

The Arctic

What does Russia see?

What does Russia want?

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Oslo 2012

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The Arctic – What does Russia see; what does Russia want?

Introduction

The aim of this brief analysis is to provide a better understanding of Russian policy towards the Arctic. In order to achieve this, we will analyze how the Arctic is presented in Russian strategic documents as well as how these documents relate to Russia's Arctic political practices (i.e. how Russian Arctic statements have been translated into political action).

We first define the geographical and thematic scope of the study. Second, we examine who is involved in formulating Russian Arctic policy (Arctic actors). Third, key strategic documents relating to the Arctic are reviewed. Fourth, as a way of assessing the extent to which official concerns outlined in policy documents are reflected in the broader public discussion on Arctic issues, we analyze how the Arctic is presented and discussed in Russian media. In this way, we hope to illustrate the extent to which policy discourses align or diverge from the real content of Russian policy in the region. We then proceed to contextualize the analysis by putting it into a broader strategic context. Here we will interpret Arctic policy in light of the concept of 'applied grand strategy'.¹ Finally, we conclude by presenting some thoughts on potential future evolution of Russian policy towards the Arctic.

The Arctic seen from Moscow

The impact of global climate change and the prospect of undiscovered or unexploited oil and gas resources have caused all Arctic countries to direct fresh attention to the region. Both Western and Russian media outlets as well as members of the analytical community have described this as 'the last dash North'² or, as Russian media has put it, 'bitva za resursy' (a fight for resources).³ On the other hand, state leaders, foreign ministers, and senior Arctic officials from the five Arctic coastal states (Canada, USA, Norway, Denmark/Greenland and Russia) have consistently argued against this image of uncontrolled competition, instead portraying the Arctic as a law-regulated zone of cooperation and national stewardship.

The term 'Arctic' itself seems to mean different things to different actors involved in the debate, both in Russia and beyond. In purely geographical terms the concept denotes a specific geographical area around the North Pole stretching either to the southern limit of the tundra or, alternatively, to the Arctic Circle. In the first case the

¹ Murdock, Clark & Kevin Kallmyer. 2011. 'Applied Grand Strategy: Making Tough Choices in an Era of Limits and Constraint'. *Orbis* no. 55 (4): 541–557.

² Smith, Mark A. & Keir Giles. 2007. *Russia and the Arctic. The 'Last Dash North'*. Shrivenham: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom. For a Norwegian reading, see Rottem, S. V. 2010. 'Klima og sikkerhet i Arktis'. *Internasjonal Politikk* no. 68 (2): 183–207.

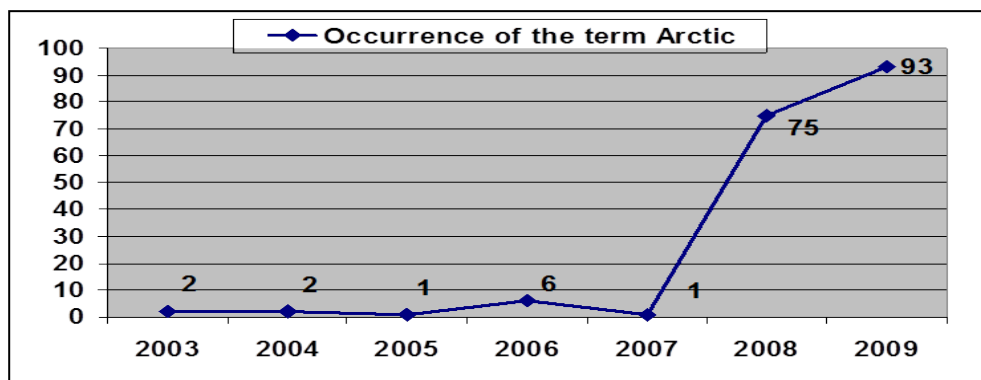
³ <http://www.rg.ru/sujet/3076/index.html>

