

Security Cooperation in the Arctic after Ukraine: how Moscow's war increased security dilemma in the High North

Abstract: This article investigates the impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 on the cooperation environment in the Arctic. This research analyzes scholarly literature, strategic documents issued by the Arctic states, and news on Arctic matters. Theoretically, I draw upon Jervis' understanding of the concept of security dilemma in International Relations. The findings of this research suggest that the halt on cooperation mechanisms with the exclusion of Russia promoted by the other Arctic states, and the access of Finland and Sweden to NATO contribute to an increased security dilemma in the Arctic. I claim that the understanding of the "Arctic exceptionalism" characteristic since the Murmansk Initiative in 1987 is a misreading of the capability of Arctic states to hinder the spillover effect from geopolitical disputes outside the Circumpolar North and that the Russian Arctic policy needs to be analyzed within the broader context of Russian defense and foreign policies. Finally, I posit that there is still room for cooperation in the Arctic and that the resuming of talks between Russia and the other Arctic states is the best strategy to de-escalate the current security dilemma.

Keywords: Arctic. War in Ukraine. Security dilemma. Cooperation. Russia.

INTRODUCTION

On October 1st, 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev held a speech in Murmansk, a city in Russia, the biggest city north of the Polar Circle. In his speech, Gorbachev acknowledged the still lasting divergencies between the Soviet Union and the United States but hinted at the restructuring of course that could ameliorate the relations between the two superpowers. Specifically, the Soviet leader drew attention to the Arctic as a region that should overcome the military confrontation characteristic of the Cold War and become a "zone of peace and fruitful cooperation." To achieve that, Gorbachev proposed six points that should delineate the cooperation among Arctic countries, in what was named "The Murmansk Initiative": 1) Northern Europe should be a nuclear-free zone; 2) restrictions on naval activity; 3) technical cooperation in developing the Arctic resources; 4) scientific cooperation on matters such as indigenous population, ethnic and cultural ties; 5) cooperation in environmental protection; 6) the use of the Northern Sea Route to commercial navigation.²

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² Gorbachev. "The Main Thing Today is to Carry Out the Tasks of the Perestroika". Speech in Murmansk at the Ceremonial Meeting on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star to the City of Murmansk, 1 October 1987.

The speech of Murmansk has been extensively analyzed by the literature to assess how much of Gorbachev's propositions have been materialised. Even more importantly, Gorbachev's speech is considered to be a turning point in the history of Arctic states and how they cooperatively interact with each other in this region of the world.³ As Åtland shows, Russian scholars Raphael Vartanov and Alexei Roginko declared in 1990 “that more had been done by the Soviet Union to develop Arctic cooperation since the Murmansk speech than during the previous seventy years.”⁴ The proposals set by the cooperative tone of Gorbachev laid ground for increasing and enduring cooperation among Arctic states in the subsequent years. Already in 1991, the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) was formulated as the first multilateral agreement among the Arctic states.

In 1993, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) was created by Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the European Commission as an inter-governmental body for cooperation in sustainable development in the Barents Sea region which could also undermine the threats of military confrontation. In 1996, the AEPS was incorporated by the Arctic Council (AC), encompassing the eight Arctic States – Russia, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Canada, and the United States – and other 3, now 6 as of 2024, permanent members representing the Indigenous People of the Arctic and that is open for the participation of non-Arctic states, intergovernmental and interparliamentary organizations, and non-governmental organizations as observers. The AC operates as a multilateral forum that promotes cooperation in economic development, environmental protection, soft security matters like border control, prevention of radioactive contamination, emergencies, and monitoring. The decisions by the AC need to be reached by consensus among its members. More importantly, the Declaration of Ottawa, the document through which the AC was created, specifically declares that the AC will not deal with any military security-related matters.⁵ DECLARATION OF OTTAWA, 1996) Besides these multilateral fora, the Svalbard Treaty (signed in 1920 and effective since 1925), some bilateral agreements such as the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities Agreement signed by the U.S and the Soviet Union in 1989, and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) constitute the basic framework for security and cooperation mechanisms in the Arctic.

³ Åtland, “Mikhail Gorbachev, the Murmansk Initiative, and the Desecuritization of Interstate Relations in the Arctic”.

⁴ Ibid., 290; Vartanov and Rogik, “New Dimensions of Soviet Arctic Policy: Views from the Soviet Union”, 69.

⁵ Arctic Council. Ottawa Declaration, 1996.

Since the institutionalization of the AC as the main venue for cooperation and dialogue among its members, which advances the six points proposed by Gorbachev in 1987, the region has been seen by governments of the Arctic states and scholars as a region where geopolitical disputes outside its area do not affect their cooperative drive and the Arctic governance. It has been repeatedly acknowledged that, despite the growing instability between Russia and the Western countries, mostly with the U.S., the Arctic has been kept away from the spillover of these geopolitical problems. Moreover, the fact that Russia has been playing by the rules of international law in the case of the submission to the UNCLOS of its claim of the Lomonosov Ridge, the settlement of the border dispute between Russia and Norway in 2010 after 40 years, and the normality of AC's activities even when major conflicts such as the wars in Iraq and Georgia, and the Ilulissat Declaration of 2008, in which the five littoral states of the Arctic – Russia, Norway, Denmark, US, and Canada – reiterated their beliefs in the maritime international law, have all been elements that promoted the perception of the “Arctic exceptionalism”.⁶

