

**Russian State Policy in the Arctic: Ambitions and Challenges**

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## Introduction

Perceptions of the Arctic region of the Russian Federation are as diverse as the area is vast. To outsiders looking in, the region is often seen as an inaccessible or hard to define expanse that for much of history has received comparatively little attention. However, for millions of Russian citizens, the Arctic is home, whether they be recent economic migrants or indigenous groups whose existence in the region date to prehistory. The Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF), as it is officially referred to by the Kremlin, is home to numerous ethnic groups, including the Saami, Karelians, Nenets, Komi, Yakuts, Dolgans, Evenks, Even, Chuckchi, and others, all of whom live alongside ethnic Russians who themselves arrived in the far North across several historical periods and for various reasons.

For Russian and Soviet governments in modern history, the region has represented both an underexploited and potentially unsecured periphery of its territory. The present administration of President Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin has not bucked this long-standing perception of the Far Northern regions of Russia and has devoted increasing amounts of political capital and state resources towards efforts to develop the Arctic across several spheres. With the approval of the “Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic in the Period to 2035” policy document by President Putin in March 2020, Moscow’s policy on the region is increasingly defined and methodical in the pursuit of goals related to regional economic development, demographic stabilization, and a renewal of Russian military infrastructure across the Far North.

While the policy areas of interest to the present generation of leadership in Moscow are not new and have their roots in priorities faced by the Soviet and even Imperial governments of Russia, many of the specific circumstances which have prompted the adoption of new guiding

doctrine and policies are more unprecedented. Significant among these is the question of what the accelerating pace of climate change will mean for the region and its environment. While this presents new challenges with regards to regional ecological issues, the Kremlin's renewed interest in the region is also tied to opportunities it sees as opened by global climate change itself. Most notably, an emerging interest in Moscow in the so-called Northern Sea Route (NSR) has only become possible with the retreat of year-round Arctic sea ice cover and longer periods of sea ice melt during the year. Deeply negative demographic trends are also an unprecedented factor relevant to Russian state interests in the Arctic today. Since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of its policy of relocating citizens from elsewhere to work in Arctic locations and industries, Arctic municipalities and federal subjects have experienced significant declines in population. Depopulation trends are of significant concern to the Russian federal government, as Moscow has both identified such trends as a principal threat to Moscow's interests in the Arctic and has accordingly assigned high priority to policy efforts to halt this decline.

Given the significant wealth in natural resources located in the Arctic regions of Russia, it is no surprise that Moscow encourages investment into hydrocarbon and mineral extraction efforts in the Arctic through assistance to private and state-owned natural resource companies alike. Numerous natural gas and oil extraction projects spearheaded by companies such as Novatek and Gazprom have either been completed in the past decade or are under active development. These include the development of the Prirazlomnaya oil field, the development of natural gas extraction capabilities like that of the Yamal liquefied natural gas (LNG) project, and the recently announced gargantuan Vostok Oil project, among others. However, development efforts are severely hampered by sanctions on technology usage and Arctic oil project financing

by the United States and other Western countries, which limits the transferal of critical modern drilling and extraction technologies to aid in new energy projects in the Russian Arctic. In an effort to circumvent these sanctions, Moscow has been able to solicit international interest from parties in China, India, Japan, Singapore, and other East Asian countries to provide similar financial and technological support. Despite these obstacles, Arctic energy development remains a priority for the Kremlin in the Arctic and will continue to attract significant policy attention in the future.

With the rapid pace of energy and natural resource extraction in the Arctic regions of Russia comes a significant ecological cost that presents itself frequently with industrial mishaps as well as through the gradual changes that stem from global climate change. Indeed, many Russian policy goals and regional achievements would not have been considered at all without the significant changes which have swept the Arctic that are rooted in climate change. For example, Russian hopes for accelerated development and heightened usage of the NSR would not be considered if historical ice levels in the Arctic Ocean and peripheral Arctic seas had remained unchanged. Even as this illustrates the rapid pace of Arctic ecological change and damage itself, news on the Russian Arctic is frequently punctuated by industrial and mining mishaps that result in significant local ecological damage. Several such accidents in 2020 have even attracted the attention of Federal Assembly legislators, whose ire has been brought to bear against companies like Nornickel, as their Arctic operations have been marked by a series of recent ecological disasters. Issues of ecological damage will remain relevant to Russian development of the Arctic so long as its emphasis on rapid development is maintained.

Russian state policy maintains that a core aspect of its interests in the Arctic is the need to be insulated from threats emanating from the Far North. While Russian overtures for a peaceful

state of affairs between Arctic powers is welcomed by other states in the region, Moscow nonetheless expresses fears about what it sees as emergent threats to its security environment in the area. These fears are both expressed in written policy as well as concrete actions taken to reactivate Soviet-era bases in the Arctic and especially along the route of the NSR. Given the critical role which the Northern Fleet serves in Russia's nuclear triad, it is not a surprise that Moscow is interested in continual reinforcement of its Arctic territories. Since the Kremlin views its heightened attention to military issues in the Arctic as primarily defensive policy, related efforts are centered around ensuring that the Northern Fleet has full operational freedom along the Russian Arctic coast, and that the fleet has a free hand to accomplish its nuclear deterrent mission in and around the Barents Sea. The Kremlin also seeks to join the reinforcement of Russia's military posture in the Arctic with a campaign in relevant multilateral bodies to secure international recognition for the extension of its continental shelf claims. While the status of the Russian Arctic as a weaker link in Russia's sovereignty and security environment may not be as urgent as it is perceived by the Kremlin, efforts to double down on the Russian military's presence in the region will continue to be a substantial element of Russian Arctic policy for years to come.

For the purposes of this analysis, the collection of regions designated by the 2014 "Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation" decree<sup>1</sup> signed by President Putin, shall be defined henceforth as the Russian Arctic. This defined area includes parts of every Russian federal subject adjacent to the Arctic Ocean, and encompasses Murmansk Oblast, the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, and the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug in full. In addition, municipalities and districts of the Republic

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<sup>1</sup> "On the Land Territories of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation." 2014. Office of the President of the Russian Federation. <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/acts/files/0001201405050030.pdf>.

of Karelia, Komi Republic, Sakha Republic, Krasnoyarsk Krai, and Arkhangelsk Oblast are individually included in the “Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation” while other districts within



**Опорная зона** – экономический инструмент развития, который предусматривает создание благоприятного режима ведения хозяйственности на этих территориях

“В законе об Арктике забыли про людей [People are forgotten in the Law on the Arctic].” 2016. *Parlamentskaya Gazeta* - Publication of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. November 29, 2016. <https://www.pnp.ru/social/2016/11/29/v-zakone-ob-arktike-zabyli-pro-lyudey.html>.

them are not included.

Additionally, the “lands and islands located in the Arctic Ocean” which fall under

Russian sovereignty are

defined as being part of this

specially defined zone. This

wide definition of the

Russian Arctic as delineated by the Kremlin will be used for the purpose of this analysis.

Given the wide scope of Russian interest in the Arctic, this research is grounded in a similarly wide set of source materials, ranging from primary source documents on Russian priorities in the Arctic, to academic or journalistic analysis of Moscow’s Arctic policy. The starting point of this analysis is the policy document “Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic in the Period to 2035” (“Foundations of State Policy”). The document is wide-reaching in its scope and covers Moscow’s stated policy priorities related to national security, social development, infrastructural development, economic development, environmental protection, international partnership, border security, and public security in the Arctic region. In addition to attention to these topics, the document also details and assesses the main challenges to Russian national security priorities in the Arctic. “Foundations of State Policy” provides an excellent starting point for further research since it details Russian priorities across many different policy areas.

Marlène Laruelle's 2014 book "Russia's Arctic Strategies and The Future of the Far North" provides an excellent foundation for analysis of Russian state policy in the Arctic. The book takes a wide and critical look at the state of affairs of the Russian Arctic with regards to different policy areas. Chapters three, seven, and eight, which focus on issues of demographic issues, natural resources, and Arctic shipping respectively, have been of particular help in research related to the application of Russian policy in the Arctic. Laruelle's work serves to provide a wide context to the geopolitical, environmental, physical, and demographic environment which Russian Arctic policy operates in.

English and Russian language academic analysis alike have proven to be very helpful in the evaluation of the implementation of Russian policy in the Arctic. Russian-language academic journals attached to universities across Russia aided in the identification of the key elements of Russian Arctic policy and also provided useful discussion of how Russian military, energy, and economic policy have been implemented. These journals include the Bulletin of Transbaikalian State University and the Bulletin of Moscow State Regional University. In addition to these Russian-language academic articles, English-language academic writing from institutions in both the United States and Europe have also proven to be helpful for similar reasons. These include the European University at St. Petersburg's ENERPO journal, the Journal of Slavic Military Studies, the journal Energy Policy, the Polar Journal, and the journal Armed Forces & Society. Research from think tanks such as CSIS, the Jamestown Foundation, and Chatham House have also proved to be critical in understanding the functioning of Russian Arctic policy, particularly that which is related to recent military developments in the Arctic.

Journalistic sources occupy a very important part in this research into Russian state policy in the Arctic, as they are most active in monitoring the implementation of such policy.

Chief among these is the Norway-based Independent Barents Observer, whose coverage of the Russian Arctic is unparalleled by any other journalistic publication. The publication is very helpful with regards to research related to security, economic, and environmental topics connected to Russian state policy in the Arctic, and reliably provides research, analysis, and journalistic reporting which is focused on the region. Publications which have a wider focus on Russian news more broadly such as RIDDLE Russia and the Moscow Times also are helpful through their occasional coverage of Arctic events and issues. Russian state-owned news publications proved to be useful as ways to glean information on what priorities or Arctic issues the Russian government seeks to emphasize or publicize, which is linked with the implementation and development of Russian policy. The analysis in this paper also relies on other Russian- and English-language publications which focus on broader policy areas that tie into research into the Russian Arctic.

This research would not have been possible without the helpful advice and guidance of my thesis advisor, Professor Richard Bidlack of the Russian Area Studies Program and History Department of Washington and Lee University. In addition, Professor Seth Cantey of the Washington and Lee Politics Department served as the second reader for this project and provided helpful input. Professor Anna Brodsky, Director of Russian Area Studies at Washington and Lee University, provided the advanced language instruction to the author needed to make meaningful use of Russian-language policy and academic writing. Beyond the advice and evaluation provided by these faculty members at Washington and Lee, the expertise of Ambassadors Kenneth Yalowitz and David Balton were invaluable towards improving the author's understanding of Russian state policy in the Arctic with regards to regional economic development and Russian maritime continental shelf claims, respectively. Paul Goble's expertise



on issues pertaining to the periphery of the Russian state also provided a valuable foundation for further research.

As the effects of climate change significantly alter the physical reality of the Russian Arctic and the Arctic Ocean, Russian efforts to secure and develop the Arctic will continue indefinitely, if not increase in magnitude and frequency. The present day in the Russian Arctic represents a unique point in the history of the region, where the long-standing perceived interests of the Russian state are being pursued in a local and international environment that is rapidly evolving in ways both positive and negative for the application of Russian policy. Since the interests of Russia and its Arctic neighbors will frequently compete in the near- and long-term future, it is critical that policymakers in other Arctic states operate with a strong understanding of the main drivers of Russian state policy in the Arctic. This research seeks to provide a wide view of Russian policy across the most important policy spheres of interest to the Russian state in the Arctic in the hope that it can improve how people who take interest in the Arctic understand the main motivations of Russia in the region, and the main ways Moscow hopes to pursue those priorities. If such an understanding is well-established, it will be possible to maintain the relatively peaceful and cordial nature of the multilateral relationship between Arctic states with regards to the Arctic region.

Russian Arctic policy today represents a broad intensification of efforts to both shore up its existing presence in the region, and to take full advantage of the assumed economic and commercial value of the Russian Far North. While the trends which shape Russian Arctic policy have their roots in Soviet, Imperial Russian, or even medieval Muscovite priorities in the region, efforts to ground Russian Arctic policy in a more ambitious approach have taken form in policy documents such as “Foundations of State Policy.” Given Moscow’s belief that the Arctic region

is a potential economic engine for the rest of the country, a significant source of natural resources and energy to fuel Russia's hydrocarbon-based economy, and a major trade artery in the making, it does not come as a surprise that its Arctic policy has received such priority. Actions related to the reinforcement of Russian military infrastructure in the Arctic and attempts to secure international recognition for its claims over a wider share of the Arctic Ocean through continental shelf claims are often labelled as direct threats to Russia's Arctic neighbors, although a probable explanation for such actions is that Moscow seeks to demonstrate its control over its northern flank in a more narrow, inward-facing sense. In the future, Russian state policy in the Arctic will continue to emphasize development of the region as a means to promote wider economic growth, and high priority will be assigned to ensuring that Russian interests in the region are secure from both outside threats and local challenges presented by population decline and ecological damage.

## **Chapter I: Historic Foundation of Russian Interests in the Arctic**

The Russian Arctic as a region has been inhabited by a variety of ethnic groups for centuries before the inclusion of the region into Russia and its historical predecessors. Russian merchants affiliated with the medieval republic of Novgorod were the first elements of what would become Russia's presence in the Arctic to come to the High North. These merchants were primarily interested in the development of the fur trade in the far North, which they sought to connect to the Hanseatic trade network in the Baltic region.<sup>2</sup> Due to the disinterest of these merchants in the expansion of Novgorod's direct rule into these fur-trading regions, Novgorod did not seek to supplant the local social, political, and religious structures maintained by the

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<sup>2</sup> Kappeler, Andreas. 2001. *The Russian Empire: A Multi-Ethnic History*. 1st ed. London: Routledge. 14-15.

Sami, Karelians, Samoyeds, and Komi, despite the occasional use of armed violence by the Novgorodians to advance their trade interests as well as to ensure the continued payment of tribute by these groups.<sup>3</sup> The Sami, Karelians, Samoyeds, and Komi are all Finno-Ugric peoples, whose historical geographic dispersion is entirely understood through linguistic means due to a lack of substantial related archaeological material.<sup>4</sup> The Sami, Komi, and Karelians all have survived to the present day, while the Samoyeds are represented today by their descendants, the Nenets, Enets, and Nganasan groups. Novgorodian fur-trading interests were concentrated around Karelia, the Kola Peninsula, and later beyond the Dvina, Mezen', and Pechora rivers, eventually reaching the Northern Urals by the year 1200.<sup>5</sup>

Muscovy's conquest of Novgorod by Ivan III in 1478 presaged a new era of stronger Russian interests in its peripheral regions, especially including the Far North. With the proclamation of the Russian Tsardom in 1547, Russia began to expand the field of its Arctic interests ever-eastward, eventually culminating in the exploration of the Alaskan coast by 1741. This early expansion was still largely based on the pursuit of economic interests, but early expansions beyond the Ural Mountains was also driven by the business interests of the powerful Stroganov family, whose involvement in the salt and fur trades formed a semi-autonomous operation in the Far North.<sup>6</sup> As the Pacific Ocean had been reached by Russian explorers in 1680, Peter the Great financed many expeditions in the Far East, especially around the Kamchatka Peninsula.<sup>7</sup> Funded by the Tsar, the Captain Vitus Bering of Denmark led the Great

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 15-17.

<sup>4</sup> Honko, Lauri. n.d. "The Finno-Ugric Peoples." In Encyclopedia Britannica. Britannica Group, Inc. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Finno-Ugric-religion#ref65422>.

<sup>5</sup> Slezkine, Yuri. Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North. Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1994. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 34.

<sup>7</sup> Laruelle, Marlène. 2014. Russia's Arctic Strategies And The Future Of The Far North. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe. 25.

Northern Expedition between 1733 and 1743, which was the most extensive attempt to map and explore the Arctic coast of Eurasia and Western North America to date.<sup>8</sup> It was also in this period that St. Petersburg began to discuss the possibility that the Pacific could be reached by sea through the Arctic Ocean, but no further action was taken to define such a route in practice. This period saw the Russian state establish more formal control over the Far North in pursuit of its economic interests, which would also be joined by a desire to spread the Russian Orthodox Church to these newly acquired northern territories. These priorities of St. Petersburg in the region were largely confined to the pursuit of certain trade goods, limited proselytization, and exploration, which meant that the Tsar's power in the Far North was limited to the spheres of economic and religious interests.

In a break from the medieval approach towards local peoples of the Russian Arctic that saw these groups enjoy significant autonomy to continue their cultural and political practices, Peter the Great introduced the use of Orthodox missionaries to both achieve spiritual goals of the empire in the region, as well as to cement Russian control in a more official manner. These missionaries were the most direct link between the Russian state and the peoples of the Far North by the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and their aggressive pace of conversions was encouraged by Peter's government as a way to culturally align the peoples of the region with the rest of the empire.<sup>9</sup> Alongside these attempts to proselytize these groups, the Russian state also supported scientific projects to understand the peoples, geography, and natural resources of the Arctic region, all with an eye on the integration of these regions more closely into the empire as well as for future economic and trade projects.<sup>10</sup> Efforts to mandate Western cultural practices among

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Slezkine, Yuri. *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*. Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1994. 50-51.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 53-57.

the Cossacks and local peoples of the Far North as well as attempts to reform the tribute payment system by 1730 were not immediately successful and were partially walked back.<sup>11</sup> Although Russian control over the Far North had expanded significantly since Russian explorers reached the Pacific in 1680, the frustration of Peter the Great's attempts to socially develop the peoples and regions of the Arctic ultimately showed how fragile Russian power in the region was. However, these attempts by Peter the Great to rapidly shift cultural and social realities in the Arctic would not be the last attempt to influence this sphere, as the later Soviet government would attempt the similar rapid cultural changes.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Russia continued to explore the Far North and tightened its control over its Arctic territories, even though higher priority was assigned to other peripheral parts of the empire. As time went on, local peoples of the Arctic began to see their trades absorbed into or supplanted by private Russian economic and trade interests, and started to interact in certain cases with outside economic interests in the region, such as trade between American merchants and the Chukchi.<sup>12</sup> Peoples across the Arctic such as the Chukchi also began to see their societies organized on Russian terms based on the top-down imposition of clan affiliations for tax purposes by local Russian administrations. Bottom-up shifts to sedentary Russian lifestyles via participation in the Russian money-based economy through fishing, trapping, and working directly for Russian merchants came hand-in-hand with the establishment of the ownership of Russian-style houses and imported tools as status symbols.<sup>13</sup> For the first time, Russian territory in the Arctic shrunk in 1867 with the sale of Alaska to the United States of America, as the colony had become unprofitable and untenable due to the depletion of otter

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 60-61.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 101.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 100-102.

populations which were critical to the fur trade, and the extreme distance from the political center of the empire.<sup>14</sup> Although Russian and other explorers were as active as ever in the Arctic Ocean north of Siberia, there was a general disinterest in issues which pertained to the region in Russian public opinion, despite the discovery of Franz Josef Land and other locations in the region.<sup>15</sup> In keeping with modern activity in attempts at assertion of sovereignty over new swathes of the Arctic, the Tsarist government attempted to demonstrate Russian control over the Kara Sea and Novaya Zemlya and tried to stake a partial claim over Svalbard through dispatching the icebreaker *Yermak* there in 1899.<sup>16</sup> While the lack of attention paid to the periphery of the Russian empire was laid bare by the 1905 Russo-Japanese War, the government in St. Petersburg was significantly lobbied to create a sizeable icebreaker fleet by naval leadership and even by public figures such as the esteemed chemist Dmitri Mendeleev.<sup>17</sup> While the late Tsarist government did not prioritize development of the Arctic, its policy towards the region nonetheless mirrored later policies of economic and political integration.