Arctic covers 27 million km², in the second case – 21 million km². The Russian sector of the Arctic covers 9 million km², of which 6.8 million km² are waters.⁴

Russia’s Security Council has defined the Arctic as ‘the northern part of the earth, including the deep Arctic basin and shallower peripheral seas together with islands and adjacent areas of Europe, Asia and North America’.⁵ One would assume that this official definition of the Arctic informs Russian policy. Nonetheless, Arctic policy discourses remain closely related to another policy field – Russian policies in and towards the North (*sever/krayniy sever*).⁶ Up to 70 per cent of Russia’s territory is defined as located in the North, although only a small portion of this is within the Arctic. It is important to recognize that there are several intertwined ‘tiers’ of Russia’s Arctic/northern policy in Russian policy discourses: concerning the Arctic territory over which the Russia has full sovereign rights; concerning the territory over which Russia has certain rights and privileges, but not full sovereignty (e.g. the Russian exclusive economic zone); and finally, concerning several other categories, such as areas Russia seeks to include in its extended shelf; areas in which Russia believes to have some special rights, like the Svalbard Archipelago;⁷ and areas that are indisputably under the control of other actors.

Attention towards the Arctic has been increasing in recent years. A good illustration of this is the Russian academic community’s preoccupation with ‘things Arctic’. As Figure 1 below reveals, in *Russia in Global Affairs*, to take one example, there has been an amazing increase in interest in Arctic issues. The engagement of the expert community suggests that despite Russia’s centralized political system, the picture of *who* is involved in Arctic politics is likely to be fairly diverse (we return to this after a brief examination of key factors driving Russia’s attention northwards).

Figure 1. The term ‘Arctic’ in *Russia in Global Affairs*



⁴ Gorkin, A.P. (ed.). 1998. *Geografiya Rossii. Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar*. Moscow: Nauchnoe Izdatelstvo Bolshaya Rossiyskaya Entisklopediya, p. 39.

⁵ www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/15/98.html

⁶ For more on this see Rowe, Elana Wilson (ed.). 2009. *Russia and the North*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press and Blakkisrud, Helge & Geir Hønneland (eds). 2005. *Tackling Space: Federal Politics and the Russian North*. Lanham: University Press of America.

⁷ For an interesting take on the Russian understanding of Svalbard see Portsel, Aleksandr. 2011. ‘Spor o Shpitsbergene: tochka ne postavlena’. *Arktika i Sever* (www.narfu.ru/upload/iblock/fbf/exodyt%20v%20jlvsnodzlszmbjdmtdgfpw.pdf) and Oreshenkov, Alexander. 2010. ‘Arctic Square of Opportunities. The North Pole and the “Shelf” of Svalbard Cannot Be Norwegian’. *Russia in Global Affairs* (<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Arctic-Square-of-Opportunities-15085>).

Key Arctic interests

Legal issues

The legal status of the Arctic is a complex issue involving not only the five Arctic states, but also a whole set of international legal rules and practices. When a Russian expedition planted the Russian flag on the seabed under the North Pole in 2007 this was widely – and wrongly – interpreted as Russia making a claim for that area. In fact, Russia had already in 2001 submitted a claim to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS).⁸ What Russia was seeking was not control over territory, but the right to extend the Russian continental shelf in line with the existing UN convention (UNCLOS). The CLCS has asked Russia to further document the claims, and Russia is now in the process of resubmitting documentation underpinning an extension of its exclusive economic zone in the Arctic by 1.2 million km².⁹

Russia's renewed focus on the Arctic can also be seen in the light of Russia's interest in strengthening her international position. In more general terms, it is linked to Russia's focus on sovereignty and the ability to stand up against external pressure – in Russian political discourse labeled 'sovereign democracy'.¹⁰

Geopolitics and hard security

Having in mind the historical role the North has played in Soviet and later Russian grand strategy, the Russian focus on strategic assets is somewhat unsurprising. The northwestern part of the territory is often referred to as the 'Northern Bastion'.¹¹ The sheer length of the Northern border and the importance of the Arctic vector in what could be termed 'Russian strategic imagination' contribute to the Arctic being viewed as an important geopolitical region and an area where Russia has crucial military interests.