Nevertheless, the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 was the first step towards a more complicated scenario for cooperation in the Arctic. As Konyshchev, Sergunin, and Subbotin show, a series of economic sanctions imposed by Western countries and Japan upon energy projects in the Russian Arctic were stalled and the Northern Sea Route traffic was diminished.⁷ Besides economic and political relations, another drawback for Russia was its exclusion from venues for military-to-military dialogue such as the Arctic Security Forces Roundtables (ASFR) and the Arctic Chief of Defence Staff (CHODS).⁸

Within this context, Russia began to bolster its military presence in the Arctic through the expansion of military infrastructure, mostly the construction of new and revival of Soviet naval and air bases, together with larger and more frequent military exercises and more strategical autonomy for its Arctic forces by the creation of the Joint Strategic Command North to its Northern Fleet and its elevation to becoming the fifth military district of the Russian Armed Forces in 2021.⁹ This has led to the conclusion that Russia's military outposts in the Arctic outnumber NATO countries' military infrastructure in the High North.¹⁰ Along with the

⁶ Byers, “Crises and international cooperation: an Arctic case study”, 384; Palubisnkaite, “The end of peaceful collaboration and ‘Arctic exceptionalism’[...]”, (master’s thesis, Aalborg Universitet), 11.

⁷ Konyshchev, Sergunin and Subbotin, “Russia’s Arctic strategies in the context of the Ukrainian crisis”.

⁸ Wishnick and Carlson, “The Russian Invasion of Ukraine Freezes Moscow’s Arctic Ambitions”, 55.

⁹ Zysk, Russia’s Military Build-Up in the Arctic: to What End?”, 3.

¹⁰ Gronhold-Pedersen and Fouce, “Dark Arctic: NATO allies wake up to Russian supremacy in the region”.

Russian military build-up in the Arctic, the episodes of Georgia, in 2008, Crimea, in 2014, and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 have contributed to the perception of other Arctic countries that Russia may have plans to use its military capabilities to advance its interests in the region.

Albeit this context, scholars have demonstrated that the Arctic governance and the cooperation within its states in the Arctic matters have been maintained stable and little affected the security environment of the region due to complex interdependence.¹¹ Russian scholars claimed that Russia's interests in the Arctic were more inward than outward-looking aiming at developing the ARZF economically and socially and that its military build-up was essentially defensive.¹² However, the most challenging question when prospecting the possibility of cooperation between Russia and Western countries in the Arctic derives from the economic importance of the Arctic zone for Russia. As put by Gubin, the Arctic and subarctic regions generate at least 10% of the GDP and about 20% of Russia's exports, with a significant potential for increasing numbers in absolute terms. According to him, 17% of all Russian oil, 80% of natural gas, and about one-third of fish are produced in the Arctic zone.¹³ The Northern Sea Route (NSR) had in 2021 the record of transport of 33.5 million tons of cargo, with expectations that by 2024, the traffic volume may reach 80 million tons, and up to 110 million tons by 2030. Hence, it has been repeatedly assumed that Russia's economic interest in the region and need for technological expertise and financial investments would be enough to promote its willingness to cooperate and hamper any actions that could destabilise the High North. However, as Godzimirski and Sergunin show, Russian experts may see the situation differently depending on their theoretical approach.¹⁴

Since Crimea, all other Arctic states (A7 henceforth) have publicised strategic documents of their Arctic politics, with a greater ton of denouncing Russia's activities as endangering to Arctic security – such as by the U.S and Finland – whereas others still believed in the possibility and need of cooperation with Russia, like Norway.¹⁵ On top of this, while delivering a speech at the margins of the ministerial meeting in the Arctic Council in 2019, in Rovaniemi, Finland, the then US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, emphasised that "[...] Russian territorial ambitions can turn violent." while stating that Russia has illegitimate

¹¹ Byers, "Crises and international cooperation: an Arctic case study".

¹² Konyshchev, Sergunin and Subbotin, "Russia's Arctic strategies in the context of the Ukrainian crisis".

¹³ Gubin, "Military Aspects of Russia's Stance in the Arctic".

¹⁴ Godzimirski and Sergunin, "Russian Expert and Official Geopolitical Narratives on the Arctic".

¹⁵ U.S Department of Defense, Report to Congress: Department of Defense Arctic Strategy"; Finland, "Finland's Strategy for Arctic Policy"; Norway, "Norway's Arctic Strategy— between geopolitics and social development".

territorial claims and its plan to connect the Northern Sea Route with China's Polar Silk Road shows a pattern of Chinese investments to enhance its military presence in other regions and it represents Chinese ambitions in the Arctic as a security threat to the U.S.¹⁶

But then came the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and in its aftermath the major impact on Arctic governance and security environment. The A7 paused the working projects in the Arctic Council while Russia had the chairmanship (2021-2023), an unprecedented number of Western sanctions imposed on Russia's economy, and the entry of Sweden and Finland into NATO changed the allegedly peaceful scenario in the Arctic. All these elements could lead to an end to the myth of "Arctic exceptionalism" and enhance the security dilemma between Russia and the other Arctic states as an outcome of the spillover from other geopolitical disputes.