Patterns that persist in present-day Russian policy in the Arctic are also visible in early Soviet policy in the region. Early Soviet policy was concerned with two objectives: to economically develop the region to be in line with other regions of the Soviet state, and to ensure that supposedly hostile capitalist states would not be able to invade through the Russian North as they had done during the Russian Civil War. Responsibility for the economic development of the Russian North was entirely delegated in 1932 to the Main Directorate for the Northern Sea Route, which had sweeping authority over everything from infrastructural and economic

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<sup>14</sup> Hensley, William Iggiagruk. 2017. "Why Russia Gave Up Alaska, America's Gateway To The Arctic". <https://theconversation.com/why-russia-gave-up-alaska-americas-gateway-to-the-arctic-74675>.

<sup>15</sup> Laruelle, Marlène. 2014. *Russia's Arctic Strategies And The Future Of The Far North*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe. 25.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 25-26.

development above the 62<sup>nd</sup> parallel, which also included issues pertaining to the native populations living there.<sup>18</sup> Abbreviated in Russian as Glavsevmorput, this organization sought to pursue economic development through the construction of nickel mines and oil wells throughout the North as well as export-oriented ports for lumber, wheat, coal and other products that arrived via the Ob, Yenisei and Lena rivers. The Glavsevmorput organization was one of the first serious efforts to develop what is now called the NSR, and was aided by several icebreakers and specially designed aircraft for Arctic missions.<sup>19</sup> While this organization was in keeping with Stalin's policies of rapid development across the Soviet Union, Glavsevmorput was accordingly afflicted by many of the same exploitative or otherwise inefficient practices as the rest of the Soviet Union during the Stalin era.

Slave labor in the GULAG system was heavily utilized in economic projects in remote locations, and was applied to practically every Arctic project.<sup>20</sup> Early Soviet efforts to develop the region were also frustrated by the inflexibility of all-union bureaucracies such as the State Planning Administration and the Kremlin itself to adapt its plans to local conditions.<sup>21</sup> Despite the growth of the Glavsevmorput into a sprawling bureaucracy, which included portfolios related to technological, mining, transportation, industrial production, and cultural development, incomplete data and a desire to "conquer" the Arctic by any means often led to mistakes and deaths.<sup>22</sup> These mistakes often included application of technology and equipment that was unsuited for the unique environment of the Arctic, which included everything from poorly installed telephone lines to ships which were not suited for the particular conditions of the

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<sup>18</sup> H. P. Smolka, "Soviet Strategy in the Arctic," *Foreign Affairs* 16, no. 2 (January 1938): 273-275.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 172, 176.

<sup>20</sup> Josephson, Paul. "Technology and the Conquest of the Soviet Arctic." *Russian Review* 70, no. 3 (2011): 422, 423. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41289976>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 428.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 426, 429.

Arctic.<sup>23</sup> Although significant public attention was paid to the mission of the development of the Far North and the placement of blame for failures on individuals, Glavsevmorput was never able to fully overcome its structural issues and tension with Moscow.<sup>24</sup>

The interests of the Soviet government in the Arctic were not confined to economic concerns, as Moscow saw both military opportunities and potential threats presented in the Arctic throughout its existence. Soviet leaders were not quick to forget how British, French, American, Italian, and Canadian troops intervened in the Russian Civil War starting in 1918 in large part through Murmansk and Archangelsk as well as the western Far North more broadly. The significant aid which the United States and the United Kingdom gave to the Imperial Russian government in the final years of the First World War through those same routes was also of interest and concern to the new Soviet government. A significant risk of being operationally constrained through the blockade of cities such as Leningrad and Vladivostok as well as the potential entrapment of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet in the Black Sea motivated the Soviet government to develop the Arctic to ensure that the Soviet Navy would have at least one way to gain access to areas outside its territorial waters in the event of a war with Germany and Japan.<sup>25</sup> By 1937, Stalin's Soviet regime had begun to develop Murmansk and other Northwestern ports to accommodate the Far North and NSR's new role as an outlet for the Soviet Union's navy in times of war, as well as the means of facilitating the flow of supplies between the Eastern and Western ends of the Union.<sup>26</sup> These fears marked the beginning of the Soviet Union's intensified

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 421-427.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 428.

<sup>25</sup> H. P. Smolka, "Soviet Strategy in the Arctic," *Foreign Affairs* 16, no. 2 (January 1938): 273.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 274-276.



interest in the Far North as a region of significant military interest, which would become increasingly visible by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The Second World War and the protracted Cold War which followed ensured that the early military interest taken by the Soviet Union in the Arctic was not only destined to persist, but also to take an even higher priority than ever before. The Kremlin's interwar interest in the shipping potential of the Arctic would come to pay dividends through the Arctic convoys of Lend-Lease materiel to Murmansk and Arkhangelsk escorted by American, British, and Canadian naval detachments. Nearly four million metric tons would be delivered to the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1945 through this route, which further demonstrated the utility of Arctic shipping to Soviet strategists, despite heavy losses the convoys endured.<sup>27</sup> The success of these convoys and the adeptness of the American, British, and Canadian navies in operations in the Arctic demonstrated both the positive and negative potential uses of Arctic sea lanes and ports from the point of view of Moscow. With the onset of Cold War tensions between the Soviet Union and the West, Soviet military policy in the Far North continued to emphasize continual reinforcement of military facilities in the region.

The Northern Fleet's assumption of its responsibility as the core element of the sea leg of the Soviet and later Russian nuclear triad in the decades following the Second World War was one of the first moments in Russian history where the Arctic truly became a cornerstone of Moscow's military policy, rather than being viewed as an exposed flank. While Soviet naval strategists initially envisioned the use of ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) close to American territorial waters as a leg of the Soviet nuclear triad, Soviet belief that American and Western

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<sup>27</sup> GOV.UK. "The Story behind the Journey Churchill Called the "worst in the World"." Accessed February 19, 2021. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-story-behind-the-journey-churchill-called-the-worst-in-the-world>.

anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities had outstripped Soviet submarines' ability to remain undetected by the early 1970s led to a reconsideration of this strategy.<sup>28</sup> With the development of the Delta class of SSBNs and the accompanying SS-N-S nuclear missile system, which had a range of 4000 nautical miles, the Soviet Navy gained the ability to hypothetically strike American targets while remaining in Soviet territorial waters.<sup>29</sup> This would prove to be a permanent shift, as Soviet submarine forces enjoyed the relative safety provided by proximity to supporting land and naval units as well as the secrecy provided by operating under the icepack of the Arctic Ocean. By 1988, more than half of all Soviet SSBNs were stationed at the Barents Sea port of Severomorsk near Murmansk, which demonstrated the degree which the Soviet Navy had invested in efforts to turn the Arctic into the cornerstone of its nuclear strategy.<sup>30</sup> With this nuclear policy in place, Soviet military policy in the Arctic had formed the same pillars of nuclear deterrence and naval mobility across the Arctic coast which would later be areas of significance to the successor government of the Russian Federation.

Soviet economic and social development of the Arctic continued through the Second World War and beyond, which was in large part driven by the need to accommodate the flow of Lend-Lease support from the Western Allies entering through Arctic ports such as Murmansk and Arkhangelsk. By 1942, every outpost in the Far North was connected to each other and Moscow by radio, and 70 weather stations were made operational by 1944.<sup>31</sup> Industrialization and mining efforts for gold, copper, and tin reserves across the western and Siberian Arctic continued in force after the end of the war, and new pipelines such as the Trans-Siberian Gas

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<sup>28</sup> Walker, William Bradley. 1988. "The New Soviet Military Doctrine and the Future of the Maritime Strategy." Naval Postgraduate School. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA202003.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Young, Oran R. 1985. "The Age of the Arctic." *Foreign Policy*, no. 61: 163. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148707>.

<sup>31</sup> Zenzinov, Vladimir. 1944. "The Soviet Arctic." *The Russian Review* 3 (2): 68–71. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/125409>.

Pipeline were completed to service a developing interest in natural gas extraction in the Far North.<sup>32</sup> With this deepened interest in natural resource extraction in and around the Arctic came new disputes about jurisdiction and sovereignty in the Arctic Ocean, a theme which is of high priority in the Kremlin today. Slow-burning disputes regarding international borders between the Soviet Union and the United States in the Bering Sea, and the Soviet Union and Norway in the Barents Sea came rose in importance with the acceleration in the pace of natural resource extraction.<sup>33</sup> The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 would uncover jurisdictional disputes between economic and military interests, especially in the Western Arctic around the Kola Peninsula. With the diminished tempo of confrontation between NATO navies and the Northern Fleet in the Arctic, questions began to arise regarding its dominant position in the region, which saw state energy companies such as Gazprom emerge as significant competitors for state priority in the early 1990s.<sup>34</sup> The leadership of the Northern Fleet usually protested the incursion of Gazprom and other oil companies' oil projects on the basis that such installations and facilities would imperil the operational flexibility of the fleet in the Barents Sea, critical to both its nuclear and conventional operations. The fleet also stymied efforts by Lukoil to construct an international oil terminal near Murmansk in the late 1990s on the grounds that such a project would necessarily bring in regular foreign traffic into the operationally sensitive Barents Sea, where Russian SSBNs already had limited mobility due to the shallow depth of the sea.<sup>35</sup> Industries oriented towards serving the Northern Fleet also were negatively affected by the collapse of the Soviet Union, as demonstrated by the attempted reorientation of the Sevmas

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<sup>32</sup> Young, Oran R. 1985. "The Age of the Arctic." *Foreign Policy*, no. 61: 171. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148707>.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 173-174.

<sup>34</sup> Åtland, Kristian. "Russia's Northern Fleet and the Oil Industry—Rivals or Partners?: Petroleum, Security, and Civil—Military Relations in the Post—Cold War European Arctic." *Armed Forces & Society* 35, no. 2 (January 2009): 362–368.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 372.

shipyard in Severodvinsk towards civilian orders, to the protests of the Northern Fleet.<sup>36</sup> These shifts marked the temporary decrease in priority for military utilization of the Arctic due to a changed geopolitical context and financial constraints brought on by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Russia's current Arctic policy is derived from that of its predecessors. The role of the Arctic in the eyes of the Kremlin as a significant economic interest of the Russian state as well as a facilitator of connection between the distant ends of the trans-continental Russian Empire echoes today in the modern emphasis by the Kremlin on the NSR as a means to facilitate both international and domestic trade. While Russians began to move into the Far North during the imperial era, heavy-handed Soviet policies to encourage or forcefully deport Russians into these Arctic region saw issues of social development in the Arctic become a later priority of Moscow in the establishment of control over the region. The 20<sup>th</sup> century would also see the first introduction of a true military dimension to Russian and Soviet policy in the Arctic, as experiences in the Russian Civil War, Second World War, and Cold War all added a sense of urgency that necessitated the reinforcement of the Northern Fleet. The Northern Fleet's utility as a line of defense in Russia's northern flank and as a critical element of Russia's nuclear triad is directly tied to these historical developments and is not likely to change in the foreseeable future. Present day Russian Arctic policy is heavily built upon past experiences, and the current iteration of Russian state policy in the Arctic, the policy document "Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic in the Period to 2035", is firmly placed in this tradition.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 375-378.

### **Chapter III: Policy Basis for Current and Future Russian Arctic Policy: “Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic in the Period to 2035”**

The policy document “Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic in the Period to 2035” (henceforth “Foundations of State Policy”) is the foundational document that spells out both the basis for, and aims of, Russian federal government policy in the Arctic region, and was initially approved by President Vladimir Putin on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020. As the basis of Russian interests in the Arctic, the document emphasizes the defense of Russian territorial integrity in the Arctic, the stabilization of regional demographic trends, the economic development of the region into a “resource base” for the entire Russian economy, and notably the maintenance of the Arctic as a region of “peace, stability, and mutually beneficial partnership.” Means to pursue and defend these interests are enumerated in the document, as are internal threats and external challenges which the Kremlin views as direct challenges to the accomplishment of such goals. Given the wide scope of “Foundations of State Policy” in its outline of Russian interests in the Arctic, any analysis of present Russian activity in the Arctic must be grounded in an understanding of the positions taken within it.

This document is the result of decades of evolution between predecessor policy documents as well as more recent policymaking efforts spearheaded by the Russian National Security Council in its leading role in Russian strategic planning. The Kremlin sees the “Foundations of State Policy” document as the defining policy document of current Russian state policy in the Arctic, and is intended to fit within a unified plan made up of two other documents that are still under development: “Strategy of Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and the Provision of National Security for the Period to 2035” (hereafter known as “Strategy of Development”), and “Socio-Economic Development of the Arctic Zone of the

Russian Federation” (hereafter known as “Socio-Economic Development of the Arctic”).<sup>37</sup> The Russian Security Council intends the “Strategy of Development” document to be a more granular plan for the realization of goals from “Foundations of State Policy”, and is yet to be made public.<sup>38</sup> A third planned policy document, “Socio-Economic Development of the Arctic” will form the final element of this “unified plan”, and is intended to handle its practical implementation.<sup>39</sup>

“Foundations of State Policy” follows a framework established by legislation which governs the division of responsibilities between different layers of government in addressing strategic issues.<sup>40</sup> The 2014 law “On Strategic Planning in the Russian Federation” delineates the responsibilities of state, subject, and municipal authorities to develop and implement strategies to address socio-economic issues and measures and to ensure the national security of the Russian Federation.<sup>41</sup> The shared authority between federal, subject, and municipal authorities to plan and execute strategies pertaining to socio-economic development described in this law is contrasted with the fact that the federal government has sole responsibility for developing national security policy. In effect, such policy means that all strategies developed and executed by subject- and municipal-level governments are subject to being overrode by policy originating

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<sup>37</sup>Buchanan, Elizabeth. 2020. "The Overhaul Of Russian Strategic Planning For The Arctic Zone To 2035". Russian Studies Series 3/20. NATO Defense College. <http://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=641#>.

<sup>38</sup>“Work Begun on Project for the Strategic Development of the Russian Federation and the Provision of National Security in the period to 2035.” 2020. National Security Council of the Russian Federation. February 20, 2020. <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/news/allnews/2737/>.

<sup>39</sup>Buchanan. "The Overhaul Of Russian Strategic Planning For The Arctic Zone To 2035". <http://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=641#>.

<sup>40</sup> Office of the President of the Russian Federation. 2020. "Об Основах государственной политики Российской Федерации в Арктике на период до 2035 года [Foundations Of State Policy Of The Russian Federation In The Arctic In The Period To 2035]." Moscow: Government of the Russian Federation. <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/f8ZpjhpAaQ0WB1zjywN04OgKi11mAvaM.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> “О стратегическом планировании в Российской Федерации, Глава 2. [On Strategic Planning in the Russian Federation, Chapter 2.]” 2014. Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/acts/files/0001201406300016.pdf>.

in Moscow. In accordance with these guidelines, the “Foundations of State Policy” strategy document directs federal policy and agencies to take a central executive and coordinating role in the Russian Arctic region.

The core foundations of this dedicated state strategy on the Arctic can be found in section 5 of chapter 1 of the document, which enumerates the core national interests of Russia in the region. Listed first among these is the “ensuring of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation”, which in later sections is claimed by the document to be challenged by neighboring Arctic states. The second foundation in the document, which is the maintenance of the Arctic as a region of peace, cooperation, and mutual benefit, is closely related to the first foundation. It should be noted that these first two listed bases of Russian interests in the Arctic are tied to the degree which Russia exercises recognized sovereignty over what it sees as its rightful territory in the Arctic. As the first and foremost aim, the document is written in such a way to suggest that the pursuit of such interests of sovereignty rank far above other considerations, and that other such goals are predicated on the success of the first.

Through this document, the Kremlin lays out its present and near-term plans to simultaneously further what it sees as the defense of its sovereign interests in the Arctic and preserve the status of the Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation. Chapter two, section one of the document, which outlines the principal and current means of realizing these stated goals, lists three separate ways which the Russian government seeks to reinforce its sovereignty and international interests in the Arctic. These are the “creation of normative bases as frameworks for the defense of Russian interests in the Arctic”, “active cooperation with other Arctic states on the basis of international law, and the “creation of a general group of military forces of the armed forces of the Russian Federation for the purpose of guaranteeing military security in various

military-political conditions”.<sup>42</sup> These means of asserting Russian sovereignty in the Arctic are closely linked with efforts to define maritime and exclusive economic zone borders in the Arctic Oceans in both bilateral and multilateral contexts. For example, Russia has worked for nearly two decades to achieve acceptance of its continental shelf claims in the Arctic since its ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS). In 2001, Russia submitted a shelf claim to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) that saw the UNCLOS commission recommend a revised submission.<sup>43</sup> This revised submission was submitted in August 2015 and supplemented in February 2016 with rationalizing materials which accompanied the Russian bid for the Lomonosov and Mendeleev Ridges as well as the Chukchi high plain. Starting with its first submission to the CLCS in 2001 and continued in the submissions which followed, Russia argues that the Lomonosov Ridge, Mendeleev-Alpha Rise, and Chukchi Plateau submarine elevations as well as the Podvodnikov and Chukchi Basins which separate these features are included in Russia’s continental shelf on the basis their status as “natural components of the continental margin”.<sup>44</sup> The pairing between these legal means of support for Russian claims in the Arctic with the policy emphasis on the creation of a general-purpose military force in the region displays how the Kremlin views the defense of what it sees as its sovereign interests in the Arctic as non-negotiable, and that it is willing to ground those interests through legal recognition and military enforcement.

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<sup>42</sup> Office of the President of the Russian Federation. 2020. "Об Основах государственной политики Российской Федерации в Арктике на период до 2035 года [Foundations Of State Policy Of The Russian Federation In The Arctic In The Period To 2035]." Moscow: Government of the Russian Federation.

<http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/f8ZpjhpAaQ0WB1zjywN04OgKiIImAvaM.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> "A Quick Start Guide To The Law Of The Sea In The Arctic". 2016. Thearcticinstitute.Org.

<https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/TAI-Quick-Start-to-UNCLOS.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> “Partial Revised Submission of the Russian Federation to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in Respect of the Continental Shelf of the Russian Federation in the Arctic Ocean.” 2015. Government of the Russian Federation.

[https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/rus01\\_rev15/2015\\_08\\_03\\_Exec\\_Summary\\_English.pdf](https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/rus01_rev15/2015_08_03_Exec_Summary_English.pdf).



Other stated priorities in “Foundations of State Policy” related to issues of economic and social development have more specific means which the Russian government hopes to realize them through. Article five of chapter one determines that Russian economic interests in the Arctic are centered on the provision of a high quality of life and welfare for Russian citizens in the Arctic, the development of the Arctic as a “strategic resource base” to be used as an engine of growth for the Russian economy, and the development of the NSR as a competitive avenue for international trade and communication. These national interests necessitate the investment of significant energy and attention into the Arctic if it is to assume the role of a “base of natural resources” for the Russian economy which would have the capacity to drive its growth. The final item on the list of the fundamental interests of Russia in the Arctic describes the protection of the natural environment of the Arctic region and indigenous cultural practices of the ethnic groups that live there. The decision to group environmental protections with cultural preservation efforts can be perceived as a demonstration of the way in which the Kremlin views such priorities in the Far North, especially given their connection to the separate priority of the provision of a high quality of life in the Arctic.