Russian military presence in the Arctic has a dual purpose. On the one hand, it is to secure strategic parity with the US; on the other hand, it is to protect vital Russian economic interests. According to Andrey Kokoshin, Russian politician, researcher and former secretary of the Security Council, Russia has to actively defend its interests in the region by strengthening the Northern Fleet and border guard and by building airfields in order to ensure full control over the developments in this area.¹²

Economic matters

Economic motives are central to Russian thinking about the Arctic. In 2008, President Dmitry Medvedev highlighted the economic importance of the region: while only 8 per cent of the population lives in the Arctic, the area generates about 20 per cent of Russia's GDP and 22 per cent of Russian exports. According to former commander of

⁸ www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/submission_rus.htm

⁹ www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/rus01/RUS_CLCS_01_2001_LOS_2.jpg

¹⁰ For more on this see Garadzha, Nikita. 2006. *Suverenitet. Sbornik*. Moscow: Yevropa.

¹¹ Kokoshin, Andrey A. (2003) *Strategicheskoe upravlenie. Teoriya, istoricheskiy opyt, sravnitelnyy analiz, zadachi dlya Rossii*. Moscow: MGIMO and ROSSPEN, pp. 319–320.

¹² Quoted in Main, Steven J. 2011. *If spring comes tomorrow. Russia and the Arctic*. Shrivenham: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom.

the Northern Fleet, Admiral Vladimir Vysotskiy, the Arctic stands for 90 per cent of Russia's production of gas, 60 per cent of oil, more than 90 per cent of nickel and cobalt, about 60 per cent of copper and 98 per cent of platinum.¹³

When Russia submitted its claims to the UN in 2001, the economic motives were clear:¹⁴ adding a further 1.2 million km² to the existing 1.3 million km² EEZ in the Barents Sea¹⁵ and 3.2 million km² in the rest of the Russian Arctic¹⁶ would mean extending the Russian EEZ in the Arctic by more than 20 per cent. This would make Russia a more influential actor internationally, not least due to the fact that this territory is expected to include vast additional reserves of fossil fuels.¹⁷ Recently Zonn and Zhiltsov presented new assessments of the resource base in the region. They concluded that the Arctic may contain more than 200 billion tons of oil and 400 trillion m³ of natural gas in total potential reserves, and that it would be possible to recover up to 66 billion tons of oil and 100 trillion cubic meters of gas.¹⁸

According to most observers the development of the energy resources in the Arctic has become a necessity – Russian energy production in the mature fields will soon start – or have already started – falling. Russian energy companies, both state owned, like Gazprom and Rosneft, and private, like Lukoil or Novatek, are therefore about to open an 'Arctic front'. The era of picking low hanging 'energy fruits'¹⁹ in the form of more easily developable onshore fields is drawing to a close. In order to remain an important energy player Russia has to go North and offshore.²⁰

The second economic issue of strategic importance is the potential opening up of the Northern Sea Route for commercial exploitation. This project has a long history. Already before WWII, Harry P. Smolka wrote an interesting assessment of the strategic usefulness of this route. Given the fact that Russia was bottled up on three sides (west, south and east) Smolka argued that opening up of the North would be strategically important as it would give Russia 'an independent, continuous and all-Russian coastline, unassailable by anyone'.²¹ Today, climate change and longer sailing seasons have reactualized the Northern Sea Route as an alternative to the Suez Canal for transport between Europe and the Pacific.

¹³ Quoted in Smith & Giles 2007.

¹⁴ Kolodkin, A. & S. Glandin. 2007. 'The Russian Flag on the North Pole'. *International Affairs* no. 53 (6): 6–16.

