

The West and Russia: Does the Way Forward Point North?

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## **ABSTRACT**

Richard Lewis: The West and Russia: Does the Way Forward Point North?

(Under the direction of Donald D. Searing)

This thesis proposes two methods by which the West can achieve a peaceful and cooperative outcome in the Arctic. As sea ice continues to recede, the northern reaches of the globe open to increased shipping, military presence, oil and precious mineral extraction, fishing and other opportunities. These opportunities represent potential cooperation or competition between interested parties, to include Russia. Realists argue that conflict is inevitable, but there already exists reason to hope for a more peaceful reality. By suggesting a new perspective on the NATO alliance and what it takes to secure ocean shipping and the vulnerable environment in a collaborative way, this thesis seeks to determine a cooperative path with benefits extending far beyond access rights and lower tensions in the Far North.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The tensions rising between the Russian Federation and the West peaked in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and state support of separatist violence in eastern Ukraine. Since then, Russian forces have taken an active role in the Syrian civil war and state agents allegedly poisoned Russian ex-spies with a nerve agent on foreign soil. As implacable as the Federation seems to be while antagonizing the West and eschewing liberal values, the West has taken an opposing stance of similar resolve via a coordinated sanctions regime and other soft power means. How does the international community span this widening chasm? In answer, this thesis seeks to trace a path forward capable of improving relations as well as establishing a more secure environment in one of the most vulnerable geographic regions of the globe: the Arctic. This paper begins by ‘laying the groundwork’ of relations as they currently exist between the two opposing sides through the perspective of the current sanctions system. Afterwards, a brief overview describes what is occurring in the emerging environment of the Arctic regions and why it matters. Finally, the author analyzes two key organizations closely associated with the developing dynamic: NATO and the Arctic Council. By examining these two entities, it may be possible to make necessary changes to the utilization of both institutions in order to address current grievances and ensure a more cooperative future between these historic adversaries.

Since the end of the Cold War in 1991 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the international community has found itself operating within an entirely new framework. Formally a bipolar world, consisting of the USSR and the United States as global heavyweights, the

dissolution of one entity left a massive power vacuum which the US found itself filling. However, since 2001, the world's first true superpower is met with myriad challenges to both its hegemony and interests abroad. The Russian Federation often centers itself at the crux of many of these challenges in some form or another and the Putin administration in Moscow appears to push the boundaries of acceptable action on a regular basis. As a result, old friction points established since 1945 have found themselves imbued with new life. However, the stage upon which the actors find themselves has changed significantly since the days of proxy conflicts and Mutually Assured Destruction, or MAD, theory. Though these ingredients certainly play a role today, the environment within which they interact provides a different setting than was present during the Cold War's more tense moments.

Despite improvements in relations since Soviet rule, recent years reveal a growing chasm between the Russian Federation and the West. Symptoms of this regression appear in the news with fair prominence and frequency. On the surface, much of this dynamic seems based on the perceived misbehavior of Russia in some sector or another, such as oil supply strangulation to countries reliant on the Federation's resources, the use of performance enhancing substances in international sports events, or hostile takeovers of private domestic companies by the government. Following such activities, the West tends to respond through sanctions or diplomatic means. It is through this tit-for-tat dynamic that the current situation between the two seemingly opposed sides must be analyzed first in order to establish the current working environment. Understanding the events which have largely defined relations between these two opposed entities provides a method of comprehending the stage upon which the players currently operate.

It is important to note at this juncture certain terminologies utilized throughout the paper. As is already evident, the usage of the term ‘the West’ is used to signify the collection of nation-states opposed in many ways to the activities carried out by the Russian Federation. For clarity’s sake, this nomenclature will refer to the US, Canadian and EU-states united in their use of sanctions to enforce change within the Russian political system. It would make little sense, for instance, to include Australia or New Zealand within this entity as much of what will be discussed refers to actions relegated to the northern hemisphere. This requirement for clarification is essential as the West represents not only the ‘senders’ of sanctions but also the coalition with which the Russian Federation contends within the specific geo-spatial realm chosen for analysis.

Another important term to discuss here is what precisely we mean when referencing ‘the Arctic’. Descending southwards from the North Pole at the northernmost part of the Earth, the latitudinal rings expand until the cartographic boundary referred to as the Arctic Circle is reached. This line, situated at 66°33’N, includes portions of eight Arctic states: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States (Spohr *et al.*, 2013). The largest portion of this shared political ‘boundary’ of the Arctic is consumed by Russia. This presents the central issue of concern from the West’s perspective as well as the source of potential opportunity afforded by this area of the globe.

This paper seeks to establish the current relationship between these two political entities first. By doing so, the present dynamic can be understood before assumptions and analysis of activities and future efforts occur. Historical relations between nations present a wide array of potential focus points. For the purposes of this work, the lens through which the modern-day relationship is examined will be the sanctions regime. This illustrates the current restrictions and



onerous penalties enacted against the Russian state which may need to be overcome if relations are to become normalized in the future. Once the dynamics of soft power tension between these two sides is established, recent developments within the Arctic domain receive attention.

This geographic area of focus has been chosen for several reasons. First and foremost, the developing situation in the Arctic is relatively new. Much of what occurs there is happening for the first time within modern contexts. Second, the developments there change constantly as the operating environment itself alters due to natural and man-made effects. Shifting realities within this part of the globe pose strategic implications for all Arctic bodies politic. Third, the Arctic presents a unique environment, perhaps as unique as space exploration, with opportunities present for both Russia and the Western nations involved in its development, exploitation, and growing viability as a route of commerce.

Through analyzing this case study, the observer is presented with a special scenario wherein new attempts for cooperation become feasible in an area with little history of past grievances to encumber such future efforts. Alternatively, this unique portion of the globe provides a new arena wherein the pursuit of realist goals rules the motivations of the more aggressive states among the Arctic nations. The emergence of the Arctic as a viable realm of influence and material gain forces us to contend with issues ranging from the treatment of indigenous peoples to the impact of humanity upon the global environment. These matters of concern require imminent and necessary address as one of the most historically hostile parts of the globe reluctantly relinquishes its ice-bound hold of the far northerly reaches.

The question posited by the author and answered by the conclusion of this thesis is whether or not the Arctic provides an opportunity for cooperation. If so, how should the international community proceed in establishing improved relations between Russia and the

nations currently taking soft power stances against it? Obviously, this is not a comprehensive prescription for the most correct answer, but it may provide touchstones enabling a path towards peaceful and cooperative efforts. Furthermore, the possibility of positive second and third order effects from such a path should only heighten interest in this region of the world and the steps taken over the next decade. Given the current status quo of globalized economies and societies, interconnected tourism and commerce, and liberal institutions such as the UN, there exist many inroads for improved relations. It behooves us to explore these methods and mechanisms to achieve desired outcomes beneficial to the Earth and its inhabitants.

Admittedly, a measure of ‘improved relations’ is hard to quantify. However, there are indicators of improvement addressed in this paper. A complete lifting of sanctions would, for example, provide an indication of warmer ties between the West and the Russian federation. But improvement does not mean cure and suggests a gradual becoming rather than an instantaneous transition. Therefore, a key assumption within this thesis posits that a total easing of sanctions or a complete and rapid turnaround in relations is not required to achieve the end result sought by the author. However, such elements as sanctions would ostensibly be under re-evaluation were the West to observe significant inroads towards the implementation of internationally recognized norms by the Federation. Russia, as well, would likely perform a recalibration of its antagonist methods in the light of such a development.

An admitted weakness in assessing the situation as a whole is the author’s lack of fluency in Russian. This certainly presents a limiting factor within this paper as no Russian literature in its un-translated form is utilized. This gap in coverage will hopefully be addressed by future research and published work carried out by those familiar with both English and Russian literature regarding this intriguing and timely topic.

## Overview

The Arctic region and its changing landscape enjoy relatively little attention compared to other strategic mainland or oceanic concerns. This is understandable for a number of reasons as this particular zone poses hazards to maritime travel to this day and, outside of the climate change debate, does not receive significant attention within mainstream media feeds at present. Much of this dearth in coverage stems from the relative newness of the subject matter in question. One is hard pressed to identify substantial discussion about this part of the world from a security or economic standpoint prior to 2007. With the vast majority of coverage found within the last fifteen years, it is little wonder that the topic is not as represented as other areas of international relations.