The pursuit of economic development as a means to accomplish parallel social priorities continues to be elaborated throughout “Foundations of State Policy.” Chapter three, section 12 of the document outlines the main tasks (*zadachi*) related to the economic development of the Arctic, with the first of these listed as “state support for entrepreneurial activity in the Far North in order to create the necessary conditions for private investment and economic effectiveness in the Arctic.” In keeping with the central role assigned to the preservation of “sovereignty” in the Arctic, the second main task of expanding private investment on the Arctic shelf related to mineral extraction as well as infrastructure related to the NSR is joined by the caveat that such

efforts should still be beholden to state control over their realization. This qualification immediately establishes undefined limits to the pursuit of these priorities and limits the future agency and freedom of private investors and entrepreneurs to act outside of what the Russian government deems as a priority. Several tasks outlined in the section broadly call for the stimulation of hydrocarbon extraction, the intensification of the exploitation of fisheries and reforestation efforts, the stimulation of the local production of agricultural products, and the development of “cruise-based, ethnic, ecological, and industrial tourism.” Just like the core priorities listed in the beginning of the document, the inclusion of local groups in Arctic economic and development decisions is provided as a task of this section, and the task of the development of additional avenues for higher and professional education is also featured in this section. The connection between Russian economic and social policy in the Arctic is visible in the final task of the section, which calls for economic support to be provided to enable the relocation of “economically active” workers to the Far North.

Sections 11, 13, and 14 of chapter three of the “Foundations of State” document describe tasks connected to the social and infrastructural development of the Russian Arctic. Chief among these tasks are those which relate to the provision of improved health services and cultural services for inhabitants of the Arctic living in sparsely populated or remote areas. The section also establishes tasks related to the establishment of modern and high-quality homes with access to vital products such as fuel and food. The final task of the section calls for agreed-upon subsidies for citizens ready to move to the Far North to continue in their search for employment in the region. Section 13 deals with tasks related to the infrastructural development of the Arctic. Tasks which relate to the NSR take priority in section 13, as the first task directly requires the formation of an icebreaker and rescue fleet sufficient to ensure “uninterrupted...shipping in the

waters of the NSR.” Other tasks related to the NSR center on the development of Arctic-wide hydrometeorological, navigation and hydrographic control capabilities in the open sea and in waterways connected to the Arctic Ocean, as well as the modernization and construction of new ports along the NSR. Other tasks call for the modernization of rail and air links to populated areas in the Far North, improvement of communications infrastructure through the laying of undersea fiber-optic cables, and local power generation. Section 14 contains several tasks related to the expansion of infrastructure needed to conduct advanced research in the Arctic, the improvement of technology required to minimize the cost of natural disasters in the Arctic, and the implementation of technology needed to provide for the health of Arctic populations as well as to minimize the effects of climate change.

Sections 15 and 17 of chapter three relate to the preservation of the natural environment of the Russian Far North and the protection of the people of the Russian Arctic from natural and man-made disasters, respectively. Tasks in section 15 include the development of protected “natural territories” to protect them from the effects of climate change, the protection of endangered species in the Arctic, the improvement of technologies to minimize emissions in the air and water from industrial activities in the region, and the modernization of tools for monitoring certain environmental indicators. Other tasks, which center on the construction of environmentally friendly waste disposal systems and the reduction of the output of toxic chemicals into the Arctic environment, are similarly focused on the creation of supposed limits on the excesses of economic expansion in the Arctic. The tasks of Section 17 focus on the development of means to protect Arctic populations from natural and man-made disasters. These include the implementation of scientific, technical, regulatory, and methodological support to ensure the safety in Arctic conditions, the creation of search and rescue (SAR) centers and fire

and rescue units suited for the local conditions of the Far North, and the improvement of aviation-related infrastructure to achieve these goals.

Section 16 lays out tasks related to the role of international cooperation which the Kremlin envisions in the Arctic. The first and most substantial task listed is the strengthening of the neighborly relationship between Russia and other Arctic countries in bilateral and multilateral contexts across all spheres of Arctic development, including in matters related economic, scientific, cultural, and international border issues. Given Russia's imminent chairmanship of the Arctic Council in the upcoming 2021-2023 period, the task recommendation of strengthening the role of the Arctic Council in issues of international coordination is notable. While the Arctic Council has been primarily dedicated to the mediation of ecological and sustainable development issues since its establishment in 1996, Ambassador Nikolay Korchunov, Ambassador-at-Large for the Arctic, has expressed Russian interest in the expansion of the Council's purview to the mediation of defense issues in the Arctic.<sup>45</sup> Other issues, such as the continuation of a Russian economic presence on Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago on which Russia is entitled to pursue economic projects as defined in the 1920 Svalbard Treaty, the pursuit of international recognition for territorial claims over an expanded region of the Arctic Ocean, and the task of encouraging mutually beneficial economic cooperation across the Arctic are all closely linked to international priorities of Moscow in the Arctic.

Sections 18, 19, 20 of chapter three of "Foundations of State Policy" all relate to topics of defense and security in the Far North. Section 18, which focuses on public safety in the Arctic region, notably calls for the expansion of Interior Ministry and National Guard structures and

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<sup>45</sup> Danilov, Peter. 2021. "Russia Wants to Resume Meetings Between Arctic Defense Chiefs." High North News. January 19, 2021. <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/russia-wants-resume-meetings-between-arctic-defense-chiefs>.

units to the Arctic region in its first listed task, as the sparsely populated region has a lighter presence of these security organs than the Kremlin might hope. The other goals call on authorities to promote “voluntary” participation in public safety measures, the reduction of the embezzlement of funds intended for the Arctic, and even the reduction of road traffic deaths in the region. Section 19, which focuses on military security, tasks the Russian armed forces with the protection of Russian territorial integrity and sovereignty in the region. In connection with this, the other tasks of the section call on the armed forces to maintain combat potential in the Arctic at a level sufficient to defend it from outside aggression, upgrade air and sea-facing defenses in the region as well as modernize the general military infrastructure along the northern flank of the Russian Federation. Section 20 deals with tasks related to border security in the Arctic region. These include the improvement of monitoring technology and capabilities across the expanse of the Arctic Ocean through the development of new technologies. Partnership with foreign coast guards, the improvement of border control infrastructure, and the improvement of equipment provided to federal organs charged with border security in the Arctic region. These goals all emphasize efforts to renew and reinforce instruments of national security which form the backbone of Russian efforts to assert its sovereignty in the Arctic.

While the document describes very hopeful courses of action in the realization of Russian goals in the Arctic, it also describes potential pitfalls which Moscow believes could jeopardize its priorities in the Arctic. Entirely contained within chapter two of “Foundations of State Policy,” such analysis differentiates between threats (*ugrozy*) and challenges (*vyzovy*) to Russian national security in the Arctic. The distinction found in the difference in word choice between the two draws attention to how the internal issues of population decline and low social and infrastructural development levels in the Arctic are seen as serious threats to the fulfillment of

the policy goals enumerated in the document, while international actions to stymie Russian claims in the Arctic are challenges to be overcome rather than existential threats.<sup>46</sup> First among the threats expressed by the document are the double threats of a declining population in the Arctic, and persistent low levels of development in the region. Others refer to severely unrealized economic and commercial potential in the Arctic, such as the slow pace of resource exploration in what Moscow believes to be a resource-rich region, a lack of government support for business ventures in the comparatively risky Russian Arctic, non-effective observance of timelines related to port construction, SAR base construction, and auxiliary fleet assembly along the NSR, and a slow pace of introduction of land and air transport formats and technologies suited to the Arctic environment. The unprepared nature of environmental monitoring technologies in the Far North as they relate to ecological challenges is also listed as a threat in the document.

In contrast, the main challenges to Russian national security interests in the Arctic are primarily related to perceived international intrusion. The first listed challenge to Russian national security in the Arctic describes the efforts by several unnamed countries to revise the bases of previously agreed upon international agreements on the Arctic to regulate economic and other endeavors without the cooperation of Russia. Such international legal challenges feature prominently among the described challenges of the document, with another significant challenge described as the “incompleteness” (*nezavershennost'*) of maritime border definitions in the Arctic and the “obstruction” of economic and other legal activities in the Arctic by other Arctic powers. While the document does not elaborate further on the meaning of “incompleteness”, the phrasing indicates Moscow’s perception of Arctic maritime borders as yet-to-be-defined on a permanent

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<sup>46</sup>Buchanan, Elizabeth. 2020. "The Overhaul Of Russian Strategic Planning For The Arctic Zone To 2035". Russian Studies Series 3/20. NATO Defense College. <http://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=641#>.

basis, which is congruent with Russian attempts to achieve favorable recognition of its claims over a wide share of the Arctic in the past two decades. The final challenge to Russian interests in the Arctic as defined by the document is the increase in potential for conflict in the region which itself is a result of increases in foreign military presence in the Arctic. Given the limited number of countries which border the Arctic, it can be reasonably inferred that these unnamed countries are Western countries who have previously disputed Russian legal interests in the Arctic. Russian attempts to apply for official UN recognition for an extension of its continental shelf continue to be contested by Denmark and Canada, since Moscow's claims compete with their own continental shelf claims in the central Arctic Ocean.<sup>47</sup>

Given the 2014 assertion by President Putin that the Arctic contains “practically all aspects of national security – military, political, economic, technological, environmental and that of resources,” it is no wonder that Russian strategic thinking has come to weigh Arctic issues more and more since Putin became president at the turn of the millennium. Russian policies in the Arctic described in “Foundations of State Policy” are in line with some of the dominant lines in Russian strategic thinking with regards to the Far North, particularly that which holds the assertion of full control over the NSR and seeks to secure international legal recognition of Russia's authority to control exploration and exploitation of natural resources beyond the conventional 200 nautical mile limit.<sup>48</sup> As interest in securing these natural resources in the Arctic has emerged, the Kremlin has steadily ramped up its expectations and attention paid to the Arctic. It is also notable, however, that interest in securing “sovereignty and territorial integrity”

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<sup>47</sup> Goble, Paul. 2021. “Moscow Pushing Even More Expansive Claims on Arctic.” Jamestown. April 22, 2021. <https://jamestown.org/program/moscow-pushing-even-more-expansive-claims-on-arctic/>.

<sup>48</sup> Mehdiyeva, Nazrin. 2018. "Russia's Arctic Papers: The Evolution Of Strategic Thinking On The High North". Russian Studies Series 4/18. NATO Defense College. <http://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=567>.

in the Arctic in some ways appears to even supplant the usual focus on energy issues.<sup>49</sup> Although “Foundations of State Policy” emphasizes the maintenance of the Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation, its description of foreign “challenges” which necessitate strident reinforcement of Russian control over its Arctic claims will put stress on this stated goal.

It is important to both understand how Russian state policy has evolved over time and to be able to meaningfully judge any future applications of policy which Moscow undertakes in the Far North. While by no means complete in being able to judge the effectiveness of Russian state policy in the Arctic, the “Foundations of State Policy” document’s own metrics set by the policymakers themselves are both interesting to note and will be helpful in evaluating future and current performance. Notably, every point except for the final one in section 26 of chapter five of the document, which outlines these metrics, relate to social, demographic, economic, or scientific development in some way. The first metric among these which the Kremlin seeks to make use of is any change in life expectancy within the Arctic zone, which is prominently joined by the use of the index of migration growth of the population, average wages in the Far North, and the number of new households connected to the internet, among others, as a metric of the success of efforts related to social and demographic issues in the Arctic. Metrics such as the number of new jobs created, value added to products created in the Arctic, share of investment of capital into the Arctic region as compared to other regions, the share of energy extraction of various types performed in the Arctic region, and the volume of shipping carried along the NSR are all metrics related to growth of economic, commercial, and energy extraction activities. The final point in the section, which seeks to measure the proportion of modern weapons systems deployed to the

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<sup>49</sup>Buchanan. "The Overhaul Of Russian Strategic Planning For The Arctic Zone To 2035". NATO Defense College. <http://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=641#>.



Arctic compared to other deployments, is notably the only metric included here related to military issues, although it is possible that Moscow would avoid publication of sensitive military goals in the Arctic alongside metrics of economic and social development. Given the wide scope of Russian policy interests in the Arctic, it is important to take stock of the current state of affairs of each policy area of interest to understand Russian interests in the Arctic in a broader sense.

### **Chapter III: Population Decline, Environmental Degradation, and Border Delineation Disputes as Challenges to Russian Arctic Policy**

While most of the forces at play in the Russian Arctic and the solutions devised by Moscow to harness them are not unique to the present era, many of the trends which will prove to be most important to the success or lack of success of Russian policy in the Arctic are recent additions to the Arctic region. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the simultaneous replacement of the planned economic system which maintained high levels of population in the Arctic by force, the Far North has seen a precipitous decline in population across all federal subjects. This issue, which occupies a prominent place in Russian strategic thinking as seen in “Foundations of State Policy”, is arguably one of, if not the most important threats to the success of Russian efforts to develop the Arctic in both the long and short terms. On the other hand, the issue of ecological damage to the Arctic through the broader process of global warming and the more localized issues of pollution and damage to local environments are ever-present in the lives of Arctic Russians but nonetheless treated as a lower priority in practice by both the Kremlin and local governments. The much-publicized deterioration of the ecological health of the Russian Arctic, particularly in and around industrial cities like Norilsk, is both a visible metric of the effectiveness of Russian development policy in the Arctic and a potential additional driver for emigration out of the Arctic. The application of Russian Arctic policy also includes the steady pace of legal measures taken to secure international recognition of Russian sovereignty far into

the Arctic as well as the haphazard attempts to reorganize the politico-administrative subdivisions of the Russian Arctic. It is important to understand the present conditions in the Arctic in which Russian policy is applied to judge both the future and present success of such policy.

An ongoing steep decrease in the population of the Russian Arctic has been a hallmark of the decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Soviet migration to the Far North peaked during the Stalin years of the 1930s to early 1950s and continued at a slower pace into the 1980s. While the centrally-planned flood of Soviet citizens into the Arctic remained steady across eras, the impetus for the inflow of population switched from the pursuit of timber, coal, metal, and mineral resources to the pursuit natural gas, gold, diamonds, and non-ferrous metals by the start of the 1970s, and both eras contributed to the entrenchment of Russian culture and Soviet industry in the region.<sup>50</sup> With the start of the 1990s and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the use of “rotational” staffing methods in the exploitation of natural resources helped to precipitate a dramatic collapse of the permanent population of the Russian Arctic region. In particular, this process occurred in the decades between 1989 and 2002, when the population of the entire Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF) fell from 9.4 to 7.8 million residents, a decline of roughly 1.6 million people which was in turn magnified by the further decrease of the population by 3 million people between 2002 and 2014.<sup>51</sup> While not as steep as population decline in the period following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the population of the AZRF fell by 30 thousand people in the 2014 to 2017 period alone, which has been partially attributed to

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<sup>50</sup> Petukhov, Sergei. 2017. “Население российской Арктики сократилось за последние двадцать лет почти вдвое [The Population of the Russian Arctic has Almost Halved in the Past Twenty Years].” February 10, 2017. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3217148>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

underdeveloped infrastructure and already established outflows of people from the Far North by Russian legislators and Arctic experts.<sup>52</sup> This represents a population loss of 1.25% of the population of the Russian Arctic's 2014 population of 2.4 million people, or the emigration or death of one in every 80 Russians in the Arctic between 2014 and 2017. As of 2020, the total population of the Russian Arctic has fallen to 2 million people, a far cry from the more than 9 million Russians who lived there in the final years of the Soviet Union.<sup>53</sup>

This trend of significant population loss across the region is not confined to any one Arctic federal subject or group of subjects alone and instead is a burden felt by all. In the more populated western extremity of the Russian Arctic, this drop is measured in the hundreds of thousands by federal subject. Murmansk Oblast, a center of Soviet and now Russian military power in the Arctic as well as one of the most populated Arctic subjects, saw its 1989 population of 1,146,757 people<sup>54</sup> fall to an estimated 733,158 people by the start of 2021<sup>55</sup>. This trend is mirrored in the other western federal subjects such as in the Republic of Karelia and Arkhangelsk Oblast, which have seen estimated decreases of 181,878 and 486,561 people, respectively. The population of the Karelian ASSR was 791,317 people in 1989 and is estimated to have dropped to 609,439 people by the start of this year, while the population of Arkhangelsk Oblast's 1989 population of 1,570,256 people is estimated to have fallen to 1,083,695 by 2021, a

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<sup>52</sup> "Население арктических регионов РФ сократилось на 30 тыс. человек за четыре года [The Population of the Arctic Regions of the Russian Federation Fell by 30 Thousand People in Four Years]." 2018. TACC. September 27, 2018. <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/5611311>.

<sup>53</sup> "Russia." 2020. The Arctic Institute (blog). June 19, 2020. <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/countries/russia/>.

<sup>54</sup> "Всероссийская перепись населения 1989 г. Численность населения СССР, РСФСР и ее территориальных единиц по полу [All-union Census 1989: Population of USSR, RSFSR and its Territorial Units by Gender." n.d. Demoskop Weekly - National Research University "Higher School of Economics" Institute of Demography. Accessed March 11, 2021. [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus89\\_reg1.php](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus89_reg1.php).

<sup>55</sup> "Предварительная Оценка Численности Постоянного Населения На 1 Января 2021 г. и в Среднем За 2020 г. [Preliminary Estimate of Resident Population as of January 1, 2021 and on Average for 2020.]" 2021. Federal State Statistics Service. [https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/of43wDjn/PrPopul2021\\_Site.xls](https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/of43wDjn/PrPopul2021_Site.xls).

loss of roughly 30% of its population. The Nenets Autonomous Okrug, although it has never possessed a population to rival that of its western neighbors, nonetheless has experienced significant population decline as well, with an observed decrease of 10,436 people between the 1989 population of 54,840 people and the estimated 2021 okrug population of 44,404 people, a nearly 20% drop in population. It should also be noted that the population of Russia as a whole decreased almost every year in the decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union, this decline was never as steep or as prolonged as the vast majority of federal subjects.

It is both interesting and important to note the differing fortunes of the Arctic districts and regions of Siberian and Far Eastern federal subjects, as some have managed to stem their population decline or even see modest gains while populations of Western districts have declined precipitously. The Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, which includes the Yamal Peninsula and the numerous planned and existent energy projects located around it, has seen an increase in its population, starting from its 1989 population of 486,164<sup>56</sup> people to an estimated 544,000 people by 2020.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, the Far Northern districts of Krasnoyarsk Krai – the Taimyr Dolgano-Nenets Municipal District and the urban district of Norilsk – suffered population loss along the same lines as federal subjects in the northwest. The Taimyr Dolgano-Nenets Municipal District, which was a federal subject in its own right as an autonomous okrug until 2007, lost an estimated 23,696 people between 1989 and 2020, a loss of nearly 43% of its 1989 population of

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<sup>56</sup> “Всероссийская перепись населения 1989 г. Численность населения СССР, РСФСР и ее территориальных единиц по полу [All-union Census 1989: Population of USSR, RSFSR and its Territorial Units by Gender.]” [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus89\\_reg1.php](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus89_reg1.php).