In the next section, I will present the direct impacts of the war in Ukraine on Arctic geopolitics and the status of cooperation between Russia and the A7. Then, I will discuss the concept of security dilemma according to Jervis.¹⁷ After that, I will debate cooperation in the future within the context of increasing security dilemma in Arctic geopolitics. Finally, I will argue that, despite the current situation, there is still room for cooperation between Russia and the other Arctic countries.

THE DIRECT IMPACTS OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

The war in Ukraine directly impacted Arctic geopolitics mostly at political-strategic, institutional, and scientific levels. On March 3rd, 2022, exactly one week after Russia invaded Ukraine, a joint statement by the A7 conveyed that the representatives of these countries would not participate in meetings of the Arctic Council held in Russia, which chaired the forum that year, and announced the pausing on their participation in "all meetings of the AC and its subsidiary bodies".¹⁸ On the following day, the Arctic Council announced via a post on Twitter the suspension of all its meetings until further notice. For the first time since its creation, the AC was suspended as a retaliation of seven of its members towards Russia due to the war launched in Ukraine. This movement led to some analysis that from then on the Arctic

¹⁶ U.S Department of State, "Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo At the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting".

¹⁷ Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma".

¹⁸ U.S Department of Defense, "Joint Statement on Arctic Council Cooperation Following Russia's Invasion of Ukraine".

international cooperation would move into “two Arctic”, where the Western States would augment their cooperation and Russia would come closer to China in the Arctic affairs .¹⁹

New mechanisms of cooperation such as “Nordic Plus and Arctic Council 2.0” have been suggested by Western scholars.²⁰ According to Onishi, Russia decided to continue the implementation of the Council’s programs domestically, whereas the A7, claiming their responsibility to the people of the Arctic, including Indigenous Peoples, announced that they would resume their work in the AC but only in the projects in which Russia did not participate. Russia's participation in the BEAC was also suspended in the aftermath of the beginning of the war.²¹ In September 2023, in a letter sent by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to other member states, Russia communicated its withdrawal from BEAC blaming the failure of the Finnish presidency to transfer the chairmanship to Russia scheduled for October 2023.²²

Nikolai Korchunov, Ambassador at Large for the Arctic Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Russia and the Senior Arctic Official of the Russian Federation to the Arctic Council since December 2018, declared in a round table held by the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) that “[f]or the Russian Federation, the Arctic Council is of interest only when it complies with Russian doctrinal documents on the Arctic zone. If membership in the AC contributes to it, we will continue our work. If we see that participation in the Council hinders us, we may consider ending our participation..”²³ In February 2024, Lavrov announced that Russia would no longer make its annual payments to the AC until its works resume completely.²⁴

Within this context, we can assume that talks between Russia and the A7 on Arctic matters have come close to non-existent. Amidst the overall scenario due to the war in Ukraine, a growing instability in the Arctic is to be expected. The possibilities for cooperation become even more complicated with the decision of Finland and Sweden to join NATO. Although this can be considered a natural and even expected political movement as a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, one cannot deny that it is difficult to imagine, from Moscow's perspective,

¹⁹ Ohnishi, “Changing Arctic governance landscape: The Arctic Council navigating through geopolitical turbulence”, 102.

²⁰ Kirchner, “Nordic Plus: International Cooperation in the Arctic Enters a New Era”; Rogoff, It’s Time for an Arctic Council 2.0”

²¹ Ohnishi, “Changing Arctic governance landscape: The Arctic Council navigating through geopolitical turbulence”, 104.

²² Edvardsen, “Russia withdraws from the Barents Cooperation”.

²³ Russia in International Affairs, “Experts Discuss the Future of Cooperation in the Arctic”

²⁴ Moscow Times, “Russia Halts Annual Payments to Arctic Council”.

a balanced mechanism in the governance of the Arctic that once was provided by the neutral status of Helsinki and Stockholm. Moreover, two bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreements were signed in December 2023 between the U.S and Finland, and Sweden, through which military forces from the U.S would have access to military bases in these countries, including installations in the High North closer to the Russian border with Finland.²⁵ Already before the outbreak of the war, Finland formalised the purchase of 64 F-35 jets which shall be delivered in complete up to 2030. This movement also helped intensify Russia's perception of growing animosity in its Arctic region.²⁶

As a reaction to the signaling of Finland and Sweden's access to NATO, Russian Minister of Defence, Sergei Shoigu, proposed the restoration of Leningrad and Moscow military districts, which had been merged in 2010 to form the new Western military district, aiming at bigger strategic autonomy and up to ten new divisions in Russian western borders.²⁷ On February 26, 2024, Putin signed a decree re-establishing these two military districts and extinguishing the Western district.²⁸

Notwithstanding the direct strategic responses of each side since the outbreak of the war, one has been witnessing more intense stress on conflictual issues in the Arctic in public pronouncements of key actors in the region, such as the statement from NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated in August 2022 that "authoritarian regimes are clearly willing to use military intimidation or aggression to achieve their aims. At the same time, they are stepping up their activities and interest in the Arctic".²⁹ Even more representative is the new Strategic Concept of NATO, in which Russia is described as "the most significant and direct threat to Allies" security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area and "its capability to disrupt Allied reinforcements and freedom of navigation across the North Atlantic is a strategic challenge to the Alliance."³⁰

The final direct impact is the pause on scientific cooperation in the Arctic. According to a study published in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, Russian field stations were removed from the International Network for Terrestrial Research and Monitoring in the Arctic (INTERACT) which led to the loss of data needed to monitor change in ecosystems. Besides,

²⁵ Grady, "New Pact Gives U.S. Military Access to 15 Bases in Finland".