The symbolic planting of the Russian flag under the Arctic sea ice in 2007 forced the world to take serious notice of the geopolitical implications of what claims to the northern reaches might mean in a post-colonial world for the first time (Haftendorn, 2011; Borgerson, 2018; Ananyeva, 2019). Oil fields have long been discovered under the sea bed and onshore, but ice and permafrost rendered methods of procuring these natural resources too expensive to be viable until recent rising temperatures began to pave the way to access possibilities (Palmer & Croasdale, 2013). Much of the literature devoted to the High North, consists of NATO security postures and wealth acquisition via resource exploitation. Furthermore, much of what is discussed in academic writing presents a world view that is very Western oriented (Burke & Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2017; Borgerson, 2018).

Some work has been done to break ground on possible vectors for cooperation. Scott Stephenson devotes a significant amount of effort in establishing a link between economic and environmental goals through which international designs can merge (2012). By creating shared

understanding and mutual agreements, much of the groundwork is laid for establishing additional norms and procedures knitting the Arctic nations closer together (Stephenson, 2012). Efforts, such as research collaboration, to establish other means of achieving shared purpose in the Far North exist as well. However, even these measures are not harmless with regards to the perceived balance of power in this part of the world (Pham, 2019). But are these endeavors enough? The author submits that this is not the case. A symptom of this reality is the dearth of literature capitalizing upon the potential the Arctic represents as a method of significantly improving relations between nuclear powered adversaries. Such a shortfall makes this thesis all the more important and timely.

A holistic approach must be taken as there exist forces presenting both challenge and reassurance. These forces must be addressed if there is to be significant progress towards relational stability. Additionally, the perspective of the Russian Federation must be taken into account. Aspects of national identity and objectives require coverage in order to understand both halves of the equation. There exist several routes to take; however, in the interest of time and length, the number of topics analyzed will be limited to two key institutions. First, an analysis of NATO and its operations in the Arctic region. How can NATO be used or not utilized in order to achieve international objectives given Russia's perspective of the alliance? Second, organizations provide vehicles through which values and practices transfer between partners, eventually gaining influence and purchase in other, related fields as the ideals of liberalism predict. The Arctic Council provides such an entity wherein significant cooperation already manifests itself. By guiding these two vectors towards achieving a net-win scenario based on cooperation and mutual trust, we may find more success than past efforts have provided.

Forging a path towards cooperative efforts within the Arctic, with the ‘trickle-down’ effect of reduction of tensions elsewhere, provides an option to disrupt the cycle of action and counter-action between the two sides. Arctic exploration and resource extraction, increasing sea levels and retracting ice flows pose unique challenges that only the international community can hope to address in any meaningful way. Furthermore, current challenges posed by the international operating environment constitute timely concerns and include attempts at reduction in nuclear arms, prevention of nuclear weapons technology proliferation, stopping international terrorism, and a vulnerable world economy. These each demand cooperative solutions rather than unilateral approaches. Perhaps the way towards more peaceful relations, mutual prosperity, and a broadening of liberal values and acceptable behaviors can be mapped through the Arctic. Such progression would likely lead to tighter coordination in meeting these global challenges. Considering what is at stake, discovering a way to increase trust and reduce tension amongst key players in a bid for greater cooperation overall is in the best interest of the global community.

## CHAPTER 2: ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP VIA SANCTIONS

It is important to be familiar with recent events if one is to grasp the current situation between the two established sides of this adversarial relationship. Despite the long history of standoff between what was once the USSR and the West, there appeared a brief period in the early and mid-1990s wherein a rapprochement seemed possible. During this window the Soviet Union dissolved as a political entity and the Russian Federation was born. However, though *glasnost* and democratization held promise for those seeking peace, the road ahead proved difficult. Russia experienced what is sometimes referred to as a ‘triple transition’ (Offe, 1991). This triple event included the dissolution of territory and subsequent disruption of networks, both political and infrastructure, an extreme political shift, and an economic overhaul focused on decentralization of the national economy (Offe, 1991). The disturbance to natural resource extraction, logistics and population centers is hard to exaggerate. Perhaps the Russian Federation could have successfully navigated any one of these challenges by itself, but this transition required speed and simultaneity.

Ultimately, the democratization of the Russian Federation would only progress so far. Yeltsin’s appointment of Vladimir Putin in 1999 as President, a move then legitimized by popular election in 2000, solidified the political shift towards re-centralizing power at the federal level (Gel’man, 2015). The Presidency received broad powers while the legislative branch experienced a significant weakening, a trend which continues to this day (Gel’man, 2015). Eventually, the erosion of democratic institutions and values, once so promisingly emergent in

the early 90s, gave way to an autocratic regime centered in the Kremlin (McFaul, 2018). Whether or not the organs of state, with the checks and balances associated with effective democracies, work within the Russian Federation is not what this paper seeks to address. Instead, the salient point is that today the course of the Russian Federation is largely dictated by the head of government. In this case, that consists of Putin and the decisions that he and those he trusts make. Recent news from Russia seems to support this view of Federation politics. The lower house of the Federation parliament has just passed a measure which could, upon ratification by popular vote in April 2020, enable Putin to run for president again in 2024 and 2030 (Gershkovich, 2020). If this constitutional change passes, his influence on Russia's trajectory would be incalculably significant.

Determining Putin's true motives and objectives may prove impossible even long after his reign in Russia comes to an end, and the topic could take up the length of a book. Therefore, this thesis will not try to divine such intentions; however, there remain influences appearing time and time again in the choices he makes which are impossible to ignore. Putin himself has spent much of his life within the intelligence apparatus of the USSR, the notorious KGB, now known as the FSB. This dangerous entity, overlapping security and political intention, has long been used as a Soviet tool used for maintaining control and seems to have inherited this mission in its current form (McFaul, 2018). In 2005, Putin publicly made his feelings known about the current world order. Referring to the collapse of the Soviet Union as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the twentieth century and mentioning it as the one historical event he wished he could change, it is obvious that he yearns for a status quo of yesteryear (Osborn, 2018). Whether that means a return to the days of the tsars, the communist party, or a hybrid of both remains unclear. But the implications are obvious, that he believes in a strong leader to bring Russia back

from the brink of obscurity to center stage. To make the point even more clear, Putin stated in March 2020 that, “the president is a guarantor of security of our state, its internal stability and evolutionary development” (Stanglin, 2020). Unfortunately for the democratization of Russia, many Russians believe that he is right and, as such, his actions seem legitimately mandated by the people (Anon, 2006).

The brief summary of the current Russian political landscape is vitally important because it is essential to understand that Putin’s worldview significantly affects the decisions of the Russian state in both foreign and domestic policy. Through his twenty years in power as either the prime minister or president, the Russian state ignited controversy abroad through various means and to varying degrees of severity. For instance, while doping of athletes is certainly important as far as regulatory commissions and interstate trust are concerned, the fallout remains largely benign and the results for the international community are negligible at surface level. It is, however, important to note that at the height of the Cold War the sporting realm found itself an extension of conflict between the Soviet Union and the US. The widespread flouting of the rules established by institutions such as the International Olympic Committee by Russian sports could very well be another symptom of Russia’s pugnacious attitude towards the West in general (Altukhov & Nauright, 2018).

The malign effects of Moscow’s efforts expanded in recent years well beyond the bounds of sporting events. They form a spectrum comprised of aggressive military maneuvers threatening sovereign airspace, to assassination, to election meddling with the intent of disrupting democratic processes in order to sow discord and confusion abroad (Li, 2019; Anon, 2017b). Even sovereign borders of states are no stranger to the machinations of Russian designs. The incursions into eastern Ukraine, the outright annexation of Crimea, and the military



intervention in South Ossetia and Abkhazia received significant attention in recent years. These efforts seem designed to meet several goals of the Russian Federation.

Among these are the desire to offset Western encroachment, via NATO expansion and EU membership, by destabilizing nations facing westward such as was the case with Ukraine and Georgia. Russia has also taken on the role of power broker in its 'near abroad' in order to tie nearby nations into its orbit of influence. Sometimes this is accomplished via peace brokering, provision of security, and economic agreements (Ohanyan, 2018). Anna Ohanyan, a professor of political science at Stonehill College and author, calls this strategy "regional fracturing" (2018). By 'fracturing' troubled areas, control can be maintained, resistance undermined, and NATO kept out. She goes further to establish Moscow's goals as twofold: maintain influence in former Soviet bloc space and increase Russia's standing on the world political stage (2018). These tie neatly into Putin's public lamentations about the loss of prestige and power associated with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Regardless of the permutations of motivation, the Kremlin is attempting to play the hand dealt by geography, history, and resources to meet as many state objectives as possible.