<sup>57</sup> “Анализ тактических показателей системы мониторинга демографической ситуации в Ямало-Ненецком автономном округе за 2019 год [Analysis of Tactical Indicators of Demographic Situation Monitoring in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug for 2019.]” 2019. Government of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug. [https://www.yanao.ru/upload/uf/5e6/Analiz-takticheskikh-pokazateley-sistemy-monitoringa-demograficheskoy-situatsii-v-Yamalo\\_Nenetskom-avtonomnom-okruge-za-2019-god.pdf](https://www.yanao.ru/upload/uf/5e6/Analiz-takticheskikh-pokazateley-sistemy-monitoringa-demograficheskoy-situatsii-v-Yamalo_Nenetskom-avtonomnom-okruge-za-2019-god.pdf).

55,111 to a mere 31,415 in 2020.<sup>58</sup> The city of Norilsk, whose administrative municipality exists on the same level as the Taimyr Dolgano-Nenets Municipal District and is the main hub for the powerful Nor Nickel mining company, saw a similar decline in the form of a loss of an estimated 85,113 people from a 1989 level of 267,609 people to its 2020 level of 182,496 people. The AZRF districts of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) are examples of the heightened trend of depopulation in the eastern regions of the Russian Arctic. Among these districts, it was not uncommon to lose more than 50% or more of their 1989 population, such as in the case of the Bulunsky, Verkhnekolymsky, Verkhoyansky, Nizhnekolymsky, and Ust'-Yansky districts. Although the remaining districts in the Arctic region of Yakutia did not experience the same steep population decline as others, all experienced some degree of population loss.<sup>59</sup> Another example of a striking loss of population in terms of proportion in the Far Eastern Russian Arctic is that of the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug, whose 1989 population of 157,528 people dropped by 108,228 people to reach its 2021 estimated level of 49,300 people,<sup>60</sup> which represents a loss of nearly 69% of its 1989 population. From this wide-view observation of the Russian Arctic, it is clear that only the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug was able to see any sort of positive population growth at all, which can most likely be attributed to the growing concentration of large natural gas and hydrocarbon extraction projects within it. Even though certain districts or

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<sup>58</sup> “Оценка численности постоянного населения на 1 января 2020 года и в среднем за 2019 год по городским округам и муниципальным районам Красноярского края [Estimation of the Resident Population as of January 1st, 2020 and on average for 2019 in Urban Districts of Krasnoyarsk Krai].” 2020. Federal State Statistics Service for Krasnoyarsk Krai, Republic of Khakassia, and Republic of Tuva. <https://krasstat.gks.ru/storage/mediabank/xLJdTcMr/>.

<sup>59</sup> “О Комплексной Программе Республики Саха (Якутия) ‘Социально-Экономическое Развитие Арктических и Северных Районов Республики Саха (Якутия) на 2014 - 2017 Годы и на Период до 2020 Года’ [Regarding the Comprehensive Program of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) for 2014-2017 ‘Socio-Economic Development of the Arctic and Northern Regions of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) for 2014 - 2017 and for the Period up to 2020].” 2017. April 28, 2017. <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/432880477>.

<sup>60</sup> “Предварительная Оценка Численности Постоянного Населения На 1 Января 2021 г. и в Среднем За 2020 г. [Preliminary Estimate of Resident Population as of January 1, 2021 and on Average for 2020.].” [https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/of43wDjn/PrPopul2021\\_Site.xls](https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/of43wDjn/PrPopul2021_Site.xls).

parts of the Russian Arctic have weathered the past three decades without significant population loss or have even occasionally gained in population since 1989, the wide scope of population loss across most of the Arctic makes abundantly clear why this phenomenon is treated as an issue of utmost importance in Russian strategic documents and thinking.

While Russian policy is committed to renewed investment in infrastructure and economic projects in the Arctic region, the feasibility of these projects is called into question by the persistent issue of population loss. The shift method (*vahtovy metod*) is believed by some Russian economic experts to be a more realistic way to scale up Russian economic activity and resource extraction in the Arctic in a manner which is demanded by policy directives issued by the Kremlin. The term “shift method” refers to the contractual employment of individuals away from their permanent place of residence on a seasonal basis.<sup>61</sup> A reimagination of the demographic structure of the Arctic population which supports economic activity there would allow flexibility to disconnect from resource fields which have outlived their usable life and would avoid the need for a significant support population to accompany the core workforce in energy and economic projects in the Arctic.<sup>62</sup> Use of the shift method in this way would also avoid overreliance on dwindling permanent Arctic populations of the future while maintaining the needed flexibility to support planned economic and energy projects in the region. Support for the shift method has even been articulated by Federation Council lawmakers such as Senator Yuri Bazhenin, a member of the committee for economic policy. Bazhenin’s support is based on the assumption that every worker that would reside permanently in the Arctic would be joined by

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<sup>61</sup> “Вахтовый Метод Работы: Что Это? [What Is the Shift Method of Work?].” 2021. Uglevodorody.Ru [Hydrocarbons.Ru]. February 12, 2021. <https://uglevodorody.ru/publ/vahtovyuy-metod-raboty-chto-eto>.

<sup>62</sup> Mislivskaya, Galina. 2021. “Сенатор назвал бессмысленным строительство новых городов в Арктике [A Senator called the Construction of New Cities in the Arctic Unthinkable].” Rossiiskaya Gazeta. March 5, 2021. <https://rg.ru/2021/03/05/reg-sibfo/senator-nazval-bessmyslennym-stroitelstvo-novyh-gorodov-v-arktike.html>.

six family members and support workers, which would necessitate costly expansion of social infrastructure to accommodate them. Government officials of more economically successful political units in the Russian Arctic such as the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug see the support of existing population centers and a move to the shift method of providing manpower for Arctic economic projects as the most sound policy for future Arctic development.<sup>63</sup> Other less voluntary uses of temporary labor in the Arctic have been proposed to accompany the shift method as a partial remedy to the shrinking population of the Arctic, with the Russian Federal Penitentiary Service proposing the use of prisoners to clean up ecological disasters in the Far North in early 2021.<sup>64</sup>

The environmental status of the Russian Arctic is a significant factor in both the present quality of life for those living in the Arctic today and towards the future fortunes of Russian policy in the Arctic. The region is also a place of significant confrontation between environmental groups on one hand, and energy companies supported by Kremlin policy on the other. Notably, a 2013 incident surrounding the protest actions of the so-called “Arctic 30” affiliated with Greenpeace against the use of the Prirazlomnaya oil rig owned by Gazprom Neft ultimately led to the arrest of the protesters and brought international attention to the environmental dimension of Russian economic interests in the Arctic. These protesters were motivated by what they saw as the severe vulnerability of the platform to the harsh elements of the Pechora Sea, which heightened the risk of future environmental damage.<sup>65</sup> As one of

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<sup>63</sup> “Эксперты считают, вахтовое освоение Арктики является наиболее эффективным [Experts Believe that the Shift Method is the Most Effective in the Arctic.]” 2020. ТАСС. March 25, 2020. <https://tass.ru/v-strane/8075555>.

<sup>64</sup> “ФСИН хочет направить заключенных на очистку Арктики [FCIN wants to Send Prisoners to Clean Up the Arctic.]” 2021. РИА Новости. March 12, 2021. <https://ria.ru/20210312/arktika-1600967055.html>.

<sup>65</sup> van Delft, Koen, and Katherine Bennett. 2013. "Greenpeace In The Russian Arctic: Environment Vs. Oil Drilling". ENERPO Journal 2 (3): 4-8. [https://eusp.org/sites/default/files/archive/imares/ENERPO\\_Journal/ENERPO\\_Journal\\_December\\_2013.pdf](https://eusp.org/sites/default/files/archive/imares/ENERPO_Journal/ENERPO_Journal_December_2013.pdf).

Russia's first forays into Arctic Ocean drilling, the Prirazlomnaya operation was seen as a serious risk to the local environment due to the use of outdated equipment in the construction of the oilrig and the high risk that if a large spill were to occur, the local environment would suffer significant damage. However, the main ecological threats to the Arctic have turned out to be land-based resource and energy extraction operations of the company Nornickel.

Nornickel has a long history of ecological mishaps in the Arctic; however, several accidents in quick succession since early 2020 have drawn the scrutiny of outside observers and the Russian government alike. A diesel spill on May 29, 2020 of 21,000 metric tons of fuel from a storage tank at a Nornickel plant near Norilsk on the Taimyr Peninsula has been described as the most significant fuel spill in the Arctic. Several plant employees were arrested for negligence and some estimates claim that a full cleanup will take years.<sup>66</sup> Two more disasters, an unsanctioned release of 6,000 cubic meters of toxic liquid used to process minerals on June 28th, and a fire at an industrial waste facility on June 29<sup>th</sup> also came to be national news like the first spill.<sup>67</sup> Later accidents, such as a leak of 45 metric tons of aviation fuel from a pipeline owned by Nornickel's pipeline subsidiary Norilsktransgaz on July 12<sup>68</sup> or significant inflows of water into Norilsk's Oktyabrsky mine in March 2021<sup>69</sup> have shown that the Nornickel's operations continue to be a source of ecological damage today.

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<sup>66</sup> "Explainer: Russia's Arctic Environmental Disasters." 2020. The Moscow Times. June 29, 2020. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/06/29/explainer-russias-arctic-environmental-disasters-a70730>.

<sup>67</sup> "Полигон с промышленными отходами загорелся в Норильске [Facility with Industrial Wastes Caught Fire in Norilsk]." 2020. Interfax.ru. June 29, 2020. <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/715076>.

<sup>68</sup> Reuters. 2020. "Russia's Nornickel Reports Another Fuel Leak in Arctic," July 12, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-pollution-arctic-spill-idUSKCN24D0BJ>.

<sup>69</sup> Fedorinova, Yuliya. 2021. "Nornickel to Stabilize Water Inflows at Mine by Next Week." Bloomberg.Com, March 3, 2021. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-03/nornickel-to-stabilize-water-inflows-at-arctic-mine-by-next-week>.



Given the significant issues the ecological damage wrought by the operations of Nornickel bring to the execution of Russian policy in the Arctic as well as public opinion of state-encouraged economic activity, Moscow has been keen to exact heavy financial and rhetorical punishment on Nornickel. In a well-publicized October 2020 visit to Norilsk and Nornickel, a Federation Council delegation of 15 senators from five committees accompanied by representatives of several federal ministries, agencies, law enforcement agencies, local municipalities, and scientific institutes concluded that the social infrastructure of Norilsk was severely deficient, and that Norilsk required a new program of socio-economic development.<sup>70</sup> This rebuke of Nornickel's dominant role in the economic development of Norilsk was driven home by Valentina Matviyenko, Chairwoman of the Federation Council, who was very clear in her assessment that the significant uptick in ecological disasters around Norilsk and the general deterioration of the infrastructure of the town was the result of the indifference of Nornickel leadership.<sup>71</sup> President Putin stated that the \$2 billion fine Nornickel was ordered to pay in damages in February for environmental degradation and its role in the May 29, 2020 diesel spill on the Taimyr Peninsula would be used to improve the ecology of the Arctic areas affected by the spill.<sup>72</sup> No matter the scale of the federal response to the string of Nornickel disasters, the ecological effects will linger for some time. In addition to pressure from the Russian government and environmental groups, Vladimir Potanin, who holds a 34% stake in Nornickel, was urged by

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<sup>70</sup> “Норильску нужна новая программа социально-экономического развития, убеждены в Совете Федерации [The Federation Council is Convinced that Norilsk Needs a New Program of Socio-Economic Development].” n.d. Совет Федерации Федерального Собрания Российской Федерации. Accessed March 16, 2021. <http://council.gov.ru/events/news/120774/?hl=%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8C>.

<sup>71</sup> “Nornickel Is ‘Cynical and Socially Irresponsible’, Says Russia’s Top Legislator.” n.d. The Independent Barents Observer. Accessed March 16, 2021. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic-mining/2020/10/norilsk-nickel-cynical-corrupt-and-socially-irresponsible-says-russias-top>.

<sup>72</sup> Reuters. 2021. “Nornickel’s \$2 Billion Fine Will Be Used to Improve Arctic Environment - Putin,” March 10, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-norilsknickel-arctic-idUSKBN2B215S>.

the Russian company Rusal, which has a 20% stake in Nornickel, to change Nornickel's senior management and to move Nornickel's corporate offices to Norilsk from Moscow to improve internal accountability.<sup>73</sup> Such challenges from shareholders indicate how widespread discomfort is among significant business interests and the Russian government with regards to the series of environmental catastrophes in the Arctic in 2020. Moscow's reaction to this string of ecological disasters can be seen as a sensitivity to shocks which could have a negative effect on the execution of ambitious policy projects laid out by the Kremlin both in the short and long term.

The Russian government is similarly keen to avoid international contestation of its legal claims in the Arctic as best as it can through the utilization of multilateral bodies and treaties to justify its claims. While the initial Russian effort to secure recognition for the extension of its continental shelf deep into the Arctic in December 2001 was met with a recommendation by the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) to perform additional research, the convention of the 50<sup>th</sup> session of the CLCS in July 2019 was particularly amicable to Russian claims that were filed in 2015.<sup>74</sup> Such a breakthrough would recognize Russian claims of sovereignty over nearly 1.2 million square kilometers of Arctic shelf that extend more than 350 nautical miles into the ocean. In particular, the CLCS confirmed the Russian claim that the Lomonosov Ridge, the Medeleev Ridge, and the adjacent Podvodnikov Basin were extensions of the Russian continental shelf, which is a significant step towards full formal recognition of the

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<sup>73</sup> Rapoza, Kenneth. 2021. "Russian Oligarchs Battle Over Nornickel's Arctic Oil Spill." *Forbes*. July 14, 2021. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2020/07/14/russian-oligarchs-battle-over-nornickels-arctic-oil-spill/>.

<sup>74</sup> Staalesen, Atle. n.d. "Russia Is Winning Support for Its Claims on Arctic Shelf, Says Chief Negotiator." *The Independent Barents Observer*. Accessed March 16, 2021. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2019/11/russia-winning-support-its-claims-arctic-shelf-says-chief-negotiator>.

Russia's evolving Central Arctic Ocean submission



“Russia’s Evolving Central Arctic Ocean Submission.” 2021. Durham University: IBRU: Centre for Borders Research.  
<https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/ibru/resources/Arctic%20Maps%202021/Map5IBRUArcticmap07-04-21RussiasevolvingsubmissionintheCAO.pdf>.

Russian claims.<sup>75</sup> The successful recognition of these claims by international bodies would be a strong positive factor in the future application of Russian policy in the Arctic Ocean, both in terms of energy extraction and the assertion of sovereignty which Russia articulates as critical to countering international pressure against its Arctic interests.

The importance placed on the delineation of Arctic maritime borders by Moscow within its wider

Arctic policy has been further encouraged by the receptiveness of international mediation bodies to requests for the extension of what is recognized as the Russian continental shelf in the Arctic. The 2015 claim submitted to the CLCS likely is not the final initiative of the Kremlin to extend the limits of its sovereignty further into the Arctic, as the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment completed scientific studies in 2019 to determine the possible further expansion of

<sup>75</sup> “Денис Храмов участвует в работе Комиссии ООН по границам континентального шельфа [Denis Khramov Participates in the Work of the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf].” 2019. Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation. November 18, 2019.  
[http://www.mnr.gov.ru/press/news/denis\\_khramov\\_uchastvuet\\_v\\_rabote\\_komissii\\_oon\\_po\\_granitsam\\_kontinentalnogo\\_shelfa/index.php](http://www.mnr.gov.ru/press/news/denis_khramov_uchastvuet_v_rabote_komissii_oon_po_granitsam_kontinentalnogo_shelfa/index.php).

Russian shelf claims in the Arctic.<sup>76</sup> The gathering of data to support Russian claims has even taken Russian research ships across the length of the Lomonosov Ridge in 2020, all the way to the northern reaches of Canada and Greenland.<sup>77</sup> Such consistent and wide-reaching pursuit of Russian goals in the Arctic Ocean shows the importance of these goals in Russian policymaking, and will therefore likely continue into the future. The urgency of Russian attempts to ascertain the geologic origins of geophysical features adjacent to its continental shelf is made more apparent to the Kremlin through Canada and Denmark's attempts to claim the Lomonosov Ridge, which have also been filed with the CLCS.<sup>78</sup> The ridge is also adjacent to the Northern Reaches of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago and Greenland, an autonomous territory of Denmark, which are used as grounds for Canadian and Danish claims, respectively. As noted in "Foundations of State Policy", the Kremlin sees international challenges to Russian Arctic claims as the primary challenge to its policy in the Arctic, which therefore drives Russia's interest in firmly cementing its claims surrounding its Arctic continental shelf.

Though Russia has enjoyed forward momentum with regards to the international recognition of its Arctic continental shelf claims, the internal territorial unit structure of the Arctic has been subject to revisions in the past two decades. While not confined to the Arctic, a series of mergers of small, less populated Russian federal subjects took place between 2005 and 2008. In the Arctic, this included the 2007 merger of the Taimyr Autonomous Okrug and Evenki Autonomous Okrug into the large Krasnoyarsk Krai to the south, which was justified under the

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<sup>76</sup> "Минприроды России завершило дополнительные научные изыскания для расширения российских границ в Арктике [Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology Finished Study on the Expansion of the Borders of Russia in the Arctic]." 2019. RIA Novosti. September 4, 2019. <https://ria.ru/20190904/1558268587.html>.

<sup>77</sup> Breum, Martin. 2021. "Russia Considers Extended Claim to the Arctic Seabed." High North News. February 1, 2021. <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/russia-considers-extended-claim-arctic-seabed>.

<sup>78</sup> Henriques, Martha. n.d. "The Rush to Claim an Undersea Mountain Range." Accessed March 17, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200722-the-rush-to-claim-an-undersea-mountain-range>.

pretext that the merger of the underdeveloped and sparsely populated autonomous okrugs would give their populations greater access to public services and improve their administrations.<sup>79</sup> Although public opinion on this merger among citizens of the old territorial units was mixed, the COVID-19 pandemic saw the return of the prospect of the merger of Arctic federal subjects. Following the precipitous fall in oil prices in the early months of the spread of the pandemic, the respective leaderships of Arkhangelsk Oblast and the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (NAO) announced the planned merger of the two regions, which the governor of the NAO argued for on the basis that the subject faced financial ruin.<sup>80</sup> The budget of the NAO is based on an assumed oil price of \$57 per barrel, and the extreme drop in prices threatened to prohibit the okrug from paying many critical expenses. Despite the appearance of inevitability in the announced merger, which also left the door open for the inclusion of the Komi Republic,<sup>81</sup> the merger was forced to be put on hold after the NAO was the only federal subject to reject the proposed constitutional amendments in the July 1 referendum, which was perceived as a protest vote against the merger.<sup>82</sup> The rejection of the proposed constitutional amendments in the NAO was unique among Russia's 84 other federal subjects in the referendum, which also included constitutional amendment proposals to allow President Putin to run for two additional presidential terms, to allow for changes to the pension system, to ban same-sex marriage constitutionally, as well as to

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<sup>79</sup> Okunev, Igor. 2020. "Merging Russian Regions: Assessing the Reform before Its Second Wave." International Centre for Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity Studies. <https://www.icelds.org/2020/05/27/merging-russian-regions-assessing-the-reform-before-its-second-wave/>.