²⁶ Sharma, "'Securitization of the Arctic' post Finland's Accession to NATO".

²⁷ Tass, "Russia's defense chief proposes re-establishing Moscow, Leningrad military districts".

²⁸ Nilsen, "Putin signs northwestern regions into Leningrad military district".

²⁹ Friis, "Hard security in the High North: Gloves off?", 54.

³⁰ NATO, Strategic Concept 2022, 4.

the Siberia taiga forest is not represented in new research which authors believe could be of endangering for monitoring melting permafrost, which is an area of big concern in climate change scientists.³¹

Despite the growing uncertainty about Arctic security environment since 2014 and with more dramatic changes since 2022, the retrospect of cooperation since the Murmansk Initiative and the lack of an imminent conflict over territory or resources have contributed to an optimistic view that the region would not end up in an open conflict any time soon. As Zysk puts it before the outbreak of the current war:

“It is important to note that Russia has made efforts to keep tension levels low in the region and insulate Arctic affairs from other disputes, including spill-over from the war in Ukraine. It has several reasons for doing so. The first is its continued desire to avoid fueling Western security concerns, which could unleash security dilemma dynamics and lead to a further buildup of foreign military presence in the region. Second, Russia has much to gain from following the letter of the law and international cooperation in the region. As a large country with an extensive coastline, Russia is one of the main beneficiaries of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, both in terms of exclusive economic zones and in terms of the continental shelf that Russia aims to expand. Third, to achieve its Arctic economic development ambitions, Russia depends on foreign investments, technology, and know-how—hence international cooperation. This has been one reason for Russia's repeated attempts at diplomatic offensives to end the sanctions imposed in 2014 and get back to business as usual as soon as possible. In fact, the sluggish economic development in the region, including the slow pace of geological exploration of promising energy and mineral resources, is considered one of the main security threats to Russia.”³²

However, the developments in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine have shown that the eight Arctic countries have not been able to isolate the Arctic from the broader context of international geopolitics, which includes not only the current war but also the great power competition with the rise of China and its interests in the Arctic *vis-à-vis* the United States, and the open signaling from Russia and NATO that they consider each other its major threat in security-related issues. Altogether, these have altered the security landscape in the Arctic and unleashed security dilemmas in the High North. Before I discuss what the future holds for Arctic security and possibilities of cooperation, I will debate the concept of security dilemma according to Jervis.

³¹ Moscow Times, “Russia’s Isolation Hampers Climate Change Research in the Arctic – Study”; López-Blanco, Topp-Jørgensen, Torben Christensen, et. al. “Towards an increasingly biased view on Arctic change.”

³² Zysk, Russia’s Military Build-Up in the Arctic: to What End?”, 5.

SECURITY DILEMMA

Security dilemma is a key concept in International Relations (IR), employed primarily by realist theorists. The concept was first coined by John Herz in his article *Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma*, published in 1950. Since then, the security dilemma has been revisited, analyzed, and utilised, by scholars from structural realism, both defensive like Charles Glaser and Kenneth Waltz and offensive realists like Mearsheimer. However, it is the work of Robert Jervis that has further advanced the concept of security dilemma and has been mostly discussed among authors of IR. I too shall draw upon Jervis' 1978 article *Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma* to make sense of the current situation in the Arctic and to help develop my argument. His work is the most beneficial to my analysis since it has been extensively used by other scholars to address the issue of possibilities of cooperation in the Arctic and because Jervis comprehends not only the material factors by also psychological ones.

Jervis first acknowledges the international system as anarchic as the main trigger for states' security-seeking behavior. The lack of an institution that can enforce international law pushes states to behave in such a manner that creates concern among them less desirably than it could be the case, also if one expects states to "freeze the status quo".³³ To develop his argument, Jervis begins by bringing forward the example of the Stag Hunt – first proposed by Rousseau – where both actors would benefit the most if they chose to cooperate and aim at the same goal. By transferring the logic of the Stag Hunt to international politics, Jervis points out that the perfect outcome would be cooperation and disarmament. However the author claims that the analogy with the Stag Hunt does not suit well for international politics because of three difficulties not present in the former: 1) since "minds can be changed, new leaders can come to power, values can shift, new opportunities and dangers can arise" one cannot assume the incentive of one state to cooperate and support status quo now will last through time; 2) even a status quo-seeking state may prefer to expand and control resources or land beyond its territory to protect its possessions; 3) the means by which a state pursue the increase of its security decrease the security of other states.³⁴

The third problem presented by Jervis is understood to be the quintessential element of the security dilemma in international politics. This hold true even if it is not the intention of the

³³ Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma", 167.