The combative actions taken by the Russian Federation can be observed from several perspectives, more of which will be covered later. However, it remains crucial to note Putin's worldview as the main decider of Russian policy abroad. As will be shown shortly in this section, the Federation and the West have both fed into the dichotomy of the Other for quite a while. The West, and specifically NATO, is seen as a security threat, who's perceived aggressive maneuvers lead to an action by the Federation to exemplify strength or to increase the unassailability of its position. In turn, this motivates the West to take further measures in order to maintain the status quo, such as eroding Russian influence in eastern Europe. This represents a

simplistic explanation of a complex dance, but the central point remains valid. The resulting uncertainty of such maneuvers creates a classic security dilemma wherein balance is never achieved between the opposing sides, but is continuously sought (Mitzen, 2006). Furthermore, the search for real security, both ontological and physical, can lead to illogical situations. As long as the West and the Federation continue along the paths illustrated above, we may find that an aggressive and oft-counterproductive relationship between these two entities is not only inevitable, but even comforting (Mitzen, 2006). Therefore, this thesis will next outline in greater detail how this relationship has played out along the economic fault line of sanctions before addressing how to break this destructive cycle.

### **The West Acts**

Recent history regarding Russia is filled with examples of confrontation and ‘pushing the envelope’ of what is deemed acceptable by the international community. Short of direct military conflict, there exist other means of exercising ‘soft power’ in order to achieve desired results within a global context. Examples of this tit-for-tat relationship include Western responses to the Russian invasion of two separatist regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, within the sovereign state of Georgia in 2008 and the overwhelming diplomatic response to the Skripal poisoning episode in 2018. Condoleezza Rice, the American Secretary of State from 2005 to 2009, stated emphatically that not only was the US involved in brokering a peace deal, returning Georgian armed forces from supporting the war in Iraq to confront Russian incursions at home but also took several steps to enact a sanctions approach against Russian-supported areas of Georgia (2018). Following the poisoning of ex-spy, Sergei Skripal, and his daughter with a chemical nerve agent on UK soil, many Western nations expelled Russian diplomats by the hundreds from their respective positions (Anon, 2018c). Furthermore, the Trump administration enacted strong

sanctions against the Russian Federation, specifically with regards to the exports of targeted electronic components and other technology-based exports (Anon, 2018c). Prior to this event, the US had imposed sanctions on select Russian companies and individuals tied to alleged cyber-attacks against the United States (Anon, 2018c).

These events illustrate a pattern of aggression and response from the West, but perhaps the most significant coordinated effort to utilize economic clout against the Russian state took place following the events which unfolded in 2014. Following the blatant violation of Ukrainian sovereignty, the Obama administration took an aggressive stance with the intent of increasing the political and economic isolation of Russia, specifically within the realms of defense, finances, and energy production (Kazantsev, 2017). Simultaneously, the EU states, Canada, Iceland, and Norway, among other nations, instituted sanctions as well. This concerted effort was intended to exhibit a unified response against Russia's actions, uphold international norms, and punish the Federation's leadership economically (Ástvaldsson, 2019; Anon, 2019b).

In general, sanctions associated with this scenario fall into two categories: those associated with the Crimea annexation and those affiliated with the unrest and separatist activities in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. Sanctions with regard to the Crimean Peninsula targeted individuals and entities associated or believed to be associated with the annexation process and subsequent human rights violations, mostly by freezing economic assets of these identified actors (Connolly, 2018; Anon, 2019b). Further measures included preventing investment in Crimea and Sevastopol and enforcing bans on technology sharing and the exporting of Crimean goods not officially sanctioned by the Ukrainian government (Connolly, 2018). In contrast, the sanctions regarding the sponsorship of separatist violence within the Donbas region centered on the three broad sectors of defense, energy, and finances; however,

these sanctions were not always uniform nor did they target every entity involved in these three sectors, with the exception of defense technology sales to Russia from Western sources (Connolly, 2018; Anon, 2019b).

### **Russia Reacts**

Measuring the success of sanctions is a difficult proposition as the act itself is a multi-faceted enterprise. From the Western perspective, several motivations for enacting a coordinated sanctions regime existed. For one, such cooperative efforts would show a united front to the Russian Federation as well as to other nations outside of the West who might consider similar actions in the future. However, it should be noted that not even this has been achieved fully as cracks in the unity of these nations have recently become apparent (Jackson, 2018). Demonstrating a willingness to stand against Russia, despite economic reprisals, would also prove a state's support for the United States, potentially strengthening relationships with the top military and economic power (Ástvaldsson, 2019). Obviously, the potential to change the target nation's decision-making process remains throughout this process, but, judging by the continued state of the Ukraine situation, it would seem that this has not played out as many had hoped. Whatever the main goals and motivations of the sanctioning body, Russia capitalized on this open show of economic aggression to consolidate power and continue a standoff narrative, reminiscent of the Cold War.

The ideology centered around Western aggressiveness towards Russia is nothing new. But it seems that these recent events breathed new life into the concept. So much so in fact that some observers have labeled the current relationship as 'the new Cold War' (Legvold, 2014). The history of Russia and its long tradition of repelling invaders and resisting outside interference have resulted in an interesting mix of desire for influence but also a distrust of the intentions of others

(Ross, 2013; Marshall, 2015). Though past security may have involved the acquisition of territorial buffer zones and geographic ‘funnels’, contemporary security is much more complicated and nuanced. Today, protecting economies, the minds of citizens, elections, and key infrastructure take up as much time in security dialogue as territorial integrity ever did. As a recent example, Russian Defense Minister, Sergei Soigu, in reaction to a perceived informational assault by the West, stated “the main and basic goal of this war is to control Russia and, ultimately, the world” (Anon, 2019c). Though Russia may not fear an invasion, it seems that its distrust of the West endures. As alluded to, economic security plays a significant role in the overall stability of the state. Given the current sanctions regime, the Russian economy received significant attention within Russian national strategy after the invasion of Ukraine.

According to the Russian National Security Strategy for 2016, released in December 2015, the West is clearly portrayed as an adversary and the emphasis of counteracting the economic damage done by restrictive policies are addressed as a key concern. Paragraph 57 specifically mentions the detrimental effects of Western sanctions on the Russian economy, thereby tying the continued functionality of the economy directly to national security interests as a whole (RNSS, 2015). This securitization of economy granted more power to the state in pressing for ‘import substitution’. It seems that not all motivation for this economic shift stems from repressive sanctions imposed by the Western regime but also from factors associated with the modern globalized market economy. For example, due to a recent decrease in global demand of oil and natural gas, the main source of the Russian petrostate’s revenue was sharply curtailed as the ruble suffered devaluation, forcing the domestic production of goods normally imported from abroad (Fal’tsman, 2015). However, by tying the economy to the security of the state against an outside

‘Other’, the reigns of power shift even further to the hands of Moscow as a matter of state protection.

In 2015, the Russian government established the Government Commission on Import Substitution as a way to minimize the need for import products from abroad and maximize self-reliance in key sectors (Anon, 2015). For example, the imports of machinery, vehicles and other associated equipment were valued at 158 billion USD in 2015 whereas exports comprised 27 billion USD (Fal’tsman, 2015). The Commission targeted this sector for substitution efforts. Overall, the planned substitution was to include more than 2,000 projects across nineteen branches of the economy at a cost of approximately 25 billion USD (Connolly, 2018). The intent was to improve the durability of the Russian economy, blunt the effects of sanctions and global market fluctuations, specifically in the oil industry, and increase the production capacity of the Russian industrial sector.

The third method of dealing with the sanctions regime has been to diversify its trading partners abroad. Though the desire to improve and increase ties to nearby nations is nothing new, the emphasis on such a focus has increased since 2014 and focuses heavily on its neighbor, China (Lukyanov, 2012; Anishchuk and Heritage, 2013). Closer ties with China, involvement in Latin America and the Middle East, and the development of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2014 are all evidence testifying to efforts geared towards forging a more resilient economy (Connolly, 2018). Russia wishes to increase its pool of active trading partners and free itself from becoming overly reliant on the EU or other Western powers for trade and economic interaction (Connolly, 2018). This provides Moscow with maneuverability with its partners and how it chooses to orient itself on the international stage while, again, insulating itself from Western sanctions and increasing its influence regionally, if not globally.

Rather than reacting in a way that makes its foreign and domestic policy decisions palatable to the EU and other Western nations, Russia utilizes sanctions and an encroaching Western presence as a pretext towards expansion in other areas. These moves suggest a continued turning away from the West in favor of a more balanced approach of diversified allies and partners, thereby weakening the influence of Western-associated liberal practices and norms. Whether or not these diplomatic, economic, and even military-oriented moves will pay off in the long run remains to be seen. However, it is unequivocal that Russia has developed a home grown and extensive foreign network representing other means of achieving its national policy ends. This brief perspective on the contentious relationship between the Federation and the West covers essential aspects of process and response, describing the methodology by which Russia maintains its economic sovereignty and increases its presence in a way reminiscent of the Cold War. With this in mind, it is logical to assume that the Arctic would be impossible to ignore given the growing opportunity for natural resource extraction, the possibility for exclusive development access rights, and potential influence over what may become an oft-used maritime trade route. The northerly reaches provide a golden opportunity for Putin's Russia to continue down this same path of self-assuredness, security, and influence projection.