<sup>80</sup> Quinn, Eilis. "'Catastrophic' Economic Situation Prompts Merger Talks for Nenets AO and Arkhangelsk Oblast." 2020. The Independent Barents Observer. Accessed March 17, 2021. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/2020/05/catastrophic-economic-situation-prompts-merger-talks-nenets-ao-and-arkhangelsk-oblast>.

<sup>81</sup> "Рабочая группа по слиянию Архангельской области с НАО предложила включить в регион и Коми [Working Group from Arkhangelsk Oblast and the NAO Proposed to Include the Komi Republic in the Region]." 2020. ТАСС. Accessed March 17, 2021. <https://tass.ru/politika/8510473>.

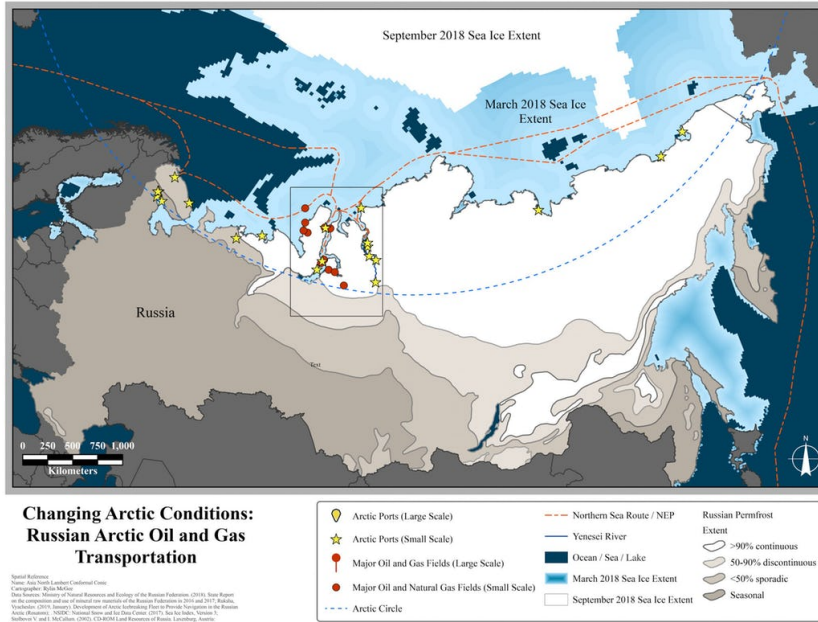
<sup>82</sup> Staalesen, Atle. 2020. "On Nenets Tundra Reverberates Sound of Anti-Kremlin Dissent." The Independent Barents Observer. July 3, 2020. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/life-and-public/2020/07/nenets-tundra-reverberates-sound-anti-kremlin-dissent>.

place the constitution above international law, among other proposed amendments. Although it is unknown if the failed merger between Arkhangelsk Oblast and the NAO was truly initiated at the federal subject level, or if the Kremlin had impelled such a decision, the strong reaction to the proposal likely will temper any future attempts by the Kremlin or local governments to change the current arrangement of territorial units or the administrative bodies attached to them.

The political and physical environment in which the Kremlin's Arctic policy is to be implemented includes signs for encouragement and discouragement. While the use of the shift method for staffing Arctic economic projects might stabilize the economic situation of the Far North, the steep population decline observed across the Arctic region presents what is arguably the most pressing problem to the success of Moscow's Arctic policy. Severe ecological damage to the Arctic by private actors represents both an opportunity for the Russian government to demonstrate its commitment to the health of Arctic populations and a potential to put further ecological pressure on already severely stressed social and economic infrastructure. A growing willingness by international bodies to recognize or partially recognize Russian Arctic continental shelf claims represents significant positive development for Russian interests and policy in the Arctic, as international pressure on Russian claims is considered a serious challenge to Russian policy in "Foundations of State Policy". As a significant element of Russian economic development both in the Arctic and the wider economy, the success of the exploitation of energy resources in the Far North as hoped by Moscow is contingent on international recognition of its sovereignty claims as well as its ability to mitigate the effects of future ecological disasters.

## Chapter IV: Arctic Energy as an Economic and Geopolitical Pillar

The development and exploitation of Arctic energy resources is not only viewed by Moscow as an economic engine for the Arctic region, but also for the wider Russian economy.



McGee, Rylin. 2020. "Mapping Russia's Arctic Hydrocarbon Development Scheme." The Arctic Institute. February 18, 2020. <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/mapping-russia-arctic-hydrocarbon-development-scheme/>.

Therefore, the attempts of the Kremlin to encourage Arctic projects of energy companies and to provide what it sees as a safe environment for their activities are of a high priority. While disincentives related to the cost and environmental challenges of Arctic energy extraction exist, Russian policy prioritizes the

continued development of hydrocarbon over deference to environmental or other concerns.

Sanctions that Western nations levied against Russia following Russian annexation of Crimea and incursion into eastern Ukraine in 2014 provide a strong headwind to Moscow's attempts to expand the exploitation of energy resources in the Arctic. The pressure placed on financial resources and technology availability by these sanctions are difficult to be overcome through the efforts of the Russian government alone. Chinese willingness to finance Arctic energy projects is one escape route which the Kremlin has come to increasingly rely on, despite some reservations. Russian Arctic energy policy is heavily oriented towards continued development of existing and

new hydrocarbon resources, and that emphasis is unlikely to change as a result of external and environmental pressures.

The presence of significant hydrocarbon reserves in the Arctic region continues to motivate Russian energy activity in the Arctic. Roughly 40% of the Russian state budget is derived from tax revenues from fossil fuel production and hydrocarbon exports, primarily sourced from older fields which have seen their output decline over time, which Moscow views as justification for increased exploration and hydrocarbon extraction in the Arctic. Given the findings of a 2008 US Geological Survey report which estimated that 30 percent of the world's undiscovered natural gas reserves and 13 percent of the globe's undiscovered oil reserves are located in the Arctic, and that Russia holds the lion's share of those undiscovered Arctic reserves,<sup>83</sup> it is unsurprising that Moscow would seek to further develop Arctic energy resources at a rapid clip.

The Kremlin's designation of the Arctic and Arctic-adjacent regions as strategic areas for growing the wider economy is grounded in the assumption that explosive growth in the Arctic energy industry will maintain the broader growth of the Russian economy itself.<sup>84</sup> Russian leadership has devoted significant attention to the idea of basing Russian economic growth on the expansion of Arctic energy and resource extraction, which can be seen in how President Putin declared as early as 2008 that the foremost goal of Russian Arctic policy was to transform the Arctic into a "resource base in the 21<sup>st</sup> century".<sup>85</sup> Barring a significant readjustment of

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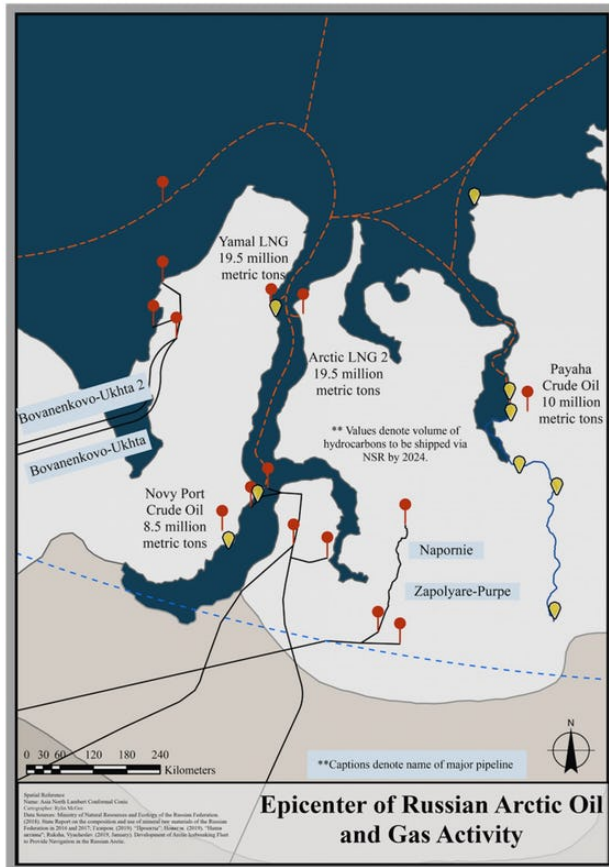
<sup>83</sup> "Circum-Arctic Resource Appraisal: Estimates of Undiscovered Oil and Gas North of the Arctic Circle." 2008. Fact Sheet. Fact Sheet. United States Geological Survey. <https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2008/3049/fs2008-3049.pdf>.

<sup>84</sup> Sidortsov, Roman. "Benefits over Risks: A Case Study of Government Support of Energy Development in the Russian North." *Energy policy* 129 (June 2019): 132–138. [https://wlu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01WLU\\_INST/12srbpt/cdi\\_crossref\\_primary\\_10\\_1016\\_j\\_enpol\\_2019\\_01\\_067](https://wlu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01WLU_INST/12srbpt/cdi_crossref_primary_10_1016_j_enpol_2019_01_067)

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*



geophysical estimates of the amount of untapped hydrocarbon resources in the Arctic, Moscow’s Arctic “resource base” ambitions will continue to dominate Russian Arctic policy for the foreseeable future.



McGee, Rylin. 2020. “Mapping Russia’s Arctic Hydrocarbon Development Scheme.” The Arctic Institute. February 18, 2020. <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/mapping-russia-arctic-hydrocarbon-development-scheme/>.

Russia’s Arctic energy projects are centered on the production of hydrocarbons such as oil and natural gas, particularly in its liquefied natural gas (LNG) form. The crown jewel of Russian LNG production today is the Yamal LNG project located on the Yamal Peninsula, which itself is located within the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug. The \$27 billion venture was declared a project of national interest by the Russian government and is centered on the development of the Tambeyskoye gas field near Sabetta on the Yamal Peninsula, whose first pumps came online in 2018.<sup>86</sup> In addition to the Yamal

LNG project, which it runs through its subsidiary Yamal LNG, the private Russian natural gas company Novatek has started to develop the Arctic LNG 2 project on the neighboring Gydan Peninsula, and hopes to complete the project by the end 2022, despite some difficulties related to

<sup>86</sup> “Yamal LNG Project, Sabetta.” n.d. Hydrocarbons Technology. Accessed March 22, 2021. <https://www.hydrocarbons-technology.com/projects/yamal-lng-project-russia/>.

the spread of COVID-19 at the construction site.<sup>87</sup> Besides Novatek, the majority state-owned energy giant Gazprom's operations on the Yamal Peninsula are centered on the Bovanenkovo field, with which the company plans to produce 220 billion cubic meters of LNG and which has been in operation since 2012.<sup>88</sup> The Yamal region itself represents approximately 80% of Russian LNG production and 15% of world LNG production by Novatek's estimate,<sup>89</sup> figures which emphasize the critical nature of the Yamal region to Russian Arctic energy policy. Given the high concentration of Russian LNG resources on the Yamal Peninsula and public statements from President Putin that that Russia "can and will" become the world's leading LNG producer,<sup>90</sup> future development of LNG extraction operations on the Yamal are likely.

While the natural gas fields of the Yamal Peninsula have seen rapid development in recent years, the fate of the Shtokman field illustrates how seemingly well-backed plans and energy policy can quickly come apart. The Shtokman field, which is located in the Central Barents Sea near the Russo-Norwegian border 550 kilometers off the Kola Peninsula, garnered significant international interest from Norwegian and French energy companies, and was estimated to contain nearly 4 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, making it one of the largest fields by potential volume in the world.<sup>91</sup> Gazprom intended to sell the natural gas of Shtokman in the North American market; however, the "shale revolution" in America and the glut of

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<sup>87</sup> Humpert, Published at: Jun 30 2020-09:48 / Updated at: Jun 30 2020- 09:48 From Malte. n.d. "Novatek Arctic LNG 2 Project Remains on Schedule Despite Impact Of Covid-19." Accessed March 22, 2021.

<https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/Novatek-arctic-lng-2-project-remains-schedule-despite-impact-covid-19>.

<sup>88</sup> Tsafos, Nikos. 2019. "Is Russia Winning the Race to Develop Arctic Energy?" Center for Strategic and International Studies. March 22, 2019. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-winning-race-develop-arctic-energy>.

<sup>89</sup> "Сообщение ПАО «НОВАТЭК» в отношении танкеров ледового класса Arc7 [Statement by PAO NOVATEK Regarding Arc-7 Ice-Class Tankers]." press-release. press-release. [https://www.Novatek.ru/ru/press/releases/index.php?id\\_4=3507](https://www.Novatek.ru/ru/press/releases/index.php?id_4=3507).

<sup>90</sup> "Russia Can and Will Become World's Top LNG Producer, Putin Says." Reuters, March 30, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/Novatek-lng-putin-idUSR4N1G703M>.

<sup>91</sup> Staalesen, Atle. 2019. "No More Shtokman Development." The Independent Barents Observer. June 21, 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2019/06/no-more-shtokman-development>.

natural gas supply in the market which came with it caused the project to be indefinitely postponed in 2012. This was followed by the withdrawal of Norwegian and French international partners of Gazprom from the project in 2015.<sup>92</sup> Shtokman Development AG, the Gazprom subsidiary responsible for its operations on the Shtokman field, was formally liquidated in June 2019 with the assent of Russian Minister of Energy Alexander Novak. To preserve its freedom for continued exploration for new fields in the Arctic in an international environment of sanctions, Russian drill ships have been given tasks closer to home in the Arctic.<sup>93</sup> This, combined with the unwillingness of Gazprom to abandon the site of its planned terminal for Shtokman natural gas on the Kola Peninsula,<sup>94</sup> shows how Russian energy policy appears to leave room for the future discovery of new fields and the exploitation of known ones.

The development of oil extraction operations in the Arctic has also been of significant interest to the Russian government, particularly offshore oil projects. Rosneft, a state-owned oil and gas company which is a significant player in Russian Arctic energy development, has seen difficulty in achieving the necessary economy of scale that is required to make offshore oil extraction profitable, as many of its 26 international partnerships have effectively been halted in the wake of the imposition of Western sanctions after 2014.<sup>95</sup> Russian oil development efforts are also hampered by the high bureaucratic hurdles required to exploit a field. To be allowed to set up drilling operations at a particular location, the applicant must receive 180 permits from 20

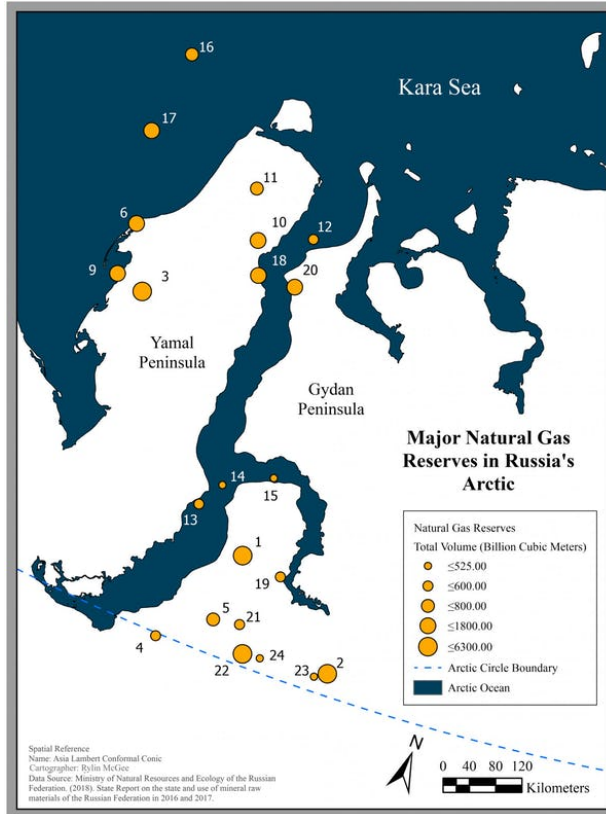
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<sup>92</sup> “‘Газпром’ Ликвидирует Shtokman Development [Gazprom Liquidates Shtokman Development].” 2019. Finmarket.Ru. June 19, 2019. <http://www.finmarket.ru/news.asp?id=5022088>.

<sup>93</sup> Staalesen, Alte. 2018. “The Drillship That Discovered the Shtokman Field Returns to Arctic.” The Independent Barents Observer. April 3, 2018. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2018/04/drillship-discovered-shtokman-gas-returns-home>.

<sup>94</sup> “‘Газпром’ не отдал свои земли у Баренцева моря парку ‘Териберка’ [Gazprom did not Give its Land by the Barents Sea to the Teriberka Park].” n.d. Interfax.ru. Accessed March 22, 2021. <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/756164>.

<sup>95</sup> Tsafos, Nikos. 2019. “Is Russia Winning the Race to Develop Arctic Energy?” Center for Strategic and International Studies. March 22, 2019. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-winning-race-develop-arctic-energy>.



McGee, Rylin. 2020. "Mapping Russia's Arctic Hydrocarbon Development Scheme." The Arctic Institute. February 18, 2020. <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/mapping-russia-arctic-hydrocarbon-development-scheme/>.

different government agencies, which, when combined with the fact that the only companies given the right to drill in the Arctic are those in which the Russian government has a stake of greater than 50%, means that Russian offshore oil drilling has been confined to a small handful of operations.<sup>96</sup> Nearly 80% of hydrocarbon resources in the Arctic are in the form of natural gas,<sup>97</sup> and the few offshore oil rigs such as the controversial Prirazlomnaya rig in the Pechora Sea (whose construction was greeted with high-profile Greenpeace protests) or the Vostochno-Prinovozemelskiy operation in the Kara Sea, which Rosneft started drilling

in August 2020,<sup>98</sup> have proven unable to produce significant quantities of oil, especially when compared to land-based Rosneft wells. Land-based oil extraction projects have seen significant state support, with a prominent example being Vostok Oil, a joint venture set up to explore and exploit Arctic oil resources, particularly on the Paiyakhskoye and Vankor fields near the Taimyr and Gydan peninsulas.<sup>99</sup> The immense financial and logistical scale of the project – which

<sup>96</sup> Anna, Kireeva. 2019. "For All of Russia's Talk about Oil Drilling in the Arctic, Most Arctic Oil Will Likely Go Untouched." Bellona.Org. April 24, 2019. <https://bellona.org/news/arctic/2019-04-for-all-of-russias-talk-about-oil-drilling-in-the-arctic-most-arctic-oil-will-likely-go-untouched>.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Reuters. 2020. "Russia's Rosneft Drilling Again in Arctic Kara Sea after Sanctions Hiatus," August 18, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-rosneft-sakhalin-idUSL8N2FK3CO>.

<sup>99</sup> IntelliNews, Ben Aris for bne. 2019. "Vostok Oil: Russia's Newest Arctic Energy Hope." The Moscow Times. November 1, 2019. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/11/01/vostok-oil-russia-arctic-energy-a68011>.

represents a total investment of \$111 billion USD to build local infrastructure and 15 “industry towns” built by 400,000 workers<sup>100</sup> – is in large part financed through the elimination of certain taxes on Rosneft and some direct investment by the Russian government,<sup>101</sup> an indication of the strong interest of Moscow in the successful completion of Vostok Oil.