¹⁵ www.seaaroundus.org/eez/645.aspx

¹⁶ www.seaaroundus.org/eez/650.aspx

¹⁷ Gautier, D.L., K.J. Bird, R.R. Charpentier, A. Grantz, D.W. Houseknecht, T.R. Klett, T.E. Moore, J.K. Pitman, C.J. Schenk, J.H. Schuenemeyer, K. Sorensen, M.E. Tennyson, Z.C. Valin & C. J. Wandrey. 2009. 'Assessment of Undiscovered Oil and Gas in the Arctic'. *Science* no. 324 (5931): 1175–1179.

¹⁸ Zonn, Igor & Sergey Zhiltsov. 2011. 'Arkticheskiy neftegazovyy front. Dannye po zapasam resursov na Kraynem Severe nuzhdayutsya v utochnenii'. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 13 December.

¹⁹ Bokserman, Arkadiy. 2012. 'Prodolzhaem "snimat slivki"'. *RusEnergy* 1 February (<http://www.rusenergy.com/ru/interview/interview.php?id=57685>).

²⁰ Guseynov, Chingiz. 2012. 'Osvoenie uglevodorodnykh resursov Severnogo Ledovitogo okeana – blizhayshaya i neotlozhnaya perspektiva'. *Burenie i neft* (<http://burneft.ru/archive/issues/2012-01/4>).

²¹ Smolka, H.P. 1938. 'Soviet Strategy in the Arctic'. *Foreign Affairs* no. 16 (2): 272–278.

Arctic actors

A direct consequence of the complexity of Arctic interests is that these issues are addressed by a variety of Russian actors – and that Russia also has to interact with external actors in order to solve some of them. There are various categories of Russian stakeholders, but due to the vertical character of the Russian political system, the most important strategic decisions are made by Moscow-based actors and then pushed down through the power vertical.

It seems that Vladimir Putin has taken a keen interest in what is happening in the Arctic. He has been involved in decision-making regarding both the military and the social sphere that has made him aware of the complexity of the issues that has to be addressed in the Russian North. More importantly, however, Putin's personal engagement in energy issues more broadly has drawn his attention to the Arctic. For example, Putin was recently actively involved in Rosneft's failed deal with the BP as well as the company's subsequent cooperation with Exxon Mobil (an important part of this deal was the development of Arctic fields). President Medvedev has also made a number of statements on the Arctic. The Arctic is thus an established issue for both members of the 'tandem', although Putin has clearly taken the lead.

Other key actors in Arctic policy formulation include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (for international coordination) and the Ministry of Regional Development (for domestic policy coordination). Recently, the Border Service Section of the FSB has become increasingly vocal about the need for strengthening the border guard and the coast guard service in the North (this is linked to the increased activity along the Northern Sea Route). Moreover, the Security Council has become a site of Arctic policy discussions. In an interview with the authors in Moscow in the autumn of 2011, a Russian source explained the Security Council as being the site where broad agreement on Arctic issues could be achieved. Another Russian interviewee summarized the politics on the Arctic in Moscow this way: 'there is no disagreement or competing visions for the Arctic now, although details about the realization of plans can be criticized and discussed.'

The Polar Foundation is another influential actor, but primarily due to the role played by its head, Polar explorer and State Duma representative Artur Chilingarov. Chilingarov is both well-connected to the political elite and an important 'policy entrepreneur' when it comes to Arctic issues. Arctic questions are also important for the Russian business community. Over the last years a number of Russian energy companies have embarked on strategic Arctic projects. The most important are the development of the Shtokman gas field (Gazprom in cooperation with Total and Statoil); the gas fields in Yamal (Gazprom as well as Novatek in cooperation with Total); and last but not least the planned development of oil and gas deposits in the Kara Sea (Rosneft in cooperation with ExxonMobil).

