for these excessive costs themselves. International cooperation is of the essence for the Russian Arctic. China can cover some costs, but again this leads to independence. The invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has only worsened the Russian situation because international cooperation has become impossible for Western states and companies that play a crucial role in the Russian Arctic because of their technology, expertise, or money. Next are a few effects and trends that are uncovering itself because of this invasion.

First, future economic exploitation has been slowed down immensely and the unfolding of the Northern Sea Route will take much longer as previously suspected. The previously mentioned Arctic LNG-project will be partially completed, temporarily, as announced by Novatek.⁴⁶ The Russian company has pulled this decision through to other Arctic projects. These decisions were made in the days after Western companies started to pull out of Russian Arctic projects.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the French oil giant Total will no longer contribute to the Arctic LNG 2-project.

In addition, other Western companies crucial for their technology started pulling out of Russia. Baker Hughes, Halliburton, Siemens, Linde are all companies of which Novatek heavily relies for certain technology. Trafigura Group pulled out of Vostok Oil LLC, the largest oil project in the Russian Arctic.⁴⁸ The list goes on.

Not only projects relating to energy but concerning the future Russian nuclear ice breakers are also confronted with heavy delays and drawbacks. The Baltic and Zvezda shipping yards have started relying heavily on Western technology, from companies such as the South-Korean Samsung Heavy Industries, but which are once again cutting of ties.⁴⁹

Can China cover for the much-needed finances and crucial technologies? Three problems arise at this point. First, China does not always have domestic alternatives for Western technology. Second, if they have these alternatives, dependencies would once again rise to new levels which stroke with the Russian ambitions. Last, even if Chinese companies could cover for Russia they are threatened by secondary sanctions. US President Biden announced three weeks after the invasion started that Chinese companies would suffer consequences if they would assist Russia in evading the effects of the current sanctions. Lenovo Group Ltd., Xiaomi Corp., and SZ DJI Technology Co. started to cut ties with their Russian partners, seeing that they are overly sensitive to disruption concerning semiconductor technology.⁵⁰

Relating to the NSR this paper stated above that shipping companies are not yet keen on the usage of the route. This feeling has only risen, seeing that of the ten biggest shipping companies only COSCO is still willing to use the route. MSC, Maersk, CMA CMA and Hapag-Lloyd unofficially renewed their confidence in the Suez-route. Again, increasing dependence on China.

A last financial blow are the overall economic sanctions and departures of major companies. Royal Dutch Shell, BP, Exxon Mobil, Deutsche Banke and Goldman Sachs all cut their ties. Even though they are not related to the deployment of the Russian Arctic, because of the general loss of finances, Moscow will have to choose wisely on how they will spend their money.⁵¹ In addition, the defence budget is rising, and the reserves of the Russian National Wealth Fund are shrinking. The full domestic financing of the Russian Arctic was already impossible, but it seems to have degraded to a situation that will only take place in fairy tales.

Furthermore, Russia is suffering extreme damage to their military standing. Arctic troops and material are being deployed in Ukraine.⁵² Synchronically NATO started their large-scale exercise Cold Response 2022 in the Norwegian Arctic, which Russia perceives as threatening.

Seeing that the US and Canada have already announced to up their Arctic defences considering the Russian invasion, Moscow has created the opposite effect.⁵³ In addition, they degraded themselves and their image in Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, but have now pushed it to the extreme.⁵⁴ They were pushed out of the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR) in 2014, are now fully ignored in the Arctic Council where they have the presidency till 2023 and are forced out of international organisations such as the UN Human Rights Council.⁵⁵ Communication with NATO and the OSCE are also cut, possibly leading to miscalculation.