³⁴ Ibid., 168-69.

state to cause the insecurity of another state. One can assume, therefore, that the mere pursuit of security can be enough to create insecurity. Based on this scenario, Jervis posits the following question: “what makes cooperation more likely?” The author wants to understand how one can “ameliorate the impact of anarchy and the security dilemma?”.³⁵ This is important to understand how, despite the incentives to increasing insecurity, it does not necessarily lead to permanent war among states and that there is still room for cooperation.

The second analogy for the security dilemma is the Prisoner’s Dilemma. Different from the Stag Hunt, there is no situation where both actors can fulfill their best interests. Since one cannot know about each other's intentions, a state would be better off if it chooses to defect. In the Prisoner’s Dilemma game theory, there are four possible outcomes: 1) both chooses to cooperate (CC); 2) State A chooses to cooperate while State B chooses to defect (CD); 3) state A chooses to defect while state B chooses to cooperate (DC); 4) booth states choose to defect (DD). According to Jervis, the fear of being exploited – cooperate while the other defects (CD) – is what most strongly drives the security dilemma. But, different than in the situation of two individuals, states are not as vulnerable as men, and that is the reason international relations do not prevail by an ever-enduring conflict among states. Another feature of this stability – even though always prone to the outbreak of a conflict – is that some states can afford to see how another state will act before it chooses to defect or cooperate because they have a margin of time and error. How exactly the situation of CD will evolve depends on the costs of it. If these costs are tolerable, Jervis believes that security is easier to attain, and a status-quo power will less likely threaten others. Therefore, it would be “easier for status quo seekers state to act on their common goals if they are hard to conquer”.³⁶

Jervis then posits that it is needed to analyze "decision makers' subjective security requirements," since the threat perception does not always match the reality, which encompasses two dimensions: 1) how much security is needed, and 2) the perception of the threat itself. These two dimensions are significant in the current Arctic security and cooperation context. As Jervis puts it “[a] state that is predisposed to see either a specific other state as an adversary, or others in general as a menace, will react more strongly and more quickly than a state that sees its environment as benign.”.³⁷ From the perspective of the A7, Russia’s interests in the Arctic, together with military build-up and the examples of Georgia, Crimea, and Ukraine,

³⁵ Ibid., 170.

³⁶ Ibid., 172-3.

³⁷ Ibid., 175.

and the certainty of NATO's hostility are perceived as threats to Arctic's stability and their national securities. On the other hand, the alienation of Moscow in Arctic governance mechanisms in addition to the nominal appointment of Russia as a major threat to NATO countries and the joining of Sweden and Finland to the Western Alliance contribute to the growing perception of the Kremlin of its insecurity, a problem forwarded by Jervis – not specifically to this case – when asserting that the “predisposition to perceive threat is the state’s view of how many enemies it must be prepared to fight”.³⁸

In the following step of developing his argument, Jervis analyzes the costs of choosing every one of the four scenarios mentioned above. I will discuss the two extreme possible outcomes: where both cooperate (CC) and where both defect (DD). Jervis considers that the higher the costs, the more incentives there are to try to cooperate and wait before assuming the other is a threat and should be detained by force. However, the author stresses that the high costs of war can create a different problem: defect may be the last choice for both sides (DD). Then, we have a change in the game to what Jervis calls the "Chicken" game. In Chicken, if actor A believes the other actor B is going to defect, then A will have to cooperate because it will be better off being exploited than risking a total breakdown – a DD situation. According to Jervis, in the short run, coercion is ineffective because the other state can refuse to cooperate, and in the long run, it will be dangerous because state B is going to be convinced that state A is aggressive and therefore a threat. The strategy will be then to make cooperation more attractive. I believe that the current situation in the Arctic may have come closer to the Chicken game as forwarded by Jervis.

The likelihood of cooperation is then discussed by Jervis, who states that, when states A and B are ready to cooperate and have a mutual belief in each other's willingness to cooperate, then inspection devices can ameliorate the security dilemma. Although he recognises that these inspection systems are not sufficient to guarantee that the other will continue to cooperate later, it can relieve immediate worries and enhance the feasibility of the current cooperation. An effective way to achieve that is, according to him, to break up one large transaction into a series of smaller ones. These can increase the perception of cooperation and in any case of a defection the losses will be small, and prospections of cooperation will be higher. Jervis believes that

³⁸ Wilhelmsen and Hjermann, “Russian Certainty of NATO Hostility”; Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma”, 176.

small transactions are one of the causes that wars among status-quo powers are less common in international politics.³⁹

The last point in Jervis's reasoning of the security dilemma that I would like to address before merging this concept with the current situation in Arctic geopolitics is the importance of a statesman's interpretation of others' behavior. In this sense, Jervis points out that:

"How a statesman interprets the other's past behavior and how he projects it into the future is influenced by his understanding of the security dilemma and his ability to place himself in the other's shoes. The dilemma will operate much more strongly if statesmen do not understand it, and do not see that their arms sought only to secure the status quo may alarm others and that others may arm, not because they are contemplating aggression, but because they fear attack from the first state. These two failures of empathy are linked. A state that thinks that the other knows that it wants only to preserve the status quo and that its arms are meant only for self-preservation will conclude that the other side will react to its arms by increasing its own capability only if it is aggressive. Since the other side is not menaced, there is no legitimate reason for it to object to the first state's arms; therefore, objection proves that the other is aggressive [...]."⁴⁰

With the core concept of security dilemma in mind, we can now move to the interpretation of the impacts of the growing security dilemma in the Arctic in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

THE FUTURE OF THE ARCTIC COOPERATION AMIDST SECURITY DILEMMA

In this section, I explore two main questions that arise concerning the security dilemma in the Arctic that were a matter of concern already before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine but have worsened since then. The first question posed by most Western scholars in their analysis of the High North is whether Russia still a status quo seeker state in the Arctic is. The second question is whether the eight Arctic countries can keep their relations in Arctic-related issues away from the spillover effect of major geopolitics matters.