Western sanctions have significantly hampered the pursuit of Russian goals in the Arctic. The American prohibition on the exportation or provision of goods, services, or technology “in support of exploration or production for deepwater, Arctic offshore, or shale projects that have the potential to produce oil in the Russian Federation, or in maritime area claimed by the Russian Federation and extending from its territory” has produced significant roadblocks in the development of Russian energy resources in the Arctic.<sup>102</sup> While a short-term gap in Russian energy extraction capabilities has resulted from Western sanctions, Russia’s present and future ability to draw upon the financing and assistance of countries not involved in the Western sanctions regime, such as that of East Asian countries like China, while also developing its own technological understanding of the challenges of Arctic offshore extraction, will allow Russian state policy to circumvent this roadblock in the long-term.<sup>103</sup> Russian conceptualization of the obstacles facing its Arctic policy is grounded in the assumption that Russian Arctic policy and goals are made particularly vulnerable by the blocking of the acquisition of Western deep sea drilling and exploration equipment, which is absolutely necessary for the accomplishment of

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Aris, Ben. 2019. “Vostok Oil: Russia’s Newest Arctic Energy Hope.” The Moscow Times. November 1, 2019. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/11/01/vostok-oil-russia-arctic-energy-a68011>.

<sup>102</sup> “Ukraine and Russia Sanctions.” 2014. 2009-2017.State.Gov. March 2014. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/e/eb/tfs/spi/ukrainerussia//index.htm>.[https://eusp.org/sites/default/files/archive/imares/ENERPO\\_Journal/ENERPOJournal\\_Jun2017.pdf](https://eusp.org/sites/default/files/archive/imares/ENERPO_Journal/ENERPOJournal_Jun2017.pdf)

<sup>103</sup> Pavon-Suriel, Glenda. “Russian Hydrocarbon Development in the Arctic Despite Sanctions”. ENERPO Journal, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2017): 11-15.

[https://eusp.org/sites/default/files/archive/imares/ENERPO\\_Journal/ENERPOJournal\\_Jun2017.pdf](https://eusp.org/sites/default/files/archive/imares/ENERPO_Journal/ENERPOJournal_Jun2017.pdf)

Russian policy goals surrounding the development of hydrocarbon extraction operations on the Arctic shelf.<sup>104</sup> American sanctions have accurately targeted key technologies needed to secure the continuation and development of specific Russian Arctic energy operations, and short of a full Russian withdrawal from Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, Russian policy must be adapted by Moscow to fit this reality for the foreseeable future.<sup>105</sup> Russian operations in the Arctic also run the risk of being entangled in sanctions targeted at Iran, as many of the vital transportation companies that work with Iranian hydrocarbons and which carry Russian hydrocarbon products to East Asian markets were caught in US sanctions against Iran in 2019, which caused significant disruptions to Novatek's LNG operations.<sup>106</sup>

Western sanctions have fundamentally shifted the flow of international financing into the Russian Arctic, which itself is an indication of the realignment of international partnerships in the Arctic. Before the imposition of Western sanctions after 2014, Western energy companies were key partners in the development of Russian hydrocarbon extraction in the Arctic. For example, a partnership between Rosneft and Exxon to explore and develop the Pobeda field in the Kara Sea ground to a halt after US sanctions forced Exxon's withdrawal in 2014,<sup>107</sup> while France's Total and Norway's Statoil withdrew from their partnership with Gazprom to develop the Shtokman Field, partly due to the halt to the progress of the project as well as the

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<sup>104</sup> Safikhanov, Andrei, Mikhail Kozin, and Timur Kurbanov. 2016. "Национальные Интересы России в Арктической Зоне Российской Федерации: Военно-Экономический Аспект [National Interests of Russia in the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation: Military-Economic Aspect]." Вестник Забайкальского Государственного Университета 22 (11). <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/natsionalnye-interesy-rossii-v-arkticheskoy-zone-rossiyskoy-federatsii-voenno-ekonomicheskii-aspekt>.

<sup>105</sup> Kirchner, Stefan. 2019. "U.S. Sanctions and the Russian Arctic: The Oil and Gas Sector as Russia's Achilles' Heel?" SSRN Scholarly Paper ID 3500044. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3500044>.

<sup>106</sup> "Russian Gas Giant Plays Down Disruption of Anti-Iran Sanctions." 2019. The Moscow Times. October 2, 2019. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/10/02/arctic-gas-industry-hit-by-anti-iran-sanctions-a67550>.

<sup>107</sup> Soldatkin, Vladimir. 2014. "Rosneft Says Discovers Offshore Arctic Oil Jointly with Exxon." Reuters, September 27, 2014. <https://www.reuters.com/article/rosneft-arctic-discovery-idUSL6N0RS04Z20140927>.

deterioration of the international climate.<sup>108</sup> After the near-total withdrawal of US and Western involvement in Russian Arctic energy development, China and Chinese state-owned companies were quick to fill the void. Chinese state-owned companies have sought to invest in the Russian Arctic even before the events of 2014, with Rosneft and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) discussing potential partnerships in the exploration of the Barents and Pechora Seas for hydrocarbon reserves in 2013.<sup>109</sup> CNPC and China's Silk Road fund hold important stakes in the much-vaunted Yamal LNG project, with CNPC holding a 20% stake alongside the Silk Road Fund's 9.9%.<sup>110</sup> Chinese involvement in Arctic energy projects also gives Russian companies access to Chinese technology, an adequate temporary stand-in for Western technology made unavailable by sanctions.<sup>111</sup> While it is yet to be determined if Chinese technology will adequately serve as a long-term replacement for equivalent Western technology and expertise, Russia has also sought to invite technological participation in LNG projects in the Arctic from Japanese companies such as Mitsui and Japan Oil, Gas, and Metals National Corporation, potentially indicating a desire to avoid undue dependence on Chinese technology alone.<sup>112</sup> China's stake in the Yamal LNG project is its most substantial energy link to the Russian Arctic to date, and the 195 billion cubic feet per annum it is entitled to take from the Yamal LNG operation emphasizes the central position of energy policy in China's presence in the Arctic.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Staalesen, Atle. 2019. "No More Shtokman Development." *The Independent Barents Observer*. June 21, 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2019/06/no-more-shtokman-development>.

<sup>109</sup> Kalfaoglu, Rabiya. 2020. "Chinese-Russian Cooperation in the Arctic: Prospects of Development." *Bulletin of the Moscow State Regional University*, no. 2 (April): 119. <https://doi.org/10.18384/2224-0209-2018-2-878>.

<sup>110</sup> "Yamal LNG Project Reaches Full Production Capacity." 2018. *Xinhua*. December 12, 2018. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-12/12/c\\_137666821.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-12/12/c_137666821.htm).

<sup>111</sup> Kalfaoglu, Rabiya. 2020. "Chinese-Russian Cooperation in the Arctic: Prospects of Development." *Bulletin of the Moscow State Regional University*, no. 2 (April): 119. <https://doi.org/10.18384/2224-0209-2018-2-878>.

<sup>112</sup> Trenin, Dmitri. 2020. "Russia and China in the Arctic: Cooperation, Competition, and Consequences." *Carnegie Moscow Center*. March 31, 2020. <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/81407>.

<sup>113</sup> Nakano, Jane, and Li William. 2018. "China Launches the Polar Silk Road." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. February 2, 2018. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/china-launches-polar-silk-road>.

As Chinese demand for natural gas continues to grow, Arctic LNG projects are seen by Beijing as a means to feed such demand, as can be seen in a February 2021 deal between Russia's Novatek and China's Shenergy for Novatek to export 3 million metric tons of LNG per year to China.<sup>114</sup>

Chinese support for Russian Arctic energy projects is most notably joined by the interests of Japan and India, as well as the remaining interests of Western energy companies, who have a variety of stakes across the main projects in the Russian Arctic. Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe spearheaded a policy of active encouragement of Japanese investment into the Russian Arctic energy sector, which was perceived to be a way to both address the Japanese market's demand for LNG and as a way to foster the rapprochement needed to discuss the territorial dispute over the Kuril Islands between the two countries.<sup>115</sup> Novatek's Arctic LNG 2 project is financed in part by a 10% stake of a consortium between the Japanese companies Mitsui & Co and Jogmec, which is joined by significant stakes held by China's CNPC and France's Total.<sup>116</sup> India enthusiastically expressed interest in investment and participation in Arctic energy projects, as in the case of the Vostok Oil project, which lends momentum to further energy cooperation in the Arctic.<sup>117</sup> Singapore has offered drilling and shipping technology as a way to gain access to Arctic hydrocarbon extraction, even after Western sanctions were imposed.<sup>118</sup> While uneven in

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<sup>114</sup> Evans, Damon. 2021. "Russia to Export More LNG to China - News for the Oil and Gas Sector." Energy Voice (blog). March 1, 2021. <https://www.energyvoice.com/oilandgas/asia/lng/303172/russia-to-export-more-lng-to-china/>.

<sup>115</sup> Itoh, Shoichi. 2018. "Japan's Opaque Energy Policy toward Russia: Is Abe Being Trumped by Putin?" 74. NBR Special Report. The National Bureau of Asian Research. <https://www.nbr.org/publication/japans-opaque-energy-policy-toward-russia-is-abe-being-trumped-by-putin/>.

<sup>116</sup> "Novatek Greenlights \$21 Billion Russian Arctic LNG 2 Plant." 2019. The Moscow Times. September 5, 2019. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/09/05/Novatek-greenlights-21-billion-russian-arctic-lng-2-plant-a67161>.

<sup>117</sup> "Лавров: Индия Может Стать Первым Неарктическим Государством, Добывающим Ресурсы в Арктике [Lavrov: India Could Become the First Non-Arctic State to Extract Resources in the Arctic]." 2020. TASS. January 14, 2020. <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/7520823>.

<sup>118</sup> Zhuravel, Valeriy, and Artem Danilov. n.d. "Singapore on the Way to the Arctic." Arctic and North, no. 24: 128–30. [http://www.arcticandnorth.ru/upload/iblock/d05/10\\_zhuravel\\_danilov.pdf](http://www.arcticandnorth.ru/upload/iblock/d05/10_zhuravel_danilov.pdf).



their success and involvement, international interests in the Russian Arctic will prove to be critical to facilitate the long-term expansion of Russian energy extraction.

Russian Arctic energy policy strongly emphasizes continual expansion of energy projects and extraction, and this is plainly visible in the rapid clip which the Russian government and its foreign partners have sought to make use of the energy resources of the Arctic. Moscow's belief in the region as a future "resource base" for the Russian economy shows no sign of abatement, despite the imposition of Western sanctions on the country in the wake of the 2014 Russian incursions into Ukraine. Russian adaptation to the changing local and international context in which its Arctic energy policy is implemented indicates both the high priority Arctic energy policy occupies in the eyes of the Kremlin as well as the belief that the Arctic will need to play a substantial role in Russia's heavily resource-based economy over the next several decades. The establishment of partnerships with relative newcomers to Arctic energy extraction, particularly those in East and South Asia, has proven to be valuable in countering the negative effect of Western sanctions on Russia's policy for developing the Arctic. Energy extraction in the Arctic will remain a point of emphasis and pride for Russia for the foreseeable future.

## **Chapter V: The Arctic as a Transport Artery**

Until very recently in its history, the Russian Arctic has not been a heavily trafficked region, and those entering the region have usually been motivated by reasons other than the pursuit of international trade. However, factors of global reach, such as the phenomenon of global climate change and the rise of large-scale international trade has combined to build interest in the use of the Arctic Ocean adjacent to Russia as a waterway. Moscow envisions that the Northern Sea Route (NSR), the official name of the route between the edges of the Bering

Sea and the Barents Sea, will serve as a major artery of world trade in the near future, and has placed significant policy emphasis on the encouragement of marine traffic on it. The route is presented as an alternative to existing routes for marine traffic between Asia and Europe which, given the recent blockage of the Suez Canal in March 2021, Russian Arctic policymakers will continue to promote as it becomes more pliable year-round through the melting of sea ice.<sup>119</sup>

Russian policy towards the NSR is intimately tied to other spheres of Russian Arctic policy, and operates under the assumption that Moscow can exert control over the NSR since it lies within what Russia claims as its territorial waters.

For the purpose of analysis, it is helpful to view the NSR through the definition used in Russian policy documents. The route is defined by the Russian Northern Sea Route Administration to start at the Kara Strait between the southern tip of Novaya Zemlya, and the northern tip of Vaygach Island, and end at Dezhneva Cape, which sits on the edge of the Bering Strait in Chukotka.<sup>120</sup> Between these two endpoints, the NSR zone passes through the Kara, Laptev, East Siberian, and Chukchi seas, which extends across the entirety of the Northern Coast of Russia East of the Barents Sea.<sup>121</sup> Special attention is paid to the Vilkitsky Strait, which sits between the Severnaya Zemlya Archipelago and the Taimyr Peninsula, the Sannikov Strait, which is between the New Siberian Islands and the East Siberian Coast, and the Long Strait, which sits between Wrangel Island and the coast of Chukotka.<sup>122</sup> These straits are particularly important due to their utility in the most direct traversal of the NSR by sea.

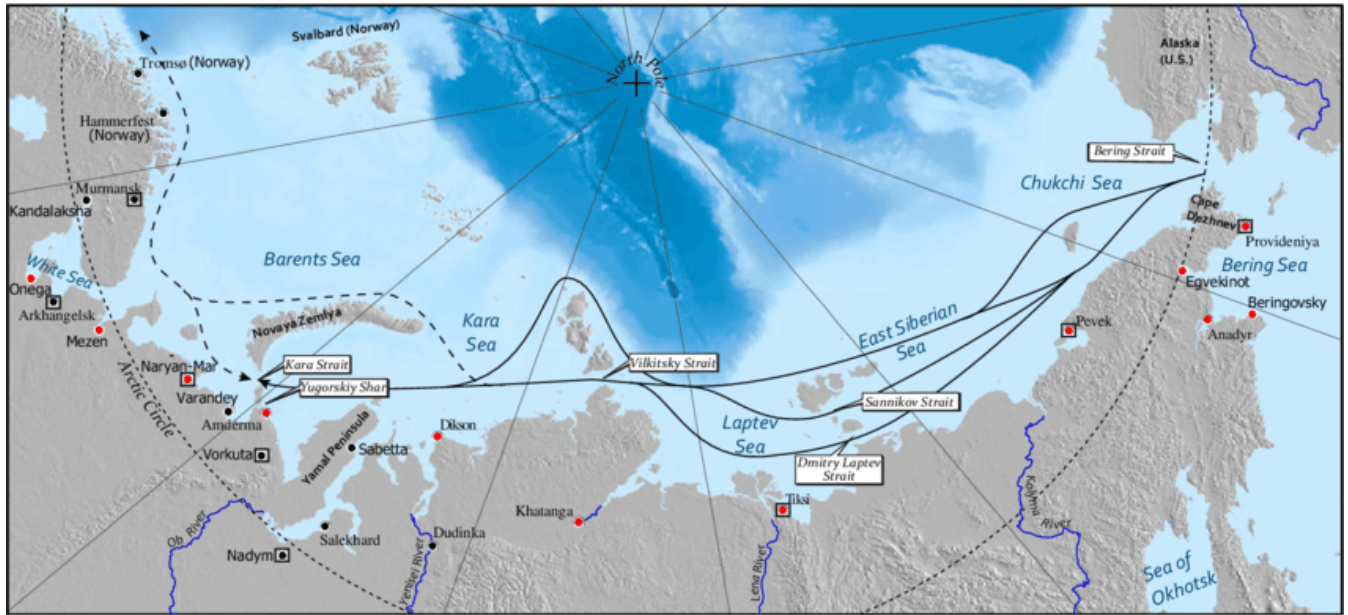
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<sup>119</sup> Nilsen, Thomas. 2021. "Making Fun of Suez Traffic Jam, Rosatom Promotes Russia's Arctic Route as an Alternative." The Independent Barents Observer. March 25, 2021. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2021/03/making-fun-suez-traffic-jam-rosatom-promotes-northern-sea-route>.

<sup>120</sup> "Акватория Северного морского пути [The water area of the Northern Sea Route]." n.d. The Northern Sea Route Administration. Accessed March 26, 2021. [http://www.nsra.ru/ru/ofitsialnaya\\_informatsiya/granici\\_smp.html](http://www.nsra.ru/ru/ofitsialnaya_informatsiya/granici_smp.html).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.



Buixadé Farré, Albert, Scott Stephenson, Linling Chen, Michał Czub, Ying Dai, Denis Demchev, Yaroslav Efimov, et al. 2014. "Figure 2 from 'Commercial Arctic Shipping through the Northeast Passage: Routes, Resources, Governance, Technology, and Infrastructure.'" *Polar Geography* 37 (October). <https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937X.2014.965769>.

While the NSR is seen by Russian policymakers and figures in academia alike as a potential economic engine for the Far North that will work in tandem with economic and energy developments, they acknowledge that certain obstacles must be overcome. Harsh natural conditions which are characteristic of the Russian Arctic present a barrier to the use of the route, the effects of which are compounded by underdeveloped port infrastructure and hazily defined routes for large-tonnage vessels.<sup>123</sup> While academic analysis emphasizes the wide potential for the use of the NSR as both a significant artery of trade between Europe and Asia in Russian Arctic policy, some acknowledge that the main driver for the future development of the route's infrastructure is the interests of energy companies, who themselves are beholden to the market

<sup>123</sup> Valery, Kubatov, Dmitry Koz'movskiy, and Natal'ya Shatalova. 2014. "Потенциал Северного Морского Пути Арктической Зоны России. Факторы и Стратегия Развития [Potential of the Northern Sea Route of the Arctic Zone of Russia. Factors and Development Strategy]." *Bulletin of Eurasian Science* 6 (25). <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/potentsial-severnogo-morskogo-puti-arkticheskoy-zony-rossii-factory-i-strategiya-razvitiya>.

forces in play in hydrocarbon markets.<sup>124</sup> This driving stake held by Russian energy companies in the NSR can be seen in how most port construction along the route in recent years has been in projects related to hydrocarbon extraction, which has the potential to improve the logistics of Arctic hydrocarbon exports. Policy connected to the construction of new ports and the deepening of existing ones has already seen some success through the construction of the port of Sabetta to support the Yamal LNG operation, but Far Eastern ports on the Arctic coast such as Tiksi, Dikson, and Pevek remain incapable of receiving the large-tonnage shipping which Kremlin policy envisions on the NSR.<sup>125</sup> This presents a serious obstacle to the use of the NSR as a transport corridor between Europe and Asia, as the route along the Far Eastern coast of the Russian Arctic remains underdeveloped when compared to the western section of the region. Academic analysis of Russian use of the Northern Sea route also holds that the route and its development play important roles in supporting Arctic populations and economic infrastructure, as overland routes which connect Arctic population centers and locations with the rest of the country are inferior to the NSR in capacity.<sup>126</sup>

One of the most publicized targets included in efforts to develop the Arctic into an engine of growth for the Russian economy is the state target of 80 million annual metric tons of shipping carried through the NSR by 2024. Rosatom Director General Alexi Likhachev, whose agency is responsible for all aspects of shipping and infrastructure on the NSR, publicly claimed

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Naumov, Yuriy. 2017. “Дальневосточные Порты в Системе Северного Морского Пути: История Освоения, Современное Состояние и Перспективы Их Развития [Far Eastern Ports in the System of the Northern Sea Route: History of Development, Current State and Prospects for Development].” *Ecumene Regional Studies* 3 (42). <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/dalnevostochnye-porty-v-sisteme-severnogo-morskogo-puti-istoriya-osvoeniya-sovremennoe-sostoyanie-i-perspektivy-ih-razvitiya>.