In short, every other Arctic state, many Western countries and many foreign companies no longer want to cooperate or even communicate with Moscow. Relating to China it can be stated that they will not actively seek a role in the invasion of Ukraine and identify itself as the 'responsible stakeholder', even though they are losing in this conflict. Since Western eyes are now extra focused in Taiwan and because economically, they are also suffering, just as the other great powers. China is even doubling down on the relationship with Russia, seeing that they are buying more Russian oil and LNG and that in May they stated to strengthen ties concerning military technology and energy. The question remains how strong their 'no limits' partnership is.⁵⁶

To conclude, the composition of the Russian strategic culture, poses high threats to their own economic and security interests in the Arctic region. Moscow is diplomatically and economically isolated, whereby China appears as the only capable and willing option to finance their needs. The same happened in 2014. Even though this does not yet make Russia a 'junior partner' in the Arctic, as common thought in the relationship with China, the contemporary begging position is almost humiliating for the state with the largest Arctic coast.

A way out for Russia

Moscow is faced with a difficult future if it wants to keep its Arctic ambitions whilst remaining hostile to Western governments and maintaining their superpower-policy. Nevertheless, there remains a way out

India and the United Arab Emirates

A first possible course of action is to invest in alternative partnerships, in addition to the one with China. This to weaken the relative dependence to China and add to the financial needs of the Russian Arctic. In this light, India and the UAE pop up as healthy options. Both states have shown significant interest in the region in recent years and have shown themselves favourable to Moscow considering the invasion of Ukraine. India and the UAE have both exempt themselves from condemning the invasion in the UN Security Council.⁵⁷ If it were not for the Russian invasion of Ukraine, South-Korea and Japan would have led the pack, however major companies such as Mitsui O.S.K. Lines and Samsung Heavy Industries refuse to work with Russia nowadays.⁵⁸

Both the UAE and India have significant interests in the Arctic. Both states gain from the upcoming transit routes, available resources and for the UAE it helps them to diversify their economy. Both have also already invested in the Russian Arctic. The Northern Transit Corridor, Arctic LNG-3, LLC Taas-Yuryakh and JSC Vankorneft are projects which count on investments from one or both powers. It would be wise for Moscow to invest in these partnerships, seeing that both states are under heavy pressure by the West and because Russia has not much of an alternative.⁵⁹

A minimalistic Northern Sea Route

A second avenue is to focus on what is needed to make the Northern Sea Route operational. There are all these projects planned for the NSR, which again costs billions of dollars to complete. Seeing that the full domestic financing is impossible, Moscow ought to reflect about which projects are essential to the adequate use of the NSR. To

which projects can the limited resources be sent to. This exercise would lower the needs for foreign aid, even in the future since the use of the NSR would reap new benefits. A paper by the International Transport Forum estimates that the full expansion of the NSR could take up another four decades.

Keep the PLA(N) away

As a product of the ameliorating relationship between the two great powers, joint military exercises have been set up. As simple as it may seem, perhaps Moscow ought to consider to stop these exercises. Even though China could still gain military intelligence through civil scientific expeditions to the Arctic, it is best to not let them assess their military qualities in Arctic conditions. Even when spy ships approach the area, Moscow could step on the breaks and frankly order China to leave. China is developing their own defence industry, is already building new aircraft carriers and submarines, whilst the Russian Arctic buffer is melting. A fatal combination.⁶⁰ In addition, the military component of the Sino-Russian relation is not a fundamental aspect, meaning disruptions or hiccups hereto will not cause any friction. China is defensive about the South-China Sea and Russia about the Arctic.

Poseidon, Greek God in the Arctic Ocean

In addition to keeping the PLA(N) away, Moscow needs to continue their policy of exhibiting their military strength and strengthening their nuclear pillar by investing in the Poseidon torpedo they are so proud of. This as to keep accurately defending their grounds and waters and deterring China, or any other state, to aggress in the Russian Arctic. The Poseidon- or Status 6-Torpedo is a high-speed torpedo, capable of operating autonomously once it has been fired off.⁶¹ With a supposed top speed of seventy knots (130km/h), the possibility to dive to more than 1.000m deep and the capacity of carrying a nuclear warhead of more than one hundred megaton the Poseidon is a god among other torpedoes.⁶² It is so strong that it is believed to be able to create nuclear tsunami's whereby the triggered tsunami could carry nuclear particles with it that could spread

over cities, which is of course extremely dangerous.⁶³ At least, if it lives up to the image that Russia creates of it.