The definition of Russia's Arctic policy as necessarily aggressive or defensive is undoubtedly a major effort. I posit, however, that scholars should avoid such extreme solutions since both either lead to erroneous interpretations or may do more harm than good to the perception of threat. One cannot deny that the Arctic has a more than special place in the broader context of Russian foreign policy and its major goal of claiming to be a great power and having

³⁹ Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma", 81.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 181.

this status acknowledged by other great powers – namely the U.S and China – in an equal basis of balance of interests. I claim that the Arctic is indeed the most prominent geopolitical arena in which Russia's government believes its objectives of international politics are to be achieved in the 21st century. This thesis can be visualised in a series of elements.

The first element starts with the geographical definition of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation by presidential in 2014. Following this, there has been a constant mention of the Arctic's economic and strategic importance found in Russia's strategic documents such as the Military Doctrine (2014), the National Security Strategy (2021) the Maritime Doctrine (2022), and the Concept of Foreign Policy (2023) specific strategic documents regarding to Russian Arctic policy like the *Foundations of the Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic for the Period up to 2035* (2020) and *Strategy for Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and Provision of National Security for the Period up to 2035* (2020).

The second element is the growing assertive tone of Russia's government towards the interests and importance of this region to Russia's national pride. This can be seen in speeches from Vladimir Putin, the creation of the “Arctic days, and the fostering of documentaries and films about achievements of Russia and imperial, soviet, and post-soviet times in the High North.⁴¹ Laruëlle has named the “geographical metanarratives” that created the “Arctic mythology”.⁴² According to her, Russian nationalist discourse preaches the country's uniqueness as a "far north" state and that this region needs to be preserved, developed, and secured against foreign threats. Moreover, shows us how Putin's government's aim to promote the country as an "Arctic superpower" is intertwined with Russia's domestic politics and is used as a strategy to bolster the regime's support.⁴³

Understood as a whole picture of Russia's Arctic ambitions, the abovementioned elements, when put together with the military build-up in the Arctic since 2014 and the fact that the cornerstone of Russia's nuclear power is located in the Kola Peninsula, may lead at first glance to the perception of growing threat emanating from Moscow towards the Western countries in the High North. Nonetheless, these elements may also be analyzed from a different angle.

⁴¹ Rotnem, “Putin's Arctic Strategy Collaboration or Conflict after Ukraine?”, 6-7.

⁴² Laruëlle, “Larger, Higher, Farther North ... Geographical Metanarratives of the Nation in Russia”; Laruëlle, “Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North”.

⁴³ Baev, ““Russia's Arctic Ambitions and Anxieties.”.

The military build-up promoted in the Russian Arctic is characterised mostly by the reactivation of Soviet-era military bases and an expected movement within the context of military modernization especially after 2008 after the typical degradation in the 1990s. Besides, as Byers puts it, the nuclear arsenal in the Kola Peninsula should be understood in the context of Russian nuclear strategy and not as an Arctic-specific issue.⁴⁴

Therefore, I claim that it is impossible to separate the Arctic policy of the Russian Federation from its foreign and defense policies. Ignoring this fact when analyzing the Russian record of cooperation within the Arctic Circle as a sign of "Arctic exceptionalism" only hinders the comprehension of Russian interests and political calculus in this region. Whereas the war in Ukraine showed that Russia is willing to undergo economic problems and deal with sanctions to enforce its national interests and defend its security environment emerging from threat perception, it does not show us that Russia is willing to become offensive in the Arctic. In other words, analysis from scholars should not be naïve but also not paranoid.

From Russia's perspective, meanwhile, the developments of the other Western countries may also be seen as an imminent threat to its security, for example, due to military exercises, NATO enlargement, and security policy documents and announcements. Even if it did not come this far, the mere opposition of the US to the use of the NSR under Russian laws may be seen as an attempt to hamper Russia's ambitions toward great power recognition, which would be reason enough for the Kremlin to believe Washington is trying to undermine Russia's position in international politics arena and to which an increase in Russia's military capabilities – even if not offense-oriented – should be bolstered.

In this context, the pause in dialogue between Western Arctic states and Russia will contribute only to an increasing security dilemma where the lack of communication could lead to misperceptions. Palubinskaite shows how the Arctic region has not been involved in major open conflicts since Arctic countries had a history of isolationist policy where cooperation and communication between them prevailed.⁴⁵ This assessment leads us to debate how cooperation in the Arctic amidst the context of the war in Ukraine could be restored so the spillover effect can be hindered. Pau and Switek claimed that although several "generally agree that Russia needs to be reintegrated into dialogue of military security in the Arctic, [...] this dialogue must

⁴⁴ Byers, "Crises and international cooperation: an Arctic case study", 385.