<sup>126</sup> Nikolaeva, Anna. 2011. “Северный Морской Путь: Проблемы и Перспективы [Northern Sea Route: Problems and Prospects].” *Bulletin of the Kola Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, no. 4. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/severnyy-morskoy-put-problemy-i-perspektivy>.

in April 2019 that Rosatom plans to surpass the official target by 12.6 million metric tons.<sup>127</sup> The critical role played by Rosatom nuclear icebreakers to facilitate use of the NSR in recent decades effectively cemented its unofficial role as the facilitator of marine transport on the NSR, which would later be made reinforced through official delegation of responsibility for the NSR to Rosatom in 2018.<sup>128</sup> Given that the 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 annual NSR tonnages were 10.7, 20.18, 31.5,<sup>129</sup> and 32 million metric tons respectively<sup>130</sup>, sharp increases in tonnage beyond significant recent growth in tonnage levels will be needed to adequately meet such targets. With such high targets for shipping on the NSR set from the political center in Moscow, significant pressure exists to scale up use of the route in a very short timeframe, regardless of feasibility.

In some ways, Rosatom's wide portfolio of responsibilities with regards to the Russian Arctic is reminiscent of the early Soviet Glavsevmorput and its wide purview across Arctic development issues. In 2018, Moscow officially codified Rosatom's wide responsibilities in law, and since then the nuclear energy-focused state corporation has taken on wide-ranging policy responsibilities, in particular those related to the NSR. With the enactment of the law, Rosatom's responsibilities were expanded to include the management and operation of the NSR, regulatory and organizational authority over navigation on the route, and the development of supporting port infrastructure along the route itself, among other responsibilities.<sup>131</sup> In order to expand its

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<sup>127</sup> "Rosatom Plans to Increase Northern Sea Route Cargo Volume to 92.6 Million Metric Tons by 2024." 2019. The Arctic. April 9, 2019. <https://arctic.ru/forumarctica/20190409/845395.html>.

<sup>128</sup> Perera, Judith. 2020. "Rosatom Focuses on the Arctic." Nuclear Engineering International. July 9, 2020. <https://www.neimagazine.com/features/feature/rosatom-focuses-on-the-arctic-8017401/>.

<sup>129</sup> "Putin's Grand Plan for Arctic Shipping Might Wreck in Barents Sea." 2020. The Moscow Times. June 24, 2020. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/06/24/putins-grand-plan-for-arctic-shipping-might-wreck-in-barents-sea-a70673>.

<sup>130</sup> Humpert, Malte. 2020. "Cargo Volume on Northern Sea Route Remains Stable at 32m Tons in 2020." High North News. September 30, 2020. <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/cargo-volume-northern-sea-route-remains-stable-32m-tons-2020>.

<sup>131</sup> "Подписан закон о наделении «Росатома» рядом полномочий в области развития Северного морского пути [A Law was Signed Granting Rosatom Powers Related to the Development of the Northern Sea Route]." n.d. President of Russia. Accessed March 30, 2021. <http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/59539>.

Arctic shipping capabilities after it was charged with the development of shipping on the NSR in 2018, Rosatom bought a 30% stake in the transport company Delo Group in 2019.<sup>132</sup> Through this acquisition, Rosatom aims to become more capable of fulfilling its leading role in Arctic shipping which it has been charged with by Moscow. In addition to its new responsibilities, Rosatom operates a significant icebreaker fleet, which is important to the continuous operation of the NSR. Rosatomflot, a subsidiary of Rosatom, operates 2 twin-reactor nuclear icebreakers, two single-reactor nuclear icebreakers, and a non-nuclear icebreaking container ship.<sup>133</sup> The expansion of Rosatom's responsibilities and capabilities into the utilization and management of the NSR has made it the metaphorical tip of the Russian Arctic policy spear with regards to the NSR, and future successes or difficulties will likely be intimately linked to the performance of the company in the Far North.

Despite this delegation of authority to Rosatom, it must share its Arctic-related responsibilities with other federal agencies. With the Northern Sea Route Directorate of Rosatom charged with the official development of NSR policy, the similarly-named Administration of the Northern Sea Route of the Russian Ministry of Transport is responsible for the approval of proposals by Rosatom's Northern Sea Route Directorate.<sup>134</sup> In his role as director of the Northern Sea Route Directorate, Vyacheslav Ruksha considers state policy developed and executed by federal organizations like Rosatom to be the main driver of the development of the

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<sup>132</sup> "Rosatom Signs Deal to Boost Russia's Arctic Infrastructure." 2019. The Moscow Times. December 3, 2019. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/12/03/rosatom-delo-deal-russias-arctic-infrastructure-northern-sea-route-a68455>.

<sup>133</sup> "Rosatom State Atomic Energy Corporation ROSATOM Global Leader in Nuclear Technologies Nuclear Energy." n.d. Rosatom. Accessed March 30, 2021. <https://www.rosatom.ru/en/rosatom-group/the-nuclear-icebreaker-fleet/>.

<sup>134</sup> Nilsen, Thomas. 2018. "Vyacheslav Ruksha Will Lead the Newly Established Northern Sea Route Directorate." The Independent Barents Observer. July 24, 2018. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2018/07/vyasheslav-ruksha-will-lead-newly-established-northern-sea-route-directorate>.

NSR in the present and future, whose main tools are the application of tax incentives as well as direct support for infrastructure development.<sup>135</sup> Ruksha points to examples of government support for marine infrastructure projects to connect the NSR to energy extraction operations on the Yamal peninsula as well as ongoing efforts to use icebreakers and new Arc7 class tankers to make year-round travel on the route possible as evidence of the high priority placed by the Russian government on NSR development.<sup>136</sup> At present, only icebreaking-capable tankers such as the Arc7 class or ships accompanied by dedicated icebreakers can traverse the NSR in winter, although such journeys are themselves enabled by the retreat of winter sea ice in recent years.<sup>137</sup> Despite high tonnage expectations referenced in foundational Russian Arctic policies, the Russian government will struggle in the near future to make the NSR into a cross-continental transport artery, rather than its present status as an avenue for shipping to Arctic ports and destinations. This is due to the year-round extreme environmental factors related to ice and weather in the region as well as the high cost of shipping through the Arctic, which is related to navigation difficulties inherent to some of the straits of the NSR as well as artificial costs which the Russian government imposes on Arctic shipping in its effort to exert control over the route.<sup>138</sup> Even as ice in the Arctic becomes more passable during the winter, navigating across

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<sup>135</sup> “Extracts from the Interview of Vyacheslav Ruksha for Korabel.Ru.” 2021. Center for High North Logistics of Nord University. March 16, 2021. <https://arctic-lio.com/extracts-from-the-interview-of-vyacheslav-ruksha-for-korabel-ru/>.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Staalesen, Alte. 2021. “A Step Closer to Year-Round Shipments on Northern Sea Route.” The Independent Barents Observer. January 18, 2021. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic-lng/2021/01/step-closer-year-round-shipments-northern-sea-route>.

<sup>138</sup> Laruelle, Marlène. 2014. *Russia's Arctic Strategies And The Future Of The Far North*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe. 176, 177.

ice-covered or ice-heavy waters remains a difficult task that requires real-time analysis of sometimes-patchy satellite imagery, which increases travel time substantially.<sup>139</sup>

Through its potential to significantly shorten marine transit time between ports in Europe and East Asia, the NSR route promises to attract international attention. While the United States has sought to either play down or refute the Chinese claim that it is a “near-Arctic state”, China has increased its involvement in the development and use of the NSR. Through the inclusion of much of its investment in NSR-adjacent energy projects in its “One Belt One Road” project and experimental traversals of the route by Chinese shipping to reach Russian Arctic and European destinations, the Chinese government hopes to utilize the NSR to better access markets in Europe and the North Atlantic.<sup>140</sup> Significant Chinese investment in the Yamal LNG and Arctic LNG 2 projects continue to drive Chinese interest in the NSR as the principal export route of natural gas extracted at these locations.<sup>141</sup> Travel time between Chinese ports and Europe is reduced by nearly 40% when traveling through the NSR as opposed to routes through the Strait of Malacca and the Suez Canal. The Chinese government also perceives the NSR as a potentially useful link between itself and Russia in the event of a war with the West or the United States, especially if longer sea links are cut, and has sought to demonstrate to Moscow that its intentions in the region are not at odds with Russian interests.<sup>142</sup> Japanese cooperation with Russia with regards to Arctic development also heavily centers on the NSR, particularly due to the utility of the route for

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<sup>139</sup> Humpert, Malte. 2021. “A New Dawn for Arctic Shipping – Winter Transits on the Northern Sea Route.” High North News. January 19, 2021. <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/new-dawn-arctic-shipping-winter-transits-northern-sea-route>.

<sup>140</sup> Kalfaoglu, Rabiya. 2018. “Китайско-Российское Сотрудничество в Арктике: Перспективы Развития [Chinese-Russian Cooperation in the Arctic: Prospects of Development].” Bulletin of the Moscow State Regional University, no. 2. <https://doi.org/10.18384/2224-0209-2018-2-878>.

<sup>141</sup> Liu, Qian, and Xiaoguang Wang. 2020. “The Shaping Effect of the Belt and Road Initiative on China’s International Oil and Gas Cooperation Strategy.” Bulletin of State Petersburg State University 13 (1): 28.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.



exports to European markets, which has led the Japanese government to pursue agreements with Russia on commercial and economic cooperation in the Arctic.<sup>143</sup> South Korea has also expressed interest in the route, as can be seen in how Korean private enterprises have successfully conducted experimental container ship journeys across the length of the NSR within the last several years.<sup>144</sup> While East Asian companies and governments have been the most public in their desires to see the NSR develop into a major international trade artery, European companies are more heavily involved in domestic usage of the route between Russian ports, with 23 separate European companies contracted to operate mainly between Murmansk and Sabetta.<sup>145</sup> Given the experience of Northern European companies in ice navigation and logistical advantages provided by their general proximity to the western reaches of the NSR, European companies have proved to be eager to fulfill demand for logistical support for local Russian economic and energy operations along the NSR.<sup>146</sup> However, Russian owned and operated shipping companies still conduct more than 75% of all voyages on the NSR.<sup>147</sup>

While foreign interest in the Russian Arctic continues to deepen, Russian anxiety over the security implications of heavy foreign traffic on the NSR has led it to tighten security controls over the route. Following the transit of the NSR by a French Navy supply ship in 2018, the Kremlin introduced policy requirements that foreign powers intending to send warships through the NSR must give 45-day advanced notice, outline the identities and roles of all officers on

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<sup>143</sup> “Japan Looking to Northern Sea Route.” 2021. SeaNews Information Analysis Agency. January 26, 2021. <https://seanews.ru/en/2021/01/26/en-japan-looking-to-northern-sea-route/>.

<sup>144</sup> “South Korea Completes First North Sea Route Voyage.” 2017. Port Technology International. October 26, 2017. [https://www.porttechnology.org/news/south\\_korea\\_completes\\_first\\_north\\_sea\\_route\\_voyage/](https://www.porttechnology.org/news/south_korea_completes_first_north_sea_route_voyage/).

<sup>145</sup> Bye, Hilde-Gunn. 2021. “European Shipping Companies Far More Active on Northern Sea Route than Asian Ones.” High North News. January 11, 2021. <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/european-shipping-companies-far-more-active-northern-sea-route-asian-ones>.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

board, and to take on a Russian pilot.<sup>148</sup> Despite such concerns, Russia will continue to push for increased international and domestic commercial usage of the NSR for the foreseeable future. Despite the tremendous scale of this undertaking, Moscow's policy focus on the expansion of Arctic transport infrastructure will also continue to occupy a prominent place in its Arctic policy alongside the development of other infrastructure and energy extraction projects. Given the wide variety of the Kremlin's Arctic interests and the establishment of policies to pursue them, it does not come as a surprise that Russia increasingly seeks to reinforce its control over the NSR through the reinforcement of its military presence in the Far North.

## **Chapter VI: Arctic Military Reinforcement as a Guarantor of Arctic Policy**

Given the heightened priority and attention paid to the Arctic in Russian state policy, Moscow has decided to support its claims over the Arctic through steady reinforcement of its existing Arctic military presence and reactivation of Soviet-era military infrastructure. However, these goals are forced to compete for attention with long-standing objectives of the Northern Fleet in the Western Russian Arctic related to ballistic missile submarine (SSBN)-based nuclear deterrents and maintaining a strong advantage over conventional forces from NATO countries in the Barents Sea region. This tension between directions of Russian Arctic military policy can be seen in how Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command strategists in its headquarters of Severomorsk must contend with the unequal existing distribution of military infrastructure between the Western and Eastern Arctic. These actions might appear to be aggressive in nature to the international observer, but with the heavy investment of attention into the Kola Peninsula

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<sup>148</sup> "Russia Tightens Control Over Northern Sea Route." 2019. The Maritime Executive. August 3, 2019. <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/russia-tightens-control-over-northern-sea-route>.

and Barents Sea, Russian Arctic military policy should be seen as a doubling down on existing doctrines and infrastructure, rather than a break from the past. While the center of gravity for Russian military policy in the Arctic will likely remain around the Kola Peninsula and Barents Sea in practice for the near-term future, the Eastern Arctic will continue to draw an increasing amount of attention and resources in order to support Moscow's objectives there.

Today, Russian Arctic military policy is defined by two main policy directions. The first of these is to continue and build upon existing NATO-facing missions related to securing the freedom of movement of Russia's SSBN nuclear deterrent in the Barents Sea, as well as the maintenance of a high state of readiness to counter feared NATO incursions into the western Russian Arctic. A second direction of Moscow's Arctic military policy is the consolidation of control over the eastern Russian Arctic, which historically has remained an undeveloped flank of the Russian state and its military. These two directions are predicated on inflated assessments of threats posed by American and NATO military capabilities, as the Kremlin particularly cites the alleged but likely nonexistent "concentration" of American SSBNs in the Norwegian Barents Sea.<sup>149</sup> Today, American naval presence in the Barents Sea is largely confined to its participation in NATO-related exercises and occasional patrols of B-52 and B-2 bomber aircraft, which notably does not include the long-term concentration of naval assets in the Sea, including that of SSBNs.<sup>150</sup> Through reinforcement of its forces on the Kola Peninsula and in its western Arctic region, the Kremlin not only hopes to ensure the survivability of the bulk of Russian SSBNs in the event of war with NATO, but also to preserve the Northern Fleet's access to the Atlantic

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<sup>149</sup> Baev, Pavel K. "Threat Assessments and Strategic Objectives in Russia's Arctic Policy." *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 32, no. 1 (January 2019): 25–40. doi:10.1080/13518046.2019.1552662.

<sup>150</sup> Nilsen, Thomas. 2020. "American Flags in the Barents Sea Is 'the New Normal,' Says Defence Analyst." *The Independent Barents Observer*. May 8, 2020. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2020/05/american-flags-new-normal-barents-sea-says-defence-analyst>.

Ocean through the Barents and Norwegian Seas.<sup>151</sup> In keeping with its important role in the Russian nuclear deterrent system, the Northern Fleet is host to seven out of the eleven SSBNs in the Russian Navy, with the remaining four assigned to the Pacific Fleet.

The eastern coast of the Russian Arctic, which was an object of sporadic interest to the Cold War-era Soviet government due to its proximity to Alaska, is once again a priority for the Kremlin. Russia's armed forces have endeavored to overcome their unfamiliarity of the Laptev and Eastern Siberian Seas through experimental voyages of mixed military and icebreaker fleets, as well as the construction of military bases on eastern Arctic landmasses such as Kotelny Island.<sup>152</sup> As both a gesture of the high priority of the Far North in Russian military strategy and a significant step towards the enhancement of the region's priority in broader strategic planning, the Northern Fleet was elevated to the level of a full military district by presidential decree in December 2020.<sup>153</sup> As the newest military district, the fleet is charged with the western Arctic federal subjects of Murmansk Oblast, Arkhangelsk Oblast, the Komi Republic, and the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, as well as the lion's share of islands off of Russia's Arctic coast, including Novaya Zemlya, Franz Josef Land, Northern Land, and the New Siberian Islands. The elevation of the district itself was preceded by the establishment of the Joint Strategic Command North in 2014, which marked the acceptance by the Kremlin that future military strategy in the Arctic

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<sup>151</sup> Rumer, Eugene, Richard Sokolsky, and Paul Stronski. 2021. "Russia in the Arctic—A Critical Examination." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. March 29, 2021. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/03/29/russia-in-arctic-critical-examination-pub-84181>.

<sup>152</sup> Baev, Pavel K. "Threat Assessments and Strategic Objectives in Russia's Arctic Policy." *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 32, no. 1 (January 2019): 25–40. doi:10.1080/13518046.2019.1552662.

<sup>153</sup> "Putin Signs Decree to Transform Northern Fleet into Military District." 2020. TASS. December 21, 2020. <https://tass.com/defense/1238053>.

would revolve around the belief that the Arctic has entered a new era of competition between Russia and NATO countries.<sup>154</sup>

The western Russian Arctic exists as a significant concentration of naval and nuclear deterrent assets in its own right, independent of the Kremlin's present day Arctic strategy. The Barents Sea is host to the Russian Navy's bastion defense system, which describes the intended survivability of Russian SSBN second-strike capabilities through the denial of NATO access to the Barents Sea and the Kola Peninsula.<sup>155</sup> Recent efforts by the Northern Fleet to demonstrate its capability to extend this bastion concept all the way to the Greenland-Iceland-UK Gap (GIUK) through complex exercises in the Norwegian Sea have also shown the degree which the Northern Fleet's strategists value access to the wider world ocean, in addition to the guarantee of SSBN freedom of movement in the Barents Sea.<sup>156</sup> Such exercises themselves represent the significant progress the Russian Navy has made in improvements to its effectiveness and safety, in comparison to the 2000 *Kursk* submarine disaster, which displayed the deteriorated state of Russian naval technology as well as the ineffectiveness of the fleet's command structure.<sup>157</sup> Of the 37 surface vessels which are officially included in the Northern Fleet, only 10 out of 13 of its large ships are operational, including the *Pyotr Velikiy*, the Kirov-class nuclear powered missile

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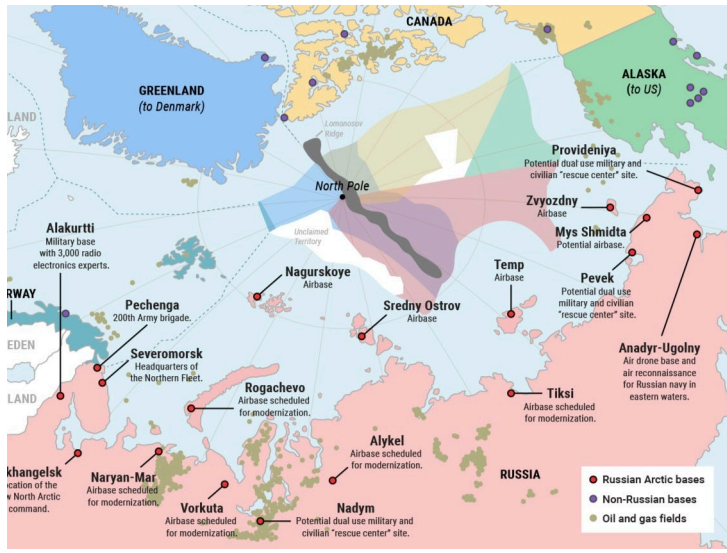
<sup>154</sup> Boulègue, Mathieu. 2019. "Russia's Military Posture In The Arctic Managing Hard Power In A 'Low Tension' Environment". Russia And Eurasia Programme. Chatham House.