Russia has invested heavily in technologies to better Poseidon and the project is supposed to be complete in 2027. The Poseidon torpedo is also fit for Arctic conditions, seeing that these waters are deep, and that torpedo's risk being detected in shallow waters. Therefore, the torpedo can dive deep, move slowly, and just before exploding, speed up so the enemy cannot act in time. Going off from a report published by the United States Senate in 2020, China still has no capacity to manage this kind of weapon.⁶⁴ It remains important however for Russia to keep a defensive discourse.

Show the need for cooperation to the West

As perverse as this last option may sound, it is one that can be the most powerful if managed right. Russia is the biggest Arctic state and has a major impact on the world with what they do or do not do in this region. With the start of their invasion in Ukraine, the Arctic Council was at a standstill. A few months later, they decided to continue their work, but not including Russia. The immediate critique on this was that no policy or research can be effective without Russia's contribution to them. Russia needs to show what the West is missing. The scientific possibilities and climate change atrocities that can arise if Russia decides to adapt a different policy are immense. Representative to the Arctic Council Nikolai Korchunov, foreign minister Sergey Lavrov and his deputy minister Alexander Grushko are already trying to show their goodwill to work together with the West.⁶⁵ Russia will probably keep this up and publish reports or statements covering the possible detrimental effects of unaligned policies.

Conclusion

That the melting ice and the growing Chinese interests poses a threat as much as an opportunity was already clear from the beginning. Therefore, the foremost conclusion that I want to make is that not China, but Russia's

own foreign policy and regime are the greatest threats to Moscow's interests in the Arctic. Military escapades such as the current invasion of Ukraine prove to be very counterproductive as they push away states, customers, financial institutions, and necessary companies. Western companies still wanting to work with Russia are booed and forced to write an artificial press release where they cut ties with Russia.

Therefore Moscow is forced to look East as China is still an able and willing partner to invest in the Arctic and to make sure the Arctic riches are uncovered. Because had Moscow held up a healthy relationship with Europe, there would be less of a need for China, whereby Russia could

keep more of its power. Investors would also be more diversified. Now, Russia has let China frame itself within Arctic governance, without even owning a piece of Arctic territory. An impressive feat.

If Russia wants to fully exploit the riches and economic potential of the Arctic, and lessen the dependence on China they need to step aside from their current foreign policy and even consider a change in regime, which seems impossible today. Fuelled by history and a defensive security attitude, Moscow frequently hesitates between cooperation and security, whereby security sometimes has the winning hand. Thus, undermining their Arctic ambitions.

¹ Luka Jorbenadze, "Russia holds the key to the future of Arctic exceptionalism", *The Arctic Institute*, 2017, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/russia-holds-key-future-arctic-exceptionalism/#:%7E:text=Arctic%20exceptionalism%20refers%20to%20the,remains%20outside%20global%20geopolitical%20confrontations.>

² Eugene Rumer, R. Sokolsky, and P. Stronski, "Russia in the Arctic - A Critical Examination", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, March 2021, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Rumer_et_al_Russia_in_the_Arctic.pdf.

³The State Council of The People's Republic of China, "China's Arctic Policy", January 2018, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm.

⁴ President of the Russian Federation, "The Basic Principles of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic up to 2035", 2020, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/f8ZpjhpAaQ0WB1zjywN04OgKil1mAvaM.pdf>.

⁵ President of the Russian Federation, "strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and for National Security Provisions up to 2035 (translation)", 2020, https://www.gov.spb.ru/static/writable/ckeditor/uploads/2020/11/24/01/%D0%A1%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%8F_%D0%90%D1%80%D0%BA%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0_2035.pdf.