Finally, the Russian armed forces are a major actor in the Arctic. The opening up of the Russian part of the Arctic to business activities, and in particular the involvement of foreign companies, has been perceived as a security threat by the Russian military establishment. This is after all still where Russia deploys the bulk of its strategic

forces (cf. the concept of ‘the Northern Bastion’).²² It seems, however, that the military’s concerns have been placated and their interests partly accommodated.²³

It should also be noted that Russia has been addressing its own – and others’ – Arctic issues within various regional and international organizations. The most important arena for such multilateral Arctic cooperation is undoubtedly the Arctic Council – in 2008 Russia became a party to the Ilulissat Declaration – but also other multilateral frameworks have played an important part, including the Euro-Arctic Barents Region and various UN agencies.²⁴

The Arctic in Russian strategic documents

Arctic issues are addressed most comprehensively in the two Arctic strategies published in 2001²⁵ and 2008.²⁶ These two documents describe Russian goals and ambitions in the Arctic in a systematic manner and give a good insight into Russian thinking about the Arctic.

The 2001 document identified Russian national interests in the Arctic in the field of economy, ecology, defense, research and geopolitics, but had a pronounced security focus: all types of activity in the Arctic were to be viewed in the context of defense and security interests. It paid particular attention to the military presence in the region and called for the ‘reliable functioning of the Russian Navy’s group of strategic sea-based nuclear forces deployed [in the Arctic] for deterring the threats of aggression against the Russian Federation and its allies’. The document underlined the need to protect Russia’s Arctic borders and defend Russia’s national interests by all means available.

The publication of the 2008 strategy was preceded by one of the most well-publicized political stunts in recent Russian history – the 2007 planting of the Russian flag on the seabed under the North Pole. This was not the first expedition to the region – in 2005 a similar mission had explored the Mendeleev underwater ridge – but the flag planting put the Arctic issue on the international agenda. Some Western media described this as the opening of a new ‘gold rush’ in the Arctic²⁷ and several Arctic states were induced to redevelop their Arctic strategies. The latter was also connected to the dramatic increase in Russian military activity in the region, most conspicuously the

²² Kokoshin, pp. 319–320.

²³ Atland, K. 2009. ‘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* no. 35 (2): 362–384.

²⁴ For an interesting regional Russian perspective see Kharlamp’eva’ Nadezhda & Mariya Lagutina. 2011. ‘Transnatsional’ naya model’ arkticheskogo upravleniya v XXI veke’. *Arktika i Sever* (www.narfu.ru/aan/article_index_years.php?ELEMENT_ID=20422).

²⁵ Government of the Russian Federation. 2001. *Osnovy gosudarstvennoy politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii v Arktike*. Moscow.

²⁶ Security Council of the Russian Federation. 2008. *Osnovy gosudarstvennoy politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii v Arktike na period do 2020 goda i dalneyshuyu perspektivu*. Moscow. (www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/15/98.html).

²⁷ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/6925853.stm

surge in the number of strategic flights: In 2007 alone, there were more strategic flights than in the whole period since the end of the Cold War.²⁸

In spite of Russia thus sending some mixed signals, the 2008 Arctic strategy reflects a more nuanced approach to the Arctic as a region containing both risks and opportunities. The authors state that the importance of the Arctic lies in its energy resources and strategically important raw materials. The key objective should be to transform the Arctic into a hub for exploitation of natural resources by 2020. Moreover, the Northern Sea Route should be developed to serve Russian as well as international interests – albeit under Russia’s tight control. In order to achieve these goals Russia has to invest hugely in the civilian and military infrastructure and to prepare the military for its new tasks.²⁹

Other more specific strategic documents also address Arctic issues. For instance, the 2001 Maritime Doctrine until 2020 focuses on national maritime policy in the Arctic sector and on the importance of the free passage of the Russian Navy to the Atlantic Ocean. There is also a certain focus here on the need to develop deposits in the Russian exclusive economic zone and on the continental shelf, as well as on the role of the Northern Fleet as a protector of the Russian state against threats from ‘maritime and oceanic directions’.