## CHAPTER 3: THE ARCTIC

### **An Accessible Arctic**

Recent developments north of the Arctic Circle appear to point to the inevitable conclusion that the frigid waters, historically capable of keeping shipping or transit of any significance at bay, are becoming more accessible every year. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimated in 2007 that summers in the Arctic would be ice free by 2070, whereas other estimates put that date significantly closer to today (Borgerson, 2013). Between the rising air and sea temperatures, we can confidently expect that the flow of traffic through the northerly latitudes will increase significantly. Such an increase in accessibility translates to more opportunities for oil extraction, potential mining, fishing, and power projection possibilities.

Massive physical changes indicate burgeoning trading outcomes. The potential for a significant increase in trafficability within the Arctic, via three semi-permanent and permanent routes, portends truly revolutionary effects on maritime transit. Nation-states have already begun making inroads with ice-capable technology development. China, for instance, has constructed two ice-breaker ships and plans to produce more nuclear-powered assets for northerly expeditions as it continues its pursuit of a One-Belt initiative linking its economy to further flung parts of the globe (Ananyeva, 2019; Martynova, 2019). By cutting significant distance between the EU trading bloc and Central and East Asia, coupled with a more politically stable route, the possibility of Anchorage, Alaska and Reykjavik, Iceland emerging as the northerly equivalents to such commerce hubs as Dubai or Singapore becomes more realistic (Borgerson, 2013). By 2010, four



commercial vessels utilized the Northern Sea Route to transit between western Europe to Northeast Asia; by 2012, that number had jumped to 46 (Borgerson, 2013). When considering these factors in tandem with the known natural resources situated within these wintry climes, there is little wonder as to why the eyes of several nations drift ever northward. With such attention, however, comes a litany of considerations.

### **Russian Intentions**

There appear to be three main schools of thought regarding what is transpiring with regards to the development of human activity in the Far North. On the one hand, there seems to be plenty of room for hope with regards to international cooperation within the Arctic realm as scientific research efforts spanning several international boundaries continue to flourish (Borgerson, 2013; Anon, 2018b). Other predictions posit an altogether different picture. According to the US Department of Defense's 2019 Arctic Strategy, "the Arctic is a potential avenue for expanded great power competition and aggression spanning between two key regions of ongoing competition identified in the [National Defense Strategy]" (US DoD, 2019). During the Arctic Council's Ministerial meeting in Rovaniemi, Finland in 2019, current US Secretary of State, Michael Pompeo, made mention of Russian militarization and aggression along their northern coastline (Pompeo, 2019). He also tied the current hard-power buildup in the Arctic directly to the inability to trust Russia's intentions given its historic violent tendencies with regards to territories of interest, a clear reference to recent violations of sovereignty in Ukraine (Pompeo, 2019).

The third option appears to be what is actually developing currently in the Arctic. This course of action consists of a blended approach of the first two possible realities. This means that while the Kremlin clearly desires to make its military might known in the Arctic arena, the Federation has also demonstrated a genuine desire to cooperate along several soft-power related

vectors. Military buildup is often very obvious and tends to be ‘news worthy’ as the sensational appeal of inherent danger often associated with military-oriented topics grabs the attention of the public more readily; therefore, this aspect of Russian Arctic policy will receive attention first.

Pavel Baev, of the Oslo Peace Research Institute, points out that the Russian security narrative stems from an exaggerated perception of US aggression and presence in the ever more accessible Arctic Ocean (2019). This has provoked a sizeable buildup along the northern Federation coastline. Certainly, the need to protect their sizeable nuclear arms presence in the Kola Peninsula indeed requires some form of physical security establishment (Baev, 2019). The position of the Kola Peninsula presents a series of issues for relations among the northern nations. If one consults the geographic position of this land feature, it becomes clear that such a massive flexing of hard power capabilities in this vicinity might very well affect the security perception of the Nordic states. One of these states, Norway, belongs to NATO and two, Sweden and Finland, are members of the EU. This ties NATO and EU interests to an area closely associated with a perceived threat increase.

Russia has made substantial additions to its defense-in-depth security concept. With a robust anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) system comprised of submarines and surface vessels, ballistic missiles, and a bevy of S-400 *Triumph* surface-to-air missiles, there seems to be little reason to continue establishing a veritable ‘fortress of the north’ encompassing much of the Russian oceanic shoreline (Staalesen, 2017; Baev, 2019). And yet, according to the US Secretary of State, the Russian government has been working to create just that reality (Pompeo, 2019). Recently, a new Arctic command has been stood up by Moscow, signaling a serious shift in focus, alongside the establishment of four new Arctic brigade combat teams, fourteen airfields, sixteen deep-water ports and the continued maintenance of a fleet comprised of forty ice breakers with

more in development (Gramer, 2017). By comparison, the United States, with its sizeable stake in the Arctic region and gargantuan defense budget and economy when compared to the Russian Federation, possesses a mere two ice breakers (Gramer, 2017).

If this was not enough to cause concern, the Russians have taken an aggressive stance with regards to their military exercises of late. The world worried at the beginning of the 2017 Zapad exercise as to the true intentions behind such a large set of maneuvers (Reid, 2017). During this September event, the Russian military executed battle drills at the strategic level to counter a simulated invasion by NATO-member countries (Reid, 2017). Though this in itself was nothing new, the recent annexation of Crimea and unrest of eastern Ukraine only added to regional tensions as many nations considered the worst-case scenario. It is recognized that military exercises are held by major powers in order to accommodate several interests. Most obviously, the rehearsal of strategic operational plans ranks high on the priority list of security-related issues during times of peace, but the benefits don't stop there. Displaying strength to intimidate adversaries and reassure allies while simultaneously providing a means of illustrating regional influence by showcasing other armed forces who choose to join in such the multi-national efforts plays a large part in establishing a hierarchy of hard power capability.

The most recent of these Russian exercises, Tsentre, took place in September 2019. According to Russian news sources, maneuvers and rehearsals included 128,000 military personnel, 20,000 pieces of special military equipment (such as artillery and air defense systems), 600 aircraft and a sizeable naval force (Sukhankin, 2019). Of perhaps even greater significance was the cooperation of several nations, including China, India and most of the central-Asian nations collectively acting in concert within a multi-national joint task force (Sukhankin, 2019). Such demonstrations of military might appear to be increasing in size, complexity and

inclusiveness in a manner that seems specifically designed to counter potential NATO efforts. At this time, there appears to be no reason why these exercises will cease or diminish in size and scope.

*Figure 1*



Adding teeth to the US Secretary of State's comments at the 2019 Arctic Council conference, the Russian government has made several demands with regards to the rights of those seeking transit along the Northern Sea Route (see Figure 1). Currently, warships of foreign entities are allowed passage along this route that skirts along the northern coast of Russia, but only with prior authorization and approval from Russia (Aliyev, 2019). Shipping laden with hydrocarbons

could face even further restrictions if they are not of Russian origin (Aliyev, 2019). To add to the resistance that the West, and specifically the US, has towards these state-based limitations, the Russian government has stipulated that even sovereign warships, generally free of such security measures, must be willing to have Russian pilots board for inspections (Kozachenko *et al.*, 2019). To refuse such actions could result in Russian security forces applying ‘emergency measures up to the arrest or destruction of the vessel’ (Kozachenko *et al.*, 2019). This act of managing both commerce and military ship movement through these Arctic waters is a clear violation of freedom of navigation as the US sees it under its national policy of freedom within ‘the commons’ (Fahey, 2018).

While these actions illustrate Russia’s decidedly bellicose stance toward Arctic development and control of access to portions of associated waterways, this narrative constitutes only part of the story of Russian involvement within the confines of the Far North. One year after planting its national flag beneath the sea ice, Russia undertook a series of steps to integrate itself into a cooperative effort with other northern nations. In 2008, the Federation joined the other Arctic states within the Ilulissat Declaration, aiding significantly in establishing boundaries of access and control, reasserted the agreed upon UNCLOS (UN Convention on the Law of the Sea) and demonstrated a willingness to be a working member of the Arctic Council (Borgerson, 2013). Shortly thereafter, Norway and Russia settled a dispute concerning boundaries associated with the Svalbard Islands (Borgerson, 2013).