⁶Michael Rywkin, "Russia: In Quest of Superpower Status", nr. 30 (2008): 13–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10803920701854272>.

⁷President of Russia, "speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy." (Speech, Munich Conference on Security Policy, München, 2007), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

⁸Julia Gurganus and Eugene Rumer, "Russia's Global Ambitions in Perspective", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 20 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/02/20/russia-s-global-ambitions-in-perspective-pub-78067>.

⁹Shaan Shaikh, "RS-28 Sarmat", *CSIS Missile Defense Project*, July 31 2021, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/rs-28-sarmat/>.

¹⁰Michael Kofman, "Drivers of Russian State Strategy and Military Operations", *Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies*, September 2020, https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/memo_6_-_kofman.pdf.

¹¹Lassi Heininen, Alexander Sergunin, en Gleb Yarovoy, "Russian Strategies in the Arctic: Avoiding a new Cold War", *Valdai Discussion Club*, n.d., https://www.uarctic.org/media/857300/arctic_eng.pdf.

-
- ¹²Jamie Dettmer, "Russia Ups the Ante in the Arctic", *VOA*, November 6 2019, https://www.voanews.com/a/europe_russia-ups-ante-arctic/6178900.html.
- ¹³Brendan Cole, "Russia Unveils "Unique" Weaponized Icebreaker as it Eyes Arctic Oil and Gas", October 28 2019, *Newsweek*, <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-arctic-ivan-papanin-icebreaker-1468057>.
- ¹⁴Sven Biscop, *Grand Strategy in 10 words: a guide to great power politics in the 21st century* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021).
- ¹⁵Michael Kofman, "Drivers of Russian State Strategy and Military Operations".
- ¹⁶Avery Goldstein, "China's Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping: Reassurance, Reform, and Resistance", *International Security* 45, nr. 1 (July 2020): 164–201, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00383.
- ¹⁷Barry Buzan, "China's Rise in English School Perspective", *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, April 3 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcy005>.
- ¹⁸Kevin McGwin, "China's COSCO to stay course on Arctic shipping", *ArcticToday*, May 16 2019, <https://www.arctictoday.com/chinas-cosco-to-stay-course-on-arctic-shipping/>.
- ¹⁹Malte Humpert, "China Acquires 20 Percent Stake in Noatak's Latest Arctic LNG Project", *High North News*, April 29 2020, <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/china-acquires-20-percent-stake-novateks-latest-arctic-lng-project>; Hu Min, "China's net zero future", *Race To Zero*, March 15 2021, [https://racetozero.unfccc.int/chinas-net-zero-future/#:%7E:text=The%20pledge%20made%20by%20President,commitment%20made%20from%20the%20top.](https://racetozero.unfccc.int/chinas-net-zero-future/#:%7E:text=The%20pledge%20made%20by%20President,commitment%20made%20from%20the%20top.;); Ivan Shumkov, "Russia's Republic of Karelia plans 60-MW offshore wind park.", *Renewablesnow.com*, November 28 2016, <https://renewablesnow.com/news/russias-republic-of-karelia-plans-60-mw-offshore-wind-park-548650/>.