⁴⁵ Palubinskaite, "The end of peaceful collaboration and 'Arctic exceptionalism' [...]", (master's thesis, Aalborg Universitet).

not be an end on itself".⁴⁶ While some opinions are that the framework of the Arctic Council should be expanded and include military security issues – for example Iceland's Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir at the Arctic Conference in October 2019, and the former Finnish Prime Minister Antti Rinne – others defend that this could endanger the AC – for example, former Norwegian Ambassador for Arctic Affairs Bård Ivar Svendsen, and other venues should be created. In May 2021, at the Council meeting in Reykjavik, Sergei Lavrov called for the resume of the dialogue in the CHODS.

Having the Arctic been exposed to the spillover effect of the war in Ukraine, we now have a situation where two blocs are constituted: Russia and the seven NATO countries (A7). In this scenario, the Chicken hunt as in Jervis' theory, where actor A seeks to cooperate despite the possibility of defection by actor B, seems to be the best alternative to de-escalate the security dilemma in the Arctic. Bearing in mind that Russia and the United States have been at the peak of their animosity since the end of the Cold War, Norway is an ever more important country to help the return of dialogue in the Arctic. This holds true if Norway maintains its traditional security policy with autonomous strategic thinking.

Knutsen and Petersen asserted that Norway has long pursued a policy mix of deterrence and reassurance measures regarding its relations with Russia that have contributed to maintaining lower levels of tension in the Arctic, namely with the term mitigation-strategies.⁴⁷ According to Folgerø, this concept, introduced in 1966 by Johan Jørgen Holst, has been used in foreign- and security policy to describe Norway's balancing relationship with the Soviet Union and later Russia.⁴⁸ This includes the deterrence of Russian aggression through its membership with NATO and the assurance is used to describe Norway's goal of not provoking and cooperating with Russia in areas deemed suitable.

Assurance is, then, best achieved through dialogue and communication mechanisms. Therefore, Knutsen and Petersen claim that a wise foreign policy based upon the security dilemma theory needs to build and maintain trust among states, for example through international institutions. They, therefore, defend the inclusion of security and defense issues

⁴⁶ Paul and Switek, "Russia in the Arctic development plans, military, potential, and conflict prevention", 37.

⁴⁷ Knutsen and Petersen, "War in Europe, but Still Low Tension in the High North? An Analysis of Norwegian Mitigation Strategies".

⁴⁸ Folgerø, "A thematic analysis of Norway's strategy of deterrence and assurance towards Russia during the war in Ukraine" (master's thesis, The Arctic University of Norway), 12.

in the Arctic Council, a position contrary to Norway's government.⁴⁹ Folgerø points out that the perception of the adversary with hostile intentions arises mostly from uncertainty and fear rather than expanding motivations. Assurance, therefore, has as its objective the removal of this uncertainty by showing the potential enemy that prior agreements are respected, and its own intentions are peaceful. These do not include only military activity but also cooperation in economics, scientific, and social areas.⁵⁰

Norwegian major general of the Air Force, Folland, wrote an article in 2022 with its perspective on Norwegian defense policy. He believes that Norway must rebalance its Arctic policy more towards deterrence but continue to mitigate the security dilemma through active dialogue and cooperation on regional matters. Folland states that while one should not have a short-sighted view of the current war in Ukraine, it does show Moscow is willing to use force to achieve its objectives. Although he claims Russia is dependent on international cooperation to realise its economic potential in the Arctic, he also recognises the Arctic is an existential part of Russia's great power ambitions and expects Russia's behavior in the Arctic to be a mix of belligerence and cooperation. Moreover, while he believes that the joining of Sweden and Finland to NATO may enhance the Nordic countries' deterrence capability, this could also contribute to an escalation of instability which could unleash aggressive responses from Moscow. Therefore, he too argues that Oslo has a unique position in the Arctic that must be tailored to reassure Russia of Norway's no-offensive posture while keeping NATO involvement credible. Folland also defends that the absence of Russia in venues such as the ASFR and the AC in the long-term is a vulnerability to the Arctic regional security environment and, therefore, is highly recommended that an Arctic security dialogue with Russia in either through existing mechanisms or new ones formulated.⁵¹

STILL ROOM FOR COOPERATION

The idea of "Arctic exceptionalism" has evolved ever since the Murmansk Initiative was proposed by Gorbachev in 1987. Since then, a series of bilateral and multilateral agreements in diverse areas and, most of all, the institutionalization of the Arctic cooperation under the Arctic Council as a forum of consensual decision-making helped the countries of the Circumpolar

⁴⁹ Knutsen and Petersen, "War in Europe, but Still Low Tension in the High North? An Analysis of Norwegian Mitigation Strategies", 40.

⁵⁰ Folgerø, "A thematic analysis of Norway's strategy of deterrence and assurance towards Russia during the war in Ukraine", (master's thesis, The Arctic University of Norway), 12-3.

⁵¹ Folland, "Arctic Strategy: Deterrence and Détente", 15.