Another key manifestation of cooperative efforts stems from the harsh realities of the landscape north of the Arctic Circle itself. Due to the dangerous nature of the environment, ships, aircraft, and people who become stranded, lost, or suffer mechanical malfunction may quickly find themselves in a catastrophic situation. The preservation of citizenry and equipment from loss is a

desirable conclusion to such scenarios. However, the great distances and extremely austere considerations often render such efforts at recovery a task of great difficulty. Therefore, the Arctic nations have entered into several binding agreements wherein they will respond as necessary and in the most expeditious manner to distress calls under the auspices of search and rescue efforts regardless of nationalities involved (Stephenson, 2012). These arrangements create a dissonance when compared to the aggressive Russian posture often referred to by heads of state.

Indeed, Russia seems to be playing well with others if one observes these notable examples of cooperation. However, the military buildup and belligerent posturing associated with access control, nested with the ongoing desire for Russia to continue diversifying its economic portfolio, cannot be disregarded. It appears that Moscow would like to keep its options open, protect its northernmost border, and maintain its position as a regional-to-global level influence. Simultaneously, the Kremlin seeks to continue its role as a ‘team player’ within the Arctic Council and as an expert at Arctic maritime operations, to include being an integral member of such humanitarian-based efforts as search and rescue in notoriously harsh environments. This balance between realist tendencies and power-sharing influences presents a potential opportunity. The rest of this thesis consists of determining potential methods by which the West can ensure that the latter motivation becomes dominant in the eyes of Putin and his eventual successors rather than the former.

## CHAPTER 4: RE-ASSESSING NATO

Much has been written about the security posture of Russia over the years. A significant portion of this accumulated knowledge is anchored in modern international relations, but it is important to understand the role that identity plays in its myriad forms. To do this, the scope must expand somewhat. In the interest of time, this paper will barely begin to address the litany of works corresponding with this particular topic of ontological security studies. However, the idea of border integrity and expansion of territory in order to maintain a securitized populace as well as political stability is well maintained. For the past 500 years, Russia experienced invasive conquests and limited incursions from outside powers from the European west and from the steppe regions to the east and south. It was, in fact, the push to anchor the overly accessible Russian borders with defensible geographic features, which would block, re-route, or funnel potential attackers, that led to Ivan IV's expansion to the Ural Mountains, Caucasus Mountains, and the Caspian Sea (Ross, 2013).

A history significantly impacted by outside threats posing existential challenges to the state gained further reinforcement in the 1940s with the invasion by Germany and by France in the century prior. Undeniably, the distrust based on broken alliances and invasion by allies and modern, enlightened nations plays a role in modern Russian outlook. The Cold War, steeped in ideological differences and defined by the establishment of the NATO-Warsaw Pact standoff, certainly did not assist in thawing relations or changing this perception. Once the threat of Soviet domination in Central Asia and Eastern Europe dissipated in the early 1990s, the menace posed by

NATO not only persisted, but expanded ever eastward, consuming once-Soviet territories until it bordered the Federation itself.

This long-established dynamic of distrust only deepened after the Bush Sr. administration made assurances that NATO would cease further expansion efforts, assurances soon broken (Breslauer, 2013). Russia's leaders would not forget this betrayal and the proximity of the Western alliance became even more onerous for the Federation to bear. It is important to note that the influence of insecurity based solely on borders and land acquisition has waned over time. From Russia's standpoint, this holds especially true as it poses one of the few examples of sovereignty violation in recent decades. However, the uncertainty posed by NATO support to nations surrounding the Russian homeland, Western military exercises that grow in size and increasing in proximity to Russia itself, and an increasingly austere economic landscape due to the sanctions regime discussed earlier all converge to create a perilous scenario (Anon, 2018a). A narrative quickly emerges of a once proud and influential nation now under siege on many fronts by untrustworthy adversaries, eager to seize upon any opportunity detrimental to the motherland (Anon, 2018a). From a Western perspective, a continued push eastward with the most successful military alliance in history may seem a powerful coercive force to achieve desired objectives, but it may have had the reverse effect.

The continued push for NATO expansion, both in membership and in roles and responsibilities, by the West has not led to the peaceful outcomes associated with the organization's stated purpose (Zimmerman, 2001). Though there may have been a moment in time where the Federation considered the idea of joining the NATO alliance, that time has passed. By 1999, two-thirds of the Russian population considered the continued expansion unfavorably or very unfavorably (Anon, 2017a; Zimmerman, 2001). As a result of continued



NATO expansion, the Russian Military Doctrine of 2014 lists the buildup of NATO capabilities as the number one ‘external danger’ to the Federation (Baev, 2019).

George Kennan, a respected expert on Russian-American relations during the Cold War and post-Cold War period, stated with dismay that an expansion of the US-led NATO alliance would have detrimental consequences across the board (1997). He particularly emphasized that both the security and the ‘prestige’ of Russia would be under assault in the eyes of Russian citizens (1997). Kennan also posited that such a perceived threat would only lead to a militarized response and a turn away from the West in order to attain a desired end state (1997). Additionally, the ‘nation under siege’ narrative has most likely played quite a large role in enabling Putin in his quest for greater power as the executive. A proverbial wolf outside the door would fuel the popular belief that a strong leader is required to maintain security against a looming threat. Ironically, the democracy defending alliance may in fact be undermining democratization efforts underway in the Federation since the fall of communism. It would seem that the continued push for NATO membership and projection of its presence in a manner threatening to the Russian sense of security ultimately results in the realization of fewer desired outcomes. Rather, a series of undesirable symptoms emerge in a pattern disturbing to the Western observer.

Many still believe that NATO represents an essential requirement when dealing with the Federation, especially in areas of potential territorial dispute. This may be a mistaken assumption, however. First, recall that Putin openly bemoans the loss of the Soviet Union. There are many reasons for this, but not least of them is the loss of prestige, influence and safety enjoyed by the Soviet state during its heyday of nuclear standoff with the US. Many influences transpired to bring about the eventual downfall of the Soviet state, but undoubtedly one of the

most powerful and ever-present influences was NATO. This is not forgotten by much of the Russian populace. Second, the very purpose of NATO from the start was two-fold: to contain and resist communist expansion in Europe and to secure Europe for cooperation and prosperity, reinforced by the ideals of democracy and free market economics (SIS Faculty, 2018). This was an organization meant to undermine Soviet power expansion, and to defeat it by hard power means if necessary. Following the fall of the USSR, the Warsaw Pact crumbled and NATO began to gobble up ex-Soviet states to aid in their transition to democracy. While the notion of a military-based alliance system endures in Europe to promote cooperation, the main reason it does so is precisely due to a resurgent Russian threat (SIS, Faculty, 2018). There is no room for partnership with a perceived foe. NATO's automatic involvement in a delicate situation, such as Arctic development, would provide fuel to the proverbial fire rather than a soothing balm.

Despite this deep-seated enmity, cooperation has been attempted before. In 1997 the "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation" was signed, promising a new age of partnership between the historic adversaries. This hope proved ephemeral as the 1999 NATO-led bombing campaign in Yugoslavia dashed the fledgling cooperative spirit (Gorskii, 2001). Unfortunately, there currently exist too many conflicting interests and too entrenched a history of animosity between the Federation and NATO to ensure cooperative efforts above the Arctic Circle at this moment in time. It is hard to see how the Russian state would ever gladly cooperate with NATO efforts at present. Especially as it remains an organization whose main purpose is as a counterbalance to Russian power in the European theater.

When one empathizes with Russia's strategic position, the trend towards isolation and perception of pressures closing in on all fronts crystalizes further. All other nations with the

Arctic Ocean as a boundary are part of NATO; furthermore, they constitute active members in the Western-led sanctions regime against Russia. The significance of these states unified in punitive action should not be lost on the observer, especially when considering Russian militarization within the Far North. An examination of a map of the Arctic reveals that the Russian state appears more isolated and surrounded than ever on an increasingly vulnerable border as sea access becomes the new normal. Remember that part of the ontological 'suite' of belief touchstones is that even dangerous or hostile realities that fit within a familiar narrative are embraced if they maintain a comfortable status quo between oneself and the Other (Chernobrov, 2016). Therefore, it is logical to assume that unless the cycle resulting in continued distrust and stalemate is broken by one or both sides that this dynamic will continue within the Arctic Circle despite early indicators of cooperation (Chernobrov, 2016). For the Federation, these influences reinforce the narrative of the necessity of a defensive posture. The balance of power is to be maintained in an anarchic world comprised of opportunities to be seized and threats to be countered, a realist view of international relations made manifest.