Both Russian energy strategies – the one published in 2003 that identified the goals of Russian energy policy until 2020,³⁰ and the one published in 2009, presenting an outline until 2030³¹ – have focused on Arctic issues. The 2009 version mentions the term ‘Arctic’ no less than 31 times, showing how important the Arctic dimension has become for the future development of the Russian energy sector, and hence for the country’s economy as a whole.³² Overall, however, it is surprising to see how little attention is being paid to the Arctic in the comprehensive documents on Russia’s foreign and security policy (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Occurrence of the term ‘Arctic’ in Russian official security, foreign policy and military strategies and doctrines 1993-2010

<i>Document</i>	<i>Mentions of ‘Arctic’</i>
1993 Foreign Policy Concept	0
1993 Military Doctrine	0
1997 National Security Concept	0
2000 National Security Concept	1
2000 Foreign Policy Concept	0

²⁸ For more on this see Zysk, Katarzyna. 2011. ‘Military Aspects of Russia’s Arctic Policy: Hard Power and Natural Resources’ in James Kraska (ed.) *Arctic Security in an Age of Climate Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 85–106. In 2009, however, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov solemnly declared that Russia had no intention to increase its military presence in the region or deploy armed forces there (<http://en.rian.ru/world/20090429/150012831.html>).

²⁹ Zysk, Katarzyna. 2010. ‘Russia’s Arctic Strategy: Ambitions and Constraints’. *Joint Force Quarterly* (57): 104–110.

³⁰ Government of the Russian Federation. 2003. *Energeticheskaya strategiya Rossii na period do 2020 goda*. Adopted by the Decree of the Government of RF # 1234-p, 28 August 2003.

³¹ Government of the Russian Federation. 2009. *Energeticheskaya strategiya Rossii na period do 2030 goda*. Adopted by the Decree of the Government of RF # 1715-p, 13 November 2009.

³² For more on this see Guseynov.

2000 Military Doctrine	0
2008 The Foreign Policy Concept	3
2009 National Security Strategy until 2020	3
2010 Military Doctrine	0

Most doctrines and concepts do not mention the Arctic at all. The only exceptions are the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept, which refers to the Arctic in conjunction with cooperation within the Barents Region and with Canada, and the 2009 National Security Concept until 2020, which links security to Arctic issues through questions of ownership and development of energy resources (including protection of infrastructure) and state border defense.

The Arctic in Russian media discourse

In order to contextualize the policy statements, we have examined the public discussion of Arctic issues as seen in the pages of *Rossiyskaya gazeta*. This newspaper is owned by the Russian government and, in addition to more standard journalistic fare, publishes information for the Russian government, like new legislation and policy documents.³³

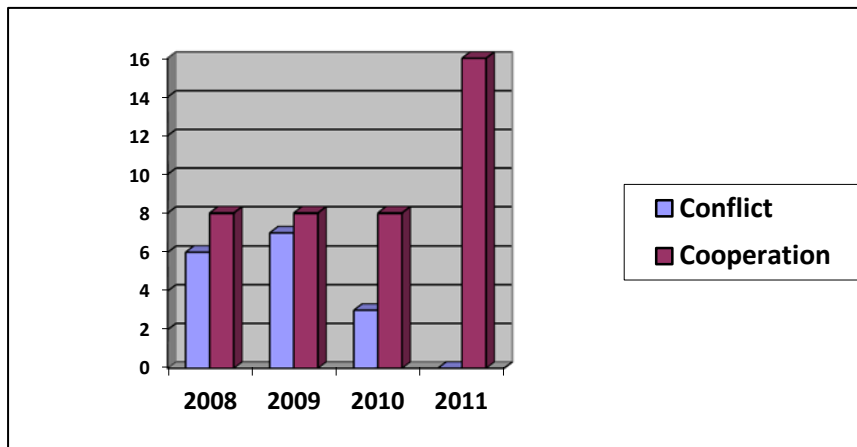
In selecting newspaper articles for analysis, the *Rossiyskaya gazeta* website was searched for articles that included (in various grammatical declinations) the word ‘*arktika*’ (Arctic). The time frame was limited to May 2008 (start of Dmitriy Medvedev’s presidency) and May 2011. This search resulted in 323 articles, which were then analysed for their coverage of Arctic issues, with particular attention paid to the kinds of actors intervening in the debate. 73 of the articles were classified as irrelevant. The remaining 250 articles were all assigned a code to signify the main thrust of their content (Arctic competition, Arctic cooperation, security, shipping, domestic Arctic concerns, Arctic research, climate, energy and official statements). Key findings include:³⁴