- ²⁰Anne-Marie Brady, *China as a Polar Great Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Heather Conley and Jamie Kraut, "U.S. Strategic Interests in the Arctic", *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, April 2010.
- ²¹Kadri Liik, "It's complicated: Russia's tricky relationship with China", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, December 2021, <https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/Its-complicated-Russias-tricky-relationship-with-China.pdf>; Eugene Rumer, "Russia's China Policy: This Bear Hug is real", *The National Bureau of Asian Research*, July 2017, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/SR66_Russia-ChinaRelations_July2017.pdf#page=23.
- ²²Tom Røseth, "Russia's China Policy in the Arctic", *Strategic Analysis* 38, nr. 6, November 2 2014: 841–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2014.952942>.
- ²³TASS, "China is Russia's priority partner in Arctic cooperation", *TASS Russian News Agency*, August 24 2015, https://tass.com/russia/816048?utm_source=russiamatters.org&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=russiamatters.org&utm_referrer=russiamatters.org.
- ²⁴Lenta.ru, "Минприроды поддержало участие китайцев в освоении Арктики.", *Lenta.RU*, November 19 2015, <https://lenta.ru/news/2015/11/19/chinanorth/>.
- ²⁵Eugene Rumer, Richard Sokolsky, and Paul Stronski, "Russia in the Arctic - A Critical Examination".
- ²⁶Tim Daiss, "China Invests in Game-Changing Arctic LNG Project", *OilPrice.com*, May 4 2019, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Natural-Gas/China-Invests-In-Game-Changing-Arctic-LNG-Project.html>.
- ²⁷Thomas Nilsen, "Novatek teams up with Chinese partner for Arctic shipping", *The Independent Barents Observer*, September 12 2018, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/2018/09/novatek-teams-chinese-partner-arctic-shipping>.
- ²⁸Ekatarina Klimenko and Camilla T.N. Sorensen, "Emerging Chinese-Russian Cooperation in the Arctic", *Stockholm International Peace Institute*, June 2017, <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2017-06/emerging-chinese-russian-cooperation-arctic.pdf>.
- ²⁹Alexander Gabuev en Vita Spivak, "The Ice Age: Russia and Chinas Energy Cooperation in the Arctic", *Carnegie Moscow Center*, December 31 2021, <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/86100>.
- ³⁰Faizan Hashmi, "Sibur Considering Ethane Extraction on Arctic LNG Facilities, With Processing in Far East.", *UrduPoint*, December 1 2020, <https://www.urdupoint.com/en/world/sibur-considering-ethane-extraction-on-arctic-1101898.html>.
- ³¹Alexander Richter, "Arctic Green Energy secures \$200m in funding for geothermal work in China", *Think GeoEnergy - Geothermal Energy News*, December 13 2020, <https://www.thinkgeoenergy.com/arctic->