So, what is to be done regarding NATO? There appears to be enough evidence to suggest that the ever-expanding alliance, though quite successful in many ways, has triggered the Russian populace and government into seeing a veritable boogeyman encroaching on their doorstep. Espen Barth Eide, Norway's Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated in a 2013 interview that NATO should be involved in the Far North because of the opportunities for cooperation to solve common issues that require complex solutions and due to the interest being taken by far flung communities well outside the NATO purview, such as China. He also argued that the emphasis should not be a military one but because there are interests of growing importance to the Arctic nations that cannot be ignored, the Far North should remain on NATO's 'watch list'

(Eide, 2013). Anna Wieslander, secretary general of the Swedish Defense Association, believes firmly that NATO must become more involved because no other institution deals with hard power security issues in that region (2019). She continues to support her stance by pointing to spillover effects of conflicts elsewhere influencing this new Arctic arena and by recognizing the possibility of a burgeoning great power race (Wieslander, 2019).

But why should this be? Primarily, the security concerns among the nations of the Arctic region have been economic or environmental related, not military. The recently released ‘Canadian Arctic and Northern Policy’ addresses eight key topics for consideration by the government, with only one of them relating to defense and security (2019). Canada has the second largest coastline shared by the Arctic Ocean. Yet even the defense and security portion of its Arctic Policy is dedicated largely to mitigation of environmental impacts associated with climate change, economic development as it pertains to improving the quality of life of Northern populations, and emergency management (2019). Undeniably, the growing importance of the Arctic becoming accessible would be a concern for those nations occupied with the development of resources and economic advantages associated with its rightful claims. However, the typical jockeying for position as the major power in the region rings hollow and may even be unnecessary in this case.

As stated previously, the Arctic provides far more opportunities for coming together than for establishing another realm of great power conflict. This is what the international community needs to seize upon. The nations of the Far North share many of the same values and the only outlier is Russia, this puts the neoliberal framework to the test as Russia demonstrates a willingness to cooperate within agreement frameworks and participates in international organizations. Already, the US and Russia have begun cooperating with regards to ship-routing

operations in the Bering Strait that divides the two powers (Sfraga and Brigham, 2018). Norway and Russian tensions regarding the Svalbard Archipelago have been intermittent the last decade or so, but there appears to be a willingness to negotiate and come to an agreement satisfactory to both parties (Closson, 2018). Though there remains a question over where control over this land mass begins and ends for Norway and Russia, who has some historic ties to this strategic location, this seems to be more centered around the NATO threat posed to its security rather than any serious desire to contest the ownership of the islands (Closson, 2018). One of the recent incidents that received the most coverage was the Russian *Elektron* fishing vessel that the Norwegian coast guard chased off and represents a policing effort over fishing rights rather than a military issue (Closson, 2018). This is hardly the manifestation of the hawks' belief that Russia will lay claim to vast swaths of Arctic land and seascape at the point of a gun if given the opportunity.

As for the conventional arms buildup, there are cracks appearing in the fearsome Russian visage. First, the Syrian conflict has not been a completely positive situation for Moscow. Putin's ally, Bashar al-Assad, has put Russia on the opposing side of a conflict with its ally, Turkey (Tharoor, 2020). The financial cost, loss of equipment, and requirement for maintenance and upkeep have been immense. Furthermore, a World Bank estimate in 2018 of energy amounting to 65% of total Russian exports, vulnerability to price fluctuation and its attendant financial crisis, persists despite efforts towards diversification (Ellyat, 2015; Anon, 2019a). This ties into the second crack in the narrative that Russia will only continue its aggressive militaristic expansion unchecked for the foreseeable future. The canary in the coal mine in this gloomy economic picture is the recent move by Moscow to detract from the Russian pension program by increasing the age of retirement (Bennetts, 2018). This led to a massive slide in Putin's approval

rating and a rare concession from the authoritarian leader regarding the retirement age for women as he attempts to shore up support while still promoting the message that austere economic measures must be taken to avoid a financial disaster (Bennetts, 2018). The contributing demographic forecast of an impending crisis as the population continues to decrease for various health reasons points towards a regional power with global ambitions, but in possession of clay feet (Haass, 2017; Bennetts, 2018).

The onset of the current coronavirus event sweeping through China, parts of Europe, Southeast Asia, Iran and the United States has taken a further toll. Oil prices have dropped substantially, Nissan has announced that it will suspend vehicle production in Russia if the developing situation becomes a pandemic, and Chinese tourism to the Federation has been put on hold until the situation changes (Sinelschikova, 2020; Standish and Johnson, 2020). The disruption of business with China threatens to undo \$110 billion in trade conducted in 2019 as Russian exports to China dropped by a third so far in 2020 and skyrocketing prices in foodstuffs, often imported from China, affects Russia's more vulnerable populations in the Far East (Simes, 2020). Alexey Belogoryev, deputy director of the energy studies at the Moscow Institute for Energy and Finance, claims that if the epidemic continues into June, 'then the price of oil will definitely fall below \$50 per barrel' (Simes, 2020). This has already occurred and oil traded at \$33 per barrel as of March, mostly due to an ill-advised oil standoff with Saudi Arabia (Standish and Johnson, 2020). While the full impact of this current outbreak remains unclear, the heightened vulnerability of the Russian economy to factors outside its control poses current and future uncertainty that must be taken into account. Furthermore, if the coronavirus has an impact relative to that which Italy, Spain, and the United States is currently experiencing, then the Putin administration may face its most serious challenge yet (Standish, 2020). These factors hardly

depict a rising world power ready to stake ambitious designs against a unified military and economic alliance.

Instead, these factors should illuminate a path forward towards cooperative efforts along several fronts within the Arctic realm. However, much of this hinges upon whether or not the West can coax Russia into making a choice that aligns with cooperation and not competition. It is impossible to know with complete certainty what the single, most important factor is involved in the calculus that must occur within the halls of the Kremlin to ensure this outcome. What is plain, however, is that the presence of its self-professed greatest security threat, NATO, will certainly be a part of these deliberations. Russia shows time and time again that in the face of a perceived threat it will prefer a show of strength rather than weakness. The reason for this consists of myriad motivations, but they each undoubtedly tie to its identity of self as well as to its ambitions. Therefore, it is logical to assume that the onus rests upon the West to determine the future of the operating environment in this scenario.

Given the defensive mindset of the Russian Federation, it seems unlikely that the expenditure in manpower, finance, and materiel towards the militarization of its north coast will be reversed and, in fact, there are no grounds to even expect such a move. Buildup does not necessarily mean intent for offensive or overtly aggressive action as seen in NATO exercises such as Trident Juncture or Russia's Zapad maneuvers. Furthermore, given the strains to the Federation's budget by overseas adventurism, economic trends, and demographic horizons already mentioned, the Russians are keenly aware of the fragility of their position. Therefore, it seems highly likely that cooperation will become much more palatable to the Kremlin, but it is essential that the West does not overlay its hand from its position of strength.

Along with the growing pains associated with the prospect of facilitating troubled nations into the NATO alliance, there must be a serious recalibration of what problematic areas should include the vaunted Article 5 protections afforded by membership (O’Hanlon, 2017). By overstretching the coverage of mutual assistance, there exists the possibility of a waning interest in the membership states’ respective populations in supporting military responses in distant parts of the world where national interest remains unclear (O’Hanlon, 2017). In an effort to maintain credibility and viability, the NATO team should carefully reconsider expanding operations within the Arctic in a hasty manner without obvious need.

With this in mind, the Arctic nations should consider the following:

First, Russia and her people perceive the threat of NATO, to be a real and present danger to the Federation and a constant reminder of how Russia is separate from the West, something that NATO expansion has done little to allay (Galliher, 2019). The potential for further expansion along Russia’s southern flank only exacerbates such concerns (Galliher, 2019). Whether or not these fears of NATO as an existential threat are at all founded in reality is beside the point. From the Russian perspective, it may seem as though the West wishes to force compliance to normative values, an end state which is probably more achievable by means other than coercion. To include the military alliance in operations north of the Arctic Circle could expand this threat along Russia’s northern boundary and needlessly aggravate the situation. Therefore, NATO should be the last tool utilized in an effort to stabilize relationships while simultaneously promoting an influential ‘spillover’ effect of norms and values associated with Western ideals.