First, media coverage representing the Arctic as a zone for cooperation, rather than conflict, grew steadily between 2008 and 2011 (see Figure 2). A great deal of coverage in this cooperative tone was generated by international cooperation activities from high-level ministerial meetings in the Arctic Council to new programs in the University of the Arctic. More competition oriented articles were triggered by discrete events. For example, Canadian military exercises in the North, NATO activity in the North, and the visit of the Canadian foreign minister to Moscow generated more conflict-oriented commentary.

³³ As we wanted to explore views about the Arctic that are deemed acceptable to public, official airing, the focus on *Rossiyskaya gazeta* was merited and the official, relatively conservative status of the newspaper a plus.

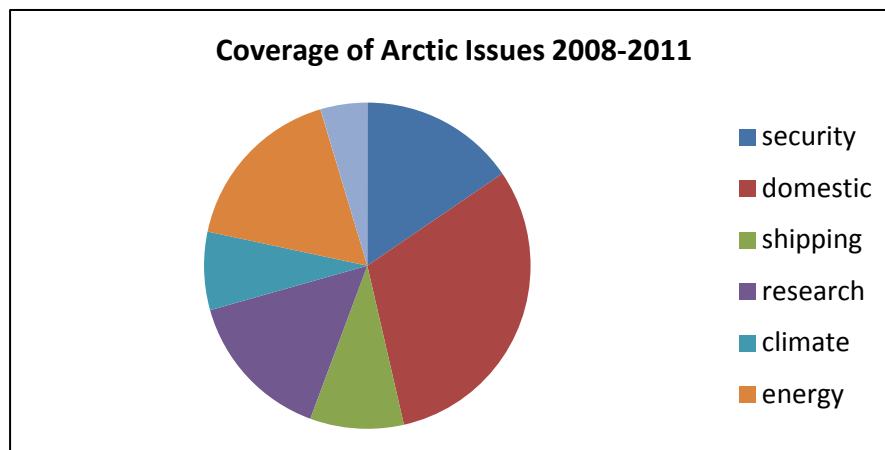
³⁴ For a full overview of these findings, see Wilson Rowe, Elana & Helge Blakkisrud (forthcoming) ‘Great Power, Arctic Power: Russia’s engagement in the High North’.

Figure 2. 'Conflict' vs. 'cooperation'



Second, there is no one driver of policy/media attention to Arctic issues. Concern for energy or security issues in the articles analyzed was fairly matched by attention to, say, Arctic research (see Figure 3). If any one issue can be said to dominate, it is domestic concerns around the Russian *territorial* North, such as environmental issues, research, living standards and domestic economic development (ibid.).

Figure 3. Coverage of Arctic Issues 2008-2011



Third, an interesting change in the quality of Arctic mentions in *Rossiyskaya gazeta* coverage is that in the earlier years of the study (2008 and 2009) there were more articles that had an explicitly Arctic focus and were often triggered by specific Arctic events, like Arctic Council meetings. What we see in later years, however, is that the Arctic receives mention more as an embedded issue relating to broader policy problems.