green-energy-secures-200m-in-funding-for-geothermal-work-in-china/; Shumkov, “Russia’s Republic of Karelia plans 60-MW offshore wind park.”

- ³²Vladimir Volgaev, “Polar Silk Road”, *Sovershenno Sekretno*, April 16 2021, <https://www.sovsekretno.ru/articles/polyarnyy-shelkovyy-put/>.
- ³³Ekatarina Klimenko and Camilla T.N. Sorensen, “Emerging Chinese-Russian Cooperation in the Arctic”.
- ³⁴Dave Johnson, “VOSTOK 2018: Ten years of Russian strategic exercises and warfare preparation.”, *NATO Review*, December 20 2018, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2018/12/20/vostok-2018-ten-years-of-russian-strategic-exercises-and-warfare-preparation/index.html>.
- ³⁵Sergey Sukhankin, “What Did Russia’s Strategic Military Exercise Tsentr-2019 Reveal?”, *ICDS*, August 6 2020, <https://icds.ee/en/what-did-russias-strategic-military-exercise-tsentr-2019-reveal/#:%7E:text=In%20addition%20to%20Russian%20armed,out%20by%20the%20Russian%20Federation.>
- ³⁶Valeriy Akimenko, Daivis Petratis, en Vira Ratsiborynska, “Russia’s Strategic Exercises”, NATO Strategic Communications - Centre of Excellence, n.d., July 2020.
- ³⁷Yew Lun Tian en Tony Munroe, “China to send troops to Russia for “Vostok” exercise”, *Reuters*, August 17 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinese-military-will-send-troops-russia-joint-exercise-2022-08-17/>.
- ³⁸Charles Digges, “Russia’s Norilsk Nickel hit with enormous fine over Arctic oil spill.”, *Bellona.org*, February 17 2021, <https://bellona.org/news/industrial-pollution/2021-02-russias-norilsk-nickel-hit-with-enormous-fine-over-arctic-oil-spill>.
- ³⁹Abhyoday Sisodia, “Russia seals its authority over the Arctic with a \$110 billion mega-port on the Taymyr peninsula”, *TFIGlobal*, February 20 2022, <https://tfiglobalnews.com/2022/02/20/russia-seals-its-authority-over-the-arctic-with-a-110-billion-mega-port-on-the-taymyr-peninsula/>.
- ⁴⁰Atle Staalesen, “Китайские и турецкие судостроители бьются за док для российских”, *The Independent Barents Observer*, April 26 2021, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/ru/arktika/2021/04/kitayskie-i-tureckie-sudostroiteli-byutsya-za-dok-dlya-rossiyskih-ledokolov>.
- ⁴¹Pavel Devyatkin, “Russian Government Supports Tax Breaks for Arctic Investments.”, *High North News*, February 19 2020, <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/russian-government-supports-tax-breaks-arctic->
- ⁴²Marie Ilyushina, “Russia accuses leading Arctic researcher of spying for China.”, *CNN*, n.d., <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/17/europe/russia-china-spying-allegation-intl/index.html>.
- ⁴³Elizabeth Roberts, “Russia jails decorated space engineer Vladimir Lapygin for seven years for treason”, *Mail Online*, September 23 2016, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3804549/Russia-jails-decorated-space-engineer-seven-years-treason-won-t-say-did-wrong.html>.
- ⁴⁴Sam LaGrone, “China Sent Uninvited Spy Ship to Russian Vostok 2018 Exercise Alongside Troops, Tanks”, *USNI News*, 18 December 2018.
- ⁴⁵Paul N. Schwartz, “The Changing Nature and Implications of Russian Military Transfers to China”, *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, June 2021, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/210621_Schwartz_Russian_Military_Transfers.pdf?47lttXU2w57d.CobDxg1b1nGmtA1tUcU.
- ⁴⁶Дятел, “НОВАТЭК сжигается с силами”, *Kommersant*, March 22 2022, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5272310>.
- ⁴⁷Sam Tabahr, “The world’s three largest oilfield service companies — Halliburton, Schlumberger, and Baker Hughes — are suspending operations in Russia”, *Business Insider*, March 20 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/oilfield-services-halliburton-schlumberger-suspend-russia-operations-ukraine-2022-3?international=true&r=US&IR=T>; Siemens AG, “siemens to wind down Russian business. Press | Company | Siemens”, *Siemens*, May 12 2022, <https://press.siemens.com/global/en/pressrelease/siemens-wind-down-russian-business>.
- ⁴⁸Joe Wallace, “The Russia-Ukraine War: March 2, 2022”, *Wall Street Journal*, March 3 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/russia-ukraine-latest-news-2022-03-02/card/commodities-trader-trafigura-reviews-stake-in-russian-arctic-oil-project-NteH6gXbEgDVW6TIOsqg>.