Second, the Arctic nations should consider the Arctic Ocean a largely non-NATO zone. This does not imply NATO presence is absent as any non-Russian military element from an



Arctic state would be, by definition, part of the NATO alliance. Instead, military exercises and NATO-specific maneuvers should be kept below the Arctic Circle if possible. Does this require a power vacuum in the northerly reaches? Absolutely not. As Russia adopts pre-emptive measures along its more accessible northern coast, it should be expected that other nations will follow suit to varying degrees according to perceived need. This remains a sovereign right and should not be discouraged. Finally, this tactical withdrawal of alliance activity has long term strategic objectives and does not render the Arctic reaches defenseless against the potential machinations of Russia or other encroaching powers. As it turns out, significant deterrence capability remains close at hand. The US recently reinstated its airbase in Keflavik, Iceland, and continues to maintain its power projection platform in Thule, Greenland as well as bases in the UK and an Arctic training base in northern Norway (Bauke, 2018; Hussein, 2019). Halfway around the globe, Alaska presents a formidable platform for military projection as elements stationed there continually support allies and maintain airspace and maritime sovereignty. Military-based security in support of Western values and norms already exists, but it does not necessarily require the NATO 'brand', much less the furtherance of NATO-led exercises or presence which may unnecessarily fan the flames of discord.

Furthermore, none of this would necessitate a pullback from the normal duties of NATO as they currently stand. The continued threat posed by Russia is a reality that cannot be safely ignored. The Federation has demonstrated its desire to push the envelope as mentioned earlier in this thesis. There is no reason to suspect that an area of cooperation opening in one global arena would mean the shuttering of an area of potential conflict in another, at least not immediately or automatically. Such concerns should be met by the normal range of responses carried out by the NATO alliance. Areas such as the Baltics and Poland should continue to consider themselves

under the aegis of protection provided by Article 5. However, not every security situation requires warships and jet aircraft sorties to deliver a solution, which brings us to the final suggestion.

An essential part to fostering working relations should entail embracing the establishment of an Arctic policing force. It appears at this juncture that physical tensions within this geographic space are limited to issues best left to the relevant coast guards of the offended parties. As the Far North opens further to outside maritime presence, the need to maintain an effective status quo and procedures for safe passage and law-abiding economic activity will be paramount. By creating a law enforcement team comprised of all nations sharing portions of this global area, it would create a sense of common purpose, work towards relieving security-based tensions rooted in distrust, and maximize coverage within this difficult operating environment while encouraging an honest broker mentality by all partners.

Who should ensure that such a policing effort is coordinated and utilized appropriately? Fortunately, an organization already exists comprised of all the Arctic states. Through this internationally recognized organization, a host of issues would receive specifically tailored attention and solutions in an inclusive environment for all interested parties. The organization in question is, of course, the Arctic Council. The next section of this thesis briefly covers some of the issues that could be addressed by this supranational entity and how it is most suitably placed to address them.

## CHAPTER 5: THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

The information referenced here regarding the Arctic Council's organization and limitations comes directly from their website and is easily accessed at <https://arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us>. Currently, this deliberative body represents an intergovernmental forum facilitating cooperation, coordination, and interaction among its members. The nation-state members include: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the US. Chairmanship works on a rotational basis and lasts two years. Iceland holds the position at this time. Membership also includes six Permanent Participants representing indigenous peoples residing within the Arctic Circle, as well. These organizations actively give voice to nations within the borders of Scandinavia, Canada, the US, and Russia. The Council is comprised of six working groups primarily focused on the efforts targeting sustainable development of infrastructure, environmental preservation, and conservation of wildlife and habitat; however, there exists the possibility of establishing specific task forces as required.

For the purposes alluded to in the previous section, limitations exist on the operating boundaries placed upon this organization and they must be addressed if any serious consideration is to be contemplated. First, and most obviously, the Arctic Council's mandate explicitly precludes involvement in military security issues. This should not change. As the efforts mentioned above include operations of a policing nature generally addressed by the various nations' coast guard capabilities, the absence of military response makes no difference to the

recommended approach. Second, no mechanisms currently exist by which this organization implements or enforces its guidelines. However, this does not necessarily degrade the effectiveness of the Council either as this is already a voluntary organization into which all Arctic states claim membership and should remain without the possibility of ‘taking sides’ in an effort to remain objective. Finally, the reality of the Arctic Council is that it is simply a forum at this point and, therefore, has no allocated budget with all programs receiving funding from the states that choose to sponsor programs of interest. This, of perhaps all the limitations, comprises the biggest hurdle as there would be a requirement for consistent staffing, positions of adjudication, and professionals on hand to coordinate, advise, and communicate efforts from this leadership hub.

The Arctic Council has already enjoyed significant success. It has enabled the forging of agreements and made inroads with international problem sets in the past and is currently re-assessing its future role in the ever-changing environment it has catered to since the mid-1990s (Exner-Pirot *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, it is ideally situated for adjudicating and facilitating discussion between involved parties without being tied to national loyalties and hard power politics. This has enabled its resiliency over the years and facilitated the respect it receives from members states and observers (Exner-Pirot *et al.*, 2019). This created a separation from the geopolitical woes plaguing much of the world involving Russia and the West. This aspect of the organization should be preserved if at all possible. Despite the standoff between these two entities in so many areas, great strides have been accomplished in the areas of search and rescue (SAR), oil pollution preparedness and response, and scientific cooperation due to the utilization of the Arctic Council’s unique capabilities (Exner-Pirot *et al.*, 2019).

Arctic SAR, environmental change, oil and transit pollution response, and fishing rights comprise several of the topics of negotiation which the Council has enabled and within which its members have found common ground within a relatively apolitical working environment. Even Vladimir Putin, who is sometimes known to react less enthusiastically to the admonitions of climate change advocates, has seemingly begun to take heed of these predictions as he agreed to participate in the Paris Climate Accords (Bershidsky, 2019; Putin, 2019). This and some of the Arctic-specific agreements already mentioned, may well be part of a realist approach by Putin in order to establish Russia as a respectable neighbor and steward of nature while the topic makes front headlines in the West (Ananyeva, 2019). Certainly, the desire to join an organization in which Russia's voice receives weight and attention, especially as a cooperative member, provides a potential avenue for illustrating Russia's willingness to be an honest broker as well as a fundamental lead in issues of global consequence. Regardless of the true intentions behind Moscow's actions in agreeing to these limiting acts of legislation, it isn't the motivation that matters as much as the interaction and the establishment of agreed upon norms and values that become habitual over time. These, in turn, create avenues for potential change in other areas which the liberal ideology would uphold. The repeated act of gaining a cooperative partner in Russia along lines of international concern is a step in the right direction.

However, if these steps are to continue with meaningful effectiveness, the Arctic Council must reconsider its future role in substantial ways. At the moment, it acts as a pseudo nonprofit organization enabling discussion as a 'decision-shaper' rather than a 'decision-maker' (Wilson, 2016). But this won't be enough with the future landscape drawing closer. Though respected as a forum for Arctic affairs, it needs to recalibrate in certain areas if it is to maintain its effectiveness and steer the direction of development and interface between nations' interests and vulnerable

territories. Such measures must be taken if it is to make a difference in redirecting the path of future affairs in such a way that maximizes peaceful coexistence and minimizes detrimental impact to the environment. At present, the Council is largely what the individual states wish it to be as that is a direct reflection of how they interact and compromise. The continued participation in agreements facilitated by the Council is due to the members of the Council themselves, not the Council as an entity. This represents a crucial change requirement moving forward.

The Council must firmly align its ways and means with its strategic ends in order to establish concrete goals and objectives. Without this, efforts towards change will be harder to attain and may lead to an overall aimlessness. In 2017 it was reported that there were 100 projects being undertaken, ranging from a migratory bird initiative, separate from the seabird program, to education in the northern latitudes (Balton and Ulmer, 2019). While this reflects the noble intentions of the Council, this also illustrates the overwhelming breadth of concerns addressed as well as the lack of clarity and inability to close out these myriad initiatives. To counter this, an expansion in facilities and personnel, comprised of participants of all Arctic states, will be necessary. Further funding will also be required by member states in capacities they agree upon, GDP may be a good starting reference point.

As for security, some of this has been addressed already. The use of coast guard elements for enforcement of laws and international sovereignty rights should remain firmly in place, but the methods should shift from purely national to international, cooperative efforts. Another option could be the establishment of an Arctic-specific law enforcement agency, potentially modelled off INTERPOL. Given the unique operating environment and associated challenges, requiring specialized equipment and procedures, such a decision would be justified. Regardless, there are several solutions to meet the need. For now, this decision should be left up to the

Council and member states to determine whether the Arctic Council will receive reinforcement and expand its roles and responsibilities. This would strengthen and deepen ties among nations taking part and would also work towards keeping security efforts squarely within the non-military realm of operations. Some claim that military assets are necessary to meet the requirements posed by the harsh environment of the Arctic and this may prove true at times. However, these should be exceptions and should be utilized as clear interpretations of enforcement, rescue, or recovery within agreed upon measures associated with recognized legislation, such as within standing Arctic SAR agreements (Wilson, 2016). As the Arctic continues to open, more resources are expected to be redirected to these northerly regions. Already, the US is well underway in adding to its meager fleet of ice breakers which will fall under the aegis of its national coast guard.