North to maintain cooperation in regional affairs despite other geopolitical disputes or the growing great power rivalry in the 21st century. Nevertheless, I believe that governments and scholars alike may have misread the situation by hoping that the Arctic could be kept away from spillover effects of international politics in a broader sense as if Arctic politics were to be somehow detached from global international relations. In addition, the myth of Arctic exceptionalism is somehow connected to the typical belief in the aftermath of the Cold War that the international liberal order and institutional liberalism theory would be sufficient to warrant international security.

Whether one agrees or not with the assumption above, current political affairs in the Arctic show us how the great power dispute – reflected in the war in Ukraine beginning with the turmoil of Euromaidan, the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the war in Donbas before the outbreak with Russian invasion in 2022 – does can spillover to the Arctic geopolitics, undermining cooperation mechanisms and fostering a security dilemma. Put simply, security dilemma as in Jervis' theory, forwards that since one state cannot know the intentions of another state, the building-up of its military forces will create a perception of menace and, therefore, the country will also enhance its military forces and increase the number and scale of military exercises. The biggest problem, then, arises when there is a lack of communication between these actors, which may cause misinterpretations, or when incidents in military exercises can unleash unintended conflicts. Moreover, when states are certain about each other's status enemy, the security dilemma may disappear and transform itself into an open conflict.

Whether the security landscape in the Arctic will evolve to be cooperative or conflictual lies less on the Arctic itself than in the broader context of geopolitics and how Arctic states interpret each other's actions and how willing they are to cooperate. It also hinges on the understanding by experts, politicians, and decision-makers of the Arctic States as status quo or changing seekers and if one assesses legal bindings are strong enough to be cooperation assurances.

Accordingly, the expel of Russia from the Arctic fora and the halt of scientific and economic cooperation – although expected – contribute only to a thinner line of misperceptions that lead the Arctic states to build up their military forces and change the tone of their leaders and representatives that intensify the fear – or perhaps an expectation – of an open conflict. Hence, I believe that the first step towards cooperation is by resuming dialogues in the ASFR and in the AC. Moreover, I agree with those who defend that the Arctic Council should encompass security-related issues within its framework. If instruments like the Arctic Council

and Euro-Atlantic Barents Council are institutions of which final goals are to provide a stable, predictable, and peaceful Arctic, excluding Russia's participation – as in the proposes such as Nordic Plus and AC 2.0 – in those as manner of political-diplomatic revenge on Moscow due to the war in Ukraine will be nothing but counterproductive. This would also be a great misreading of Russian foreign policy in the 21st century, which repeatedly claimed more participation on an equal basis with the Western world – above all with the U.S. – and would not allow barriers to its own objectives. The need for cooperation does not imply an entirely set of common goals. The lack of mutual objectives is the most important drive for cooperation.

Some argue that because Russia invaded Ukraine it will also invade Nordic countries or act in such a way that Arctic stability would be endangered. Others claim that, because Russia has been complying with the Arctic governance structure, the UNCLOS, multilateral fora, and bilateral agreements and because they need Western investments and expertise to forward Moscow's objectives in the Arctic, then this is a sign that Russia will not wage war in the Arctic. I claim neither is true. Maintaining a stable environment in the Arctic presupposes active and continual practices of cooperation between NATO countries and Russia not only in soft security and economic themes but also – and perhaps now more than never – on hard security issues through security fora mechanisms and military-to-military contacts to hinder security dilemmas, bearing in mind that is impossible to manage any Arctic issue without Russia in the same way it is impossible to talk about the Amazon forest without including Brazil.

To sum up, Arctic geopolitics should be understood as a part of broader international politics and consider the foreign and defense policy of each state. Even more importantly, the comprehensive understanding of Russian foreign policy and its interests in the Arctic; the U.S. foreign policy in Arctic security objectives; together with Russia-China evolving relations and the great power dispute between Washington and Beijing are the keys to appraising the Arctic security environment. This holds true and can be visualised in specific themes, as seen below.

If the U.S. wants to hamper Chinese political; diplomatic; financial and military advances, leaving Russia with Beijing as the only option for its infrastructure and technological necessities in the Arctic may act against its own interests. Besides, one would need to be naïve to genuinely believe that the U.S. and Canada would engage in an open conflict because of their rival stances about Northwest Passage; or that Canada and Denmark would engage in a war over Hans Island. That is important to bear in mind due to the following assumption: the danger of an evolving military conflict between Russia and the A7 has more to do with their overall

relations in the broader context of international politics than it has to do with their divergent attitudes in Arctic matters.

The biggest obstacle in the current situation is the encounter of two different world-readings. While Russia wants the Arctic governance to be understood as detached from other geopolitical arenas where everything can run normally, Western countries, keep Moscow apart from it as a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Neither strategy is beneficial. Therefore, if one assumes the A7 countries' Arctic policy is all one of the same things – namely NATO-driven – then the Arctic Council would be nothing more than a forum for Russia-NATO relations and hence the AC would be currently doomed to fail. Instead, if one believes that each of the eight Arctic states has its autonomous Arctic policies, own interests, and security strategies, then Russia-Norway relations, which have proved throughout the years to be pragmatically successful in cooperation despite rivalries, can be a good example and the key for fostering stability in the region.

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