Finally, in terms of policy actors, the range of persons speaking about Arctic politics increased markedly through the three years covered in this study. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidential Administration were the dominant voices in 2008 and 2009, by 2010 the debate around the Arctic had clearly spread to other institutions in Moscow (the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Trade, the FSB (Border Services), the Federation Council, the Security Council, regional representatives, etc.). This growth in the number of 'Arctic actors' suggests that Russia is aware of the

myriad of ways in which Arctic sovereignty can be demonstrated and Russia's interests in the Arctic pursued.

Perceptions of Russia's Arctic policy

In order to get a sense for Russia's Arctic international practices, we also carried out 19 semi-structured interviews with civil servants from Russia, the US, Norway, Canada, and Denmark. All interviewees were involved in on-going Arctic cooperation. Key conclusions from the interviews are:³⁵

- 1) All interviewees noted that Russia had an increasingly positive attitude towards Arctic cooperation over the past three years. They argue that Russia has invested effort into developing and filling with content a positive, leadership-oriented image in policy fields seen as interesting to Russia (in particular combating oil spills and search and rescue operations).
- 2) Russian interviewees argued that there is wide agreement across sectors in Moscow about Russia's current low threat, cooperation-oriented and internationally-law minded approach to the Arctic. As one Russian interviewee put it, 'There are no longer competing visions for Arctic development.'
- 3) Several interviewees (Russian and Western) noted the importance of keeping budget restrictions in mind when interpreting Russia's Arctic plans – policy declarations are often divorced from fiscal realities. Many grand statements about the Northern Sea Route may fall into this category.

What does Russia want in the Arctic?

The analysis of official and popular statements on the Arctic has revealed that in the opinion of both Russian policy makers and the Russian public the Arctic is important for the realization of Russia's national interests. However, in order to understand what role this region may play in Russian grand strategy, the Arctic has to be placed in a broader strategic context.

A grand strategy is the way in which a power seeks to integrate its overall political, economic and military policies in order to pursue long-term interests. The classical definition focuses on military aspects and state security.³⁶ More recent studies argue that a grand strategy is not only military, but also fiscal and political in nature.³⁷ A grand strategy could hence be described as the art of relating all of the means at your disposal to the ends you have in view.³⁸

³⁵ For a full overview of these findings, see Wilson Rowe & Blakkisrud.

³⁶ Kennedy, Paul. 1991. 'Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition', in Paul Kennedy (ed.) *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

³⁷ See e.g. Lobell, Steven E. 2009. 'Threat assessment, the state and foreign policy: a neoclassical realist model', in Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell & Norrin M. Ripsman (eds) *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 61.

³⁸ Gaddis, John Lewis. 2009. *What Is Grand Strategy?* (www.duke.edu/web/agsp/grandstrategypaper.pdf).

Murdock and Kallmyer have introduced the term ‘applied grand strategy’.³⁹ They focus on goals (including hierarchies) and the way the authorities pursue these (that is, collaboratively or unilaterally, proactively or reactively, and internationally or nationally). Although Murdock’s and Kallmyer have studied US grand strategy, their approach can also help understand key elements and features of Russian grand strategy.

What makes their framework interesting in a Russian context is first of all their proposal to see states as pursuing a combination of *security*, *economic* and *value* goals, each of which can be defined variably depending on the circumstances. They also argue that grand strategies have ‘national character’, as different states have different and unique value systems which reflect their origins and traditions. In the case of Putin’s Russia there are several factors that have to be taken into account if we want to understand how what happens in the Arctic is a function of Russian choices in the broader geographical and political context.

First, we have to bear in mind the strategic circumstances under which Putin is defining and pursuing strategic goals. Russian Arctic policy is not realized in a strategic vacuum – the capabilities and policies of other actors are an important part of the strategic equation. Russia can afford to ignore the policies of its minor Arctic partners, such as Norway, Denmark and, to a lesser degree, Canada, but has to take into consideration the Arctic choices of the sole remaining