This will obviously require a change in how the Council goes about establishing legal constraints on its power. The Council's inception occurred during a period of calm, where disputes were settled with relative ease. Any past legal constraints could be sidestepped by utilizing the UNCLOS, the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS), or in agreements brokered via the Council forum (Wilson, 2016). There is reason to believe that the growing complexity of an unfrozen ocean expanse would undermine such certainties quickly, with under-powered and under-resourced institutions playing catch-up after tensions flare. By taking proactive steps now, such an outcome can be avoided. Heather Conley notes that incidents such as the Shell North Sea oil spill and the recovery of a Boeing 737 by Canadian SAR teams, both occurring in 2011, provide examples wherein the current framework simply does not meet the need established by the emerging situation (2012). The proposed use of NATO by many, due

largely to assets available and territory controlled by NATO members, as the means to meet these growing needs should be resisted if at all possible (O'Rourke, 2013).

Coordination and agreement of efforts in responses to threats to the environment, humanity, commerce and sovereignty is a necessity. While maintaining individual states' freedoms within this region of the world must be enticing, the benefits of hammering out a conclusive treaty-based organization wherein rules and laws can be enacted effectively will surely see greater results in the long run. States desire to be part of programs and institutions wherein their voices can be heard and needs addressed, even if they must be compromised upon. If such an organization could be created out of the respected foundations and relationships forged already by the Arctic Council, those involved already would very well continue to utilize it as a method to create that shared understanding and focused mindset the Arctic demands.

At this juncture, it may seem desirous that the US utilize its international influence to leverage against this difficulty. However, it must be kept in mind that the US does not make a habit of ratifying treaties due to self-imposed limitations. Some observers conclude that this stems from simple hubris or from a desire to maintain operational 'wiggle room' to ensure that any agreements aligned with its desired worldview. The truth is a bit more complicated as any treaty would, according to the US Constitution, require approval of the President and two-thirds of the Senate to be accepted. Though this is certainly an institutional obstacle, it is hardly impossible to clear. Of more significance to the US, any treaty so ratified would be considered as binding as the Constitution itself. This would mean that the US could be held accountable far more effectively than other nations who have been historically eager to align themselves with such processes without significant consequence attached should they fail to meet goals or agreed-upon metrics (e.g. Paris Climate Accords, Kyoto Protocol, UNCLOS, etc.) (Murray,



2017). Therefore, it would be best to socialize that support via ratification of a proposed treaty would be an impractical expectation from the US standpoint. That being said, such agreements should influence a significant part of the US' Arctic Strategy as it recalculates the importance of the Far North, the Arctic Council, and the end state which could be achieved by utilizing more carrot and less stick.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The drastic reduction in the thickness and extent of ice in the Arctic Ocean presents the world with opportunities for both conflict and cooperation. The Arctic states find themselves ideally poised to deal with such eventual collisions or merging of interests. However, this will only prove the case if they act swiftly and in unison. The question of how best to deal with this emergent situation will remain for some time within both academia and in the halls of governments.

This paper examined the contentious relationship between Russia and the Western sanctions regime. By utilizing this specific example, the current parameters within which both parties have operated for the past five years is established. The fact that this reality also extends throughout the coming Arctic expansion is why this case study provides such a unique example of how to overcome this gridlock. Realism and liberalism play out against each other in various ways south of the Arctic Circle, but, within this northern field of potential, the desire to cooperate and gain via consensus seems more attainable than ever.

There may be several ways to come about such a desirable conclusion, but this paper examines two paths specifically: the reassessment of NATO and a significant reconsideration of the Arctic Council. These two solution-based approaches should be considered with the long-term benefits in mind. Furthermore, the author considers it best if they can be applied simultaneously and not out of synch. By resisting the urge to recklessly plunge into the Arctic with NATO at the helm, the states arrayed at the northern-most points of the globe may be able

to achieve what decades of stand-off and posturing have not. Likewise, by re-evaluating the purpose and design of the Arctic Council an organization with organic buy-in and experience in this particular arena may emerge as the new norm-establishing entity, accomplishing real change and enforcing agreed upon rules as an impartial adjudicator. True progress in a geospatial area vulnerable to many global problem sets would surely have cascading effects beneficial to far more than the primary Council member states.

By taking real steps to dismantle the cycle of established actor roles for other states, we can make serious inroads into disrupting the back and forth of standoff and reflexive posturing for position on the international stage. NATO is perceived as the enemy of Russia and it has been utilized as a major tool of the West to reduce the influence and relative power of the Federation. If the roles were reversed, how willing would the West be to make conciliatory gestures and invest trust in an organization seemingly set on the reduction of national prestige with armored brigades, nuclear-laden missiles, and menacing aircraft? Strength is respected, there is no doubt. But much of the perceived need for such displays of hard power stems directly from the self-serving cycle that these weapons were created to deter. If the Arctic is eventually to become another geospatial side show of business as usual between the two adversaries, then so be it. But there is no reason to force this outcome without giving alternative possibilities a fighting chance.

When one considers the Cold War and the brushes with existential disaster faced by the world, one must also consider what brought us back from the brink of mutual annihilation. Many today claim that Mutually Assured Destruction would keep the specter of nuclear holocaust at bay. However, when the world came closest to releasing these horrific weapons upon one another, during the Cuban Missile Crisis and Operation Able Archer, it was the human element that averted the worst of outcomes from transpiring. Diplomacy and individual actors turned the

tide and avoided the collision that seemed all but inevitable in both scenarios. As Alexander Wendt put it, “Anarchy is what states make of it” (Collins, 2014). Though anarchy and its attendant uncertainty may be unavoidable, it can be transcended through interaction, understanding, and developing new certainties (Collins, 2014). Ultimately, it was not the weapons designed for destruction, but rather the people willing to break the wheel of distrust and incomplete understanding that pulled the world back from the brink of nuclear war. Such may prove the case in this untouched and yet non-politicized part of the globe.

Some will consider this too rosy a picture to seriously consider and that to trust an aggressive Russia would reflect naivety. But this plan does not do away with security at the military level completely. As mentioned previously, nations would retain coastal and waterway security measures and should be encouraged to do so in the coming decades. As for NATO, it will not disappear as it currently stands ready from multiple access points to surge northward if necessary. This should not change. A robust response capability is essential as an emergency measure, but, as one would not use a fire extinguisher before a fire has begun, such a capability would be counterproductive without obvious need. By doing so, cooperation would be less coerced and more voluntarily carried out.

Instead of the military, a policing force should be established. In line with this effort, the Arctic Council must reassess its future role. If it chooses to remain an ineffective instrument to enforce policies, treaties, and recognized law, then another viable alternative should be developed. The Council, however, already provides many qualities making it eminently preferable to this secondary option. Its years of activity, rotating chairmanship, entrenched policies and legitimacy as a fair and recognized forum for negotiation and problem solving lend itself to a larger role. Funding will be necessary and the primary states associated with it must

see this as an investment well-made given the potential benefits. Through this central hub of authority, policing activity, regulation development, environmental response, and SAR efforts can be coordinated and effectively managed within a unique climate. This consistent interchange of ideas, representation, and equal footing among other nation-states would be ideal for bringing Russia in line with regulations and values associated with the West. By enabling Russia to step up to the table and become a part of something larger than itself within a liberal institution, real change could be affected. Such change would likely lead to a warming of relations in other matters as well. It is important to remember what Russia has done in the past to invoke the distrust of the West, but it is just as important to remember what Russia is currently and how it may become a better version of itself if given the chance.

The Soviet Union existed as a diametrically opposed entity, designed to spread its ideology and system of oppression further. There was a time for implacable standoff, but that time is not now and this is not the Soviet Union. Putin certainly desires a strong Russia, but that is understandable. The breakup of the USSR was humiliating, disruptive and painful in many ways. But this, again, provides another opportunity to embrace and not coerce with guns, bombs, and jets. Historically, the hard power method has not met with much meaningful success outside of blatant conflict. The Arctic does not provide a panacea to the woes associated with Western and Russian relations, but the possibility of enabling Russia to take control of its future within guidelines it willingly adopts should be seized upon. Russia, secure in a new understanding and dynamic, may find a renewed sense of purpose by turning north collaboratively and achieve that which it has sought since the early 1990s: a place among equals with real influence, security, and standing. The possibility of a way forward promoting liberalism and progressivism while achieving ends for all sides is one that the West would be short-sighted to ignore. The

recommendations in this paper are not the unequivocal answer to the complicated environment within which the world operates today; however, they will surely generate a thought process through which we might achieve positive outcomes together as we face regional challenges with global consequences.

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