[https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-06-28-Russia-Military-Arctic\\_0.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-06-28-Russia-Military-Arctic_0.pdf)

<sup>155</sup> Zysk, Katarzyna. "Escalation and nuclear weapons in Russia's military strategy." *The RUSI Journal* 163, no. 2 (2018): 4-15.

<sup>156</sup> Nilsen, Thomas. 2019. "Russia Claims to Have Demonstrated Complex Exercise Outside Norway." *The Independent Barents Observer*. April 11, 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2019/04/russia-demonstrated-complex-bastion-defense-exercise-outside-norway>.

<sup>157</sup> "20 Years after Kursk, Russia Moves from Tragedy to Redefined Underwater Warfare Capability." 2020. *The Independent Barents Observer*. August 11, 2020. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2020/08/20-years-after-kursk-russia-moves-tragedy-attempted-deep-sea-supremacy-north>.



Nudelman, Mike, and Jeremy Bender. 2015. "This Map Shows Russia's Dominant Militarization of the Arctic." Business Insider. August 7, 2015. <https://www.businessinsider.com/chart-of-russias-militarization-of-arctic-2015->

cruiser which is the flagship of the fleet.<sup>158</sup> A mixture of active and inactive guided missile destroyers, anti-submarine ships, and destroyers are also attached to the fleet, as is Russia's sole aircraft carrier, the *Admiral Kuznetsov*, which is currently not operational.<sup>159</sup> The new Northern Fleet military district also possesses anti-submarine, maritime patrol, and

air superiority aircraft, which are frequently used by the fleet to conduct aggressive patrols across the edge of the Russian Arctic.<sup>160</sup>

The creation of a new Arctic brigade can be seen as a significant aspect of the reinforcement of the Russian military's control over the Arctic. This brigade, which was formally established in 2015, was formed from the 80<sup>th</sup> Independent Motor Rifle Brigade in the town of Alakurtti, which is in the southeast of Murmansk Oblast, and the 200<sup>th</sup> Independent Motor Rifle Brigade in the town of Pechenga, which is adjacent to the Barents Sea and the Russo-Norwegian border. In keeping with its Arctic-centric zone of responsibility, the brigade is

<sup>158</sup> Boulègue, Mathieu. 2019. "Russia's Military Posture In The Arctic Managing Hard Power In A 'Low Tension' Environment". Russia And Eurasia Programme. Chatham House. [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-06-28-Russia-Military-Arctic\\_0.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-06-28-Russia-Military-Arctic_0.pdf)

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Safikhanov, Andrei, Mikhail Kozin, and Timur Kurbanov. 2016. "Национальные Интересы России в Арктической Зоне Российской Федерации: Военно-Экономический Аспект [National Interests of Russia in the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation: Military-Economic Aspect]." Вестник Забайкальского Государственного Университета 22 (11). <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/natsionalnye-interesy-rossii-v-arkticheskoy-zone-rossiyskoy-federatsii-voenno-ekonomicheskii-aspekt>.

equipped with snowmobiles and special Arctic amphibious and transport vehicles.<sup>161</sup> Even before the elevation of the Northern Fleet into a military district of its own, the Arctic-based 61st Separate Kirkenes Red Banner Naval Infantry Regiment began to be expanded in late 2014, which marked the beginning of the expansion of Arctic coastal units in the western Russian Arctic.<sup>162</sup> Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu has also expressed plans for the establishment of two full Arctic coast divisions to reinforce Russian control over the length of the coast, with one division planned for the Kola Peninsula and the other for the Chukotka Peninsula in the Far East.<sup>163</sup>

Even if it is not entirely clear whether these formations will materialize as envisioned or not, Russian efforts to modernize military infrastructure in the western Arctic receive significant attention and investment. An example of this is the ongoing modernization of the Severomorsk-1 Air Base, a project which was started in late 2011 or early 2012, ahead of the 2013 decision by the Ministry of Defense to express its interest in bringing Arctic bases which had fallen into disrepair after the collapse of the USSR back online to support its new Arctic objectives.<sup>164</sup> The modernization of the Okolnaya submarine support base and Gadzhiyevo submarine base, which are both critical elements of the support infrastructure for Russian SSBNs on the Kola Peninsula demonstrates how Russian Arctic strategic thinking is not entirely devoted towards new initiatives, and still maintains a significant emphasis on the western Arctic as a critical element

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<sup>161</sup> Staalesen, Alte. 2016. "Arctic Brigade on snow." The Independent Barents Observer. February 22, 2016. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/ru/node/484>.

<sup>162</sup> "Морской Пехоты в Арктике Станет Больше [The Number of Naval Infantrymen Will Increase in the Arctic]." 2014. Vesti.Ru. November 28, 2014. <https://www.vesti.ru/article/1836800>.

<sup>163</sup> Sergunin, Alexander, and Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørv. "The Politics of Russian Arctic shipping: evolving security and geopolitical factors." The Polar Journal (2020): 1-22.

<sup>164</sup> Melino, Matthew, Heather Conley, and Joseph Bermudez. n.d. "The Ice Curtain: Kola Peninsula Part 1: Slow Modernization of Severomorsk-1 Air Base." Tearline.Mil. Accessed April 5, 2021. [https://www.tearline.mil/public\\_page/the-ice-curtain-kola-peninsula-part-1-slow-modernization-of-severomorsk-1-air-base/](https://www.tearline.mil/public_page/the-ice-curtain-kola-peninsula-part-1-slow-modernization-of-severomorsk-1-air-base/).

of Russian deterrence capabilities.<sup>165</sup> This inclusion of the bastion defense system in future-facing strategy and development can also be seen in how the S-400 air defense system began to be installed in July and August 2019 at the Rogachevo Air Base on Yuzhny Island of the Novaya Zemlya Archipelago.<sup>166</sup> The installation of S-400 systems at Rogachevo Air Base serves to provide further cover for the Northern Fleet's Barents Sea bastion and further reinforce Russian military infrastructure in the western Arctic.

In an effort both to shore up its presence in the eastern Arctic and to secure its control over the NSR, Russia has endeavored to reinforce small bases along the Laptev and East Siberian Seas, particularly on the island chains close to the route. By 2018, the Russian military had begun to develop or redevelop military infrastructure on the New Siberian Islands, Kotelny Island, Wrangel Island, and Cape Schmidt, in addition to infrastructure in more westerly locations such as Franz Josef Land, Novaya Zemlya, and the Kola Peninsula.<sup>167</sup> The main bases in the eastern Russian Arctic which have seen expansion are those which are located on Kotelny Island, Wrangel Island, and Cape Schmidt, and several of the 12 military airfields, anti-aircraft missile positions, and military ports across the entirety of the Russian Arctic complement these eastern Arctic outposts.<sup>168</sup> Of the bases of the eastern Russian Arctic, those on the New Siberian Islands and Wrangel Island are the most crucial elements of the framework of Russian Arctic bases that line the NSR, with Wrangel Island being the easternmost major island adjacent to the

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<sup>165</sup> Melino, Matthew, Heather Conley, and Joseph Bermudez. 2020. "The Ice Curtain: Kola Peninsula Part 2: Expanded Maritime Facilities." *Tearline.Mil.* March 10, 2020. [https://www.tearline.mil/public\\_page/the-ice-curtain-kola-peninsula-part-2-expanded-maritime-facilities/](https://www.tearline.mil/public_page/the-ice-curtain-kola-peninsula-part-2-expanded-maritime-facilities/).

<sup>166</sup> Melino, Matthew, Heather Conley, and Joseph Bermudez. 2019. "The Ice Curtain: Enhanced Defense of Russia's Western Arctic." *Tearline.Mil.* December 20, 2019. [https://www.tearline.mil/public\\_page/the-ice-curtain-s-400-deployments-and-enhanced-defense-of-russias-western-arctic/](https://www.tearline.mil/public_page/the-ice-curtain-s-400-deployments-and-enhanced-defense-of-russias-western-arctic/).

<sup>167</sup> "Шойгу назвал самой современной российскую военную инфраструктуру в Арктике [Shoigu Named the Most Modern Russian Military Infrastructure in the Arctic]." 2018. *Lenta.ru.* December 24, 2018. <https://lenta.ru/news/2018/12/24/preimushество/>.

<sup>168</sup> Litovkin, Dmitry. 2019. "Арктический 'Бастион': Россия Закрыла Севморпуть [Arctic 'Bastion': Russia Closed the Northern Sea Route]." *TACC.* December 2, 2019. <https://tass.ru/opinions/7244521>.



NSR. A military town was built on the island to support the 2016 deployment of the Sopka-2 S-band Air-Route Radar Complex.<sup>169</sup> This deployment, and others like it, seek to allow the Russian military to achieve its stated goal of effective Russian control over the length of the NSR, both through the reinforcement of hard power assets along its length, and through improving infrastructure which can be used to monitor traffic along the route.

While Russian efforts to reinforce its Arctic military presence have been accompanied by significant fanfare and international attention, such developments have seen mixed success. For example, in the case of the planned expansion of Tiksi Airbase on the northern coast of Yakutia into a full Northern Fleet air defense base equipped with modern S-400 air defense systems, there is little evidence that much progress on this expansion has been made.<sup>170</sup> Development efforts themselves are not without controversy, as can be seen in how the Defense Ministry contractor RusAlyansStroy has been accused of embezzling nearly 3 billion rubles while under contract to construct bases in the eastern Russian Arctic.<sup>171</sup> However, Russian efforts to revamp its western Arctic military presence have seen more success, especially when one considers how the Northern Fleet has succeeded in maintaining the Barents Sea as a base of operations for Russia's SSBN-based second-strike capabilities. The elevation of the Northern Fleet into a full military district in itself represents the efforts the Fleet has made in the decades since the 2000 *Kursk* disaster to build itself into an effective force capable of protecting Russian interests within its zone of responsibility. While painted by many outside observers to be an aggressive attempt

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<sup>169</sup> Sukhankin, Sergey. 2020. "Completing the Arctic Shield: Russian Activities on Wrangel Island." Jamestown. April 9, 2020. <https://jamestown.org/program/completing-the-arctic-shield-russian-activities-on-wrangel-island/>.

<sup>170</sup> Melino, Matthew, Heather Conley, and Joseph Bermudez. 2019. "The Ice Curtain: Tiksi Airbase; Many Russian Announcements, Little Equipment." Tearline.Mil. June 10, 2019. [https://www.tearline.mil/public\\_page/the-ice-curtain-tiksi-airbase-many-russian-announcements-little-equipment/](https://www.tearline.mil/public_page/the-ice-curtain-tiksi-airbase-many-russian-announcements-little-equipment/).

<sup>171</sup> Goble, Paul. 2020. "Window on Eurasia -- New Series: Massive Corruption Slowing Putin's Drive to Expand Russian Military Presence in Arctic." Window on Eurasia (blog). November 4, 2020. <https://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2020/11/massivecorruption-slowing-putins-drive.html>.

to militarize the Arctic unilaterally, the fact that the center of gravity of Russian Arctic military reinforcement is largely centered on legacy missions in the Western Arctic indicates how current Russian military policy does not represent a significant break from the past. Efforts to militarily develop the eastern Russian Arctic warrant further attention due to their close association with Russian policy in the spheres of energy extraction and maritime transport on the NSR, regardless of the actual level of success those efforts have found. Given the high priority assigned to the Arctic across all policy areas by the Kremlin, attempts to revamp Russia's presence in the Far North will continue for the foreseeable future, despite significant international attention as well as some logistical pitfalls.

### **Conclusion: Is Russian Arctic Policy Feasible?**

Given the wide scope of Russian policy in the Arctic, one must approach each constituent part of such policy separately in order to judge how effectively it will be applied in the future. As one might expect, the Kremlin itself is outwardly optimistic about the prospects of its Arctic policy, which is seen in the creation of ambitious targets and goals for it to reach. Given the high importance assigned to the region by Russia regarding its economic future, it does not come as a surprise that Moscow is investing as much as it possibly can into the Far North. As a result, Russian policymakers have a high pain tolerance for negative-side effects of their Arctic policy, as can be seen in the continued fast clip of energy and natural resource extraction development despite environmental concerns which has largely continued despite punitive action by Moscow against ecological offenders, as well as Western pushback against its claims to regions of the Arctic beyond its Exclusive Economic Zone. While it may be tempting on first glance to describe Russian military development efforts in the Arctic in the past decade as entirely offensively

oriented, these efforts in practice amount to a mostly predictable continuation of existing Russian and Soviet policy in the Arctic.

With so many different policy initiatives undertaken by Russia in the Far North, how should the United States and other Western countries respond to Russian policy? Heightened Russian interest in the Arctic has not gone unnoticed by Western countries, who increasingly have come to watch what they perceive to be a new buildup of Russian forces in the region with unease. The United States Department of Defense, whose 2019 Arctic strategy named “defending the American homeland, ensuring common areas remain free and open, and competing when needed to maintain a favorable regional balance of power” as its main priorities in the Arctic, has declared its intention to keep the NSR open to international traffic in cooperation with Arctic allies.<sup>172</sup> However, American policymakers should be careful to avoid putting undue pressure on the Arctic’s status as a policy area which is compartmentalized from tensions elsewhere in the bilateral relationship between the United States and Russia. A not-uncommonly suggested option for American policymakers is a freedom of navigation operation (FONOP) in the Arctic, which would suggest sending American warships across the length of the NSR in order to support freedom of navigation on the route. Beyond how such an action would fuel Russian fears of the encroachment of outside powers near its Arctic interests, an Arctic FONOP would run the risk of military incident, either through direct confrontation with Russian naval or air forces in the Arctic, or an ice-related or otherwise environmental naval accident that the United States’ sole operational icebreaker would be unable to resolve without

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<sup>172</sup> Lopez, C. Todd. 2021. “DOD Closely Monitoring Russian Activities in Arctic.” US Department of Defence. April 5, 2021. <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2561489/dod-closely-monitoring-russian-activities-in-arctic/>.

Russian help.<sup>173</sup> Western powers should also be wary involving NATO as an organization in the Arctic region outside of its role as a facilitator of dialogue between states, as a significant interest of NATO in the region would undoubtedly raise questions in Moscow of the intentions of other Arctic states, most of whom are in NATO.<sup>174</sup>

Instead of going toe to toe with the Russian military in the Arctic to ensure free transit of the NSR, the United States should engage with Russia through multilateral organizations such as the Arctic Council and the CLCS in order to address its concerns about the NSR and any other areas of interest. While the fact that the United States is not party to the UNCLOS does not preclude it from submitting claims to the CLCS, it means that the claims of states that are party to the Convention are of a higher priority for processing. In order to challenge the overreach of Russian claims in a productive manner, the United States should sign and ratify the UNCLOS. Given the long timeframes which continental shelf claims are processed by the CLCS, active Russian interests in the Arctic will persist for years or even decades to come, simply by virtue of its economic claims. Especially with the rapidly changing natural environment of the Arctic due to climate change in mind, it is important that the Arctic Council remains a productive and friendly forum for discussion of environmental, social, and economic issues in the Far North. Russia will assume the chairmanship of the Arctic Council in May 2021, which represents a chance for the United States and others to redouble efforts to create a cooperative status quo on the council, which will be important to the maintenance of the council as a point of contact

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<sup>173</sup> Auerswald, David. 2019. "Now Is Not the Time for a FONOP in the Arctic." War on the Rocks. October 11, 2019. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/10/now-is-not-the-time-for-a-fonop-in-the-arctic/>.

<sup>174</sup> Pincus, Rebecca. 2019. "NATO North? Building a Role for NATO in the Arctic." War on the Rocks. November 6, 2019. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/11/nato-north-building-a-role-for-nato-in-the-arctic/>.

between Russia and other Arctic states.<sup>175</sup> Multilateral formats remain the most effective way for other Arctic states to be able to push back against the application of Russian policy in the Arctic as needed, and it is in the interests of Arctic states to maintain such emphasis as opposed to the use of hard power to attempt to coerce Russia.

Given the high priority assigned to Arctic policy and growing international interest in region's potential as a shipping corridor and energy source, it is likely that the region will continue to see substantial development in the near- and medium-term future. However, significant headwinds for Russian Arctic development exist that will need to be overcome to achieve stated Russian goals of turning the Arctic into an energy powerhouse and commercial artery. Given the high importance placed on the exploitation of natural resources in the future development of the Arctic by "Foundations of State Policy", the future of the Russian Arctic will be heavily dependent on wider development in hydrocarbon markets. As could be seen in the rapid fall in oil prices in March and April 2020 connected with the COVID-19 pandemic, such markets can shift quickly, which will prove to be a challenge to future developments in the Russian Arctic. Other factors, such as high levels of scrutiny from the Kremlin and the Federal Assembly on issues related to environmental disasters in the Arctic and struggles with population loss in the region will threaten to slow or halt the execution of Russian policy in the Arctic.

Since many of the policies enumerated in "Foundations of State Policy" require significant investment of human resources in order to be carried out, the use of the shift method in the Arctic would be the most effective way to minimize the effects of depopulation in Russia's northern federal subjects. Even as international interest in the NSR continues to build while it

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<sup>175</sup> Luxner, Larry. 2021. "The Arctic Is a Place of Unusual International Cooperation. Can That Last?" Atlantic Council (blog). March 23, 2021. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-arctic-is-a-place-of-unusual-international-cooperation-can-that-last/>.

becomes open to international shipping for longer timeframes every year, Moscow's insistence on maintaining full control over the route will prove to be an obstacle for its development into a major trade route between Europe and East Asia. High fees placed on NSR shipping traffic has the potential to discourage the use of the NSR by outside parties despite the advantages of the route emphasized by Moscow. While the NSR has seen significant increases in annual tonnage totals, such tonnage figures will need to see high levels of continued growth to meet targets set by Moscow, as well as to make up a major part of world shipping tonnage. For the near-term future, Arctic-destination shipping will likely continue to make up the majority of the traffic of the NSR.

As a whole, Russian Arctic policy represents the intensification of the Russian government's interest in the Arctic after decades of being unable to dedicate the attention and resources to the region that it might have wanted to. Russian Arctic policy embodies Moscow's desire to take full advantage of what it sees as its natural role as a leading Arctic state. Attempts to maximize the Arctic's potential as an economic base and as a central part of world commerce mirrors historic Russian and Soviet intentions for the Arctic, and feature prominently in "Foundations of State Policy". Russia's Arctic military policy is similarly grounded in historical concerns and priorities, which are based around the central aim of ensuring that the Arctic does not become an exposed flank on Russia's periphery, with special attention paid to the Arctic's role as the host to Russia's SSBN-based second strike capabilities. Russian interest in the Arctic region likely will not diminish in the near- to medium-term future, and therefore American and Western policymakers should consider these policies when developing Arctic strategies of their own. With interest in the Arctic the strongest and most sustained as it has ever been in recent memory and while the region simultaneously undergoes significant environmental shifts as a

result of climate change, the application of Russian Arctic policy will shape the future of the whole Arctic region over the next several decades.

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