-
- ⁴⁹Trym Eiterjord, "What Does Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Mean for China in the Arctic?", *The Diplomat*, March 26 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/what-does-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-mean-for-china-in-the-arctic/>.
- ⁵⁰Dan Strumpf, "Chinese Tech Giants Quietly Retreat From Doing Business With Russia", *Wall Street Journal*, May 7 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinese-tech-giants-quietly-stop-doing-business-with-russia-11651845795.d>
- ⁵¹Holly Ellyatt, "Russia is dominating the Arctic, but it's not looking to fight over it.", *CNBC*, December 27 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/12/27/russias-dominance-in-the-arctic.html>.
- ⁵²Lee Berthiaume, "War sparks fresh calls on upgrading North America's defenses", *CTVNews*, March 5 2022, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/ukraine-war-sparks-fresh-calls-for-urgency-on-upgrading-north-america-s-defences-1.5806978>.
- ⁵³Thomas Nilsen, "Hundreds of Arctic troops killed, says Ukrainian adviser.", *The Independent Barents Observer*, March 26 2022, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2022/03/several-hundred-arctic-troops-killed-says-ukrainian-adviser>.
- ⁵⁴Alexander Crowther, "Russia's Military: Failure on an Awesome Scale", *CEPA*, n.d., <https://cepa.org/russias-military-failure-on-an-awesome-scale/>.
- ⁵⁵Hilge-Gunn Bye, "Arctic Council, EU, NATO on Agenda as Military Leaders Addressed Arctic Security Issues.", May 12 2021, *High North News*, <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/arctic-council-eu-nato-agenda-military-leaders-addressed-arctic-security-issues>; Michelle Nichols, "U.N. suspends Russia from human rights body, Moscow then quits.", *Reuters*, April 7 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/un-vote-suspending-russia-human-rights-council-over-ukraine-2022-04-07/>.
- ⁵⁶Hanns W. Maull, "Why China Isn't Backing Away From Alignment With Russia.", *The Diplomat*, April 20 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/why-china-isnt-backing-away-from-alignment-with-russia/>.
- ⁵⁷United Nations Security Council, "Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Ending Ukraine Crisis, as Russian Federation Wields Veto", February 25 2022, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sc14808.doc.htm>.
- ⁵⁸Cynthia Kim and Hyonhee Shin, "South Korea bans exports of strategic items to Russia, joins SWIFT sanctions", *Reuters*, February 28 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/skorea-bans-exports-strategic-items-russia-join-swift-sanctions-2022-02-28/>.
- ⁵⁹Peter B. Danilov, "DP World Wants to Build Terminal in Vladivostok for Arctic Container Shipping", September 7 2021, <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/dp-world-wants-build-terminal-vladivostok-arctic-container-shipment>; Hazem Shayah, "Economic Diversification by Boosting Non-Oil Exports (Case of UAE)", *Journal of Economics, Business and Management* 3, nr. 7 (2015): 735–38, <https://doi.org/10.7763/JOEBM.2015.V3.276>; Pavel Devyatkin and Nima Khorrami, "Dubai and the Opening Arctic: Russia's Rosatom and UAE Logistics Company to Cooperate in the Far North.", *The Arctic Institute*, November 23 2021, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/dubai-opening-arctic-russia-rosatom-uae-logistics-company-cooperate-far-north/>.
- ⁶⁰Peter Kikkert and Whitney Lackenbauer, "The Militarization of the Arctic to 1990", in *The Palgrave Handbook of Arctic Policy and Politics*, Ken S. Coates and Carin Holroyd (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 487–505, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20557-7_30.
- ⁶¹Brent M. Eastwood, "Meet the Poseidon: Russia's Nuclear Torpedo Could Change Everything.", *19FortyFive*, March 27 2022, <https://www.19fortyfive.com/2022/03/meet-the-poseidon-russias-nuclear-torpedo-could-change-everything/>.
- ⁶²Covert Cabal, *Can Russia's Doomsday Weapon Be Stopped? Status-6/Poseidon* (Youtube, n.d.), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQianSUpVfw>.
- ⁶³H.I. Sutton, "Russia's New "Poseidon" Super-Weapon: What You Need To Know", *Naval News*, March 3 2022, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/03/russias-new-poseidon-super-weapon-what-you-need-to-know/>.
- ⁶⁴United States Department of Defense, "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China" *Office of the Secretary of Defense*, (2020),

<https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

- ⁶⁵ Gloria Dickie, "Russian officials call Arctic Council boycott "regrettable"", *Reuters*, March 4 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-officials-call-arctic-council-boycott-regrettable-2022-03-04/>; M. Lee, "US, Russia at odds over military activity in the Arctic", *AP News*, 20 May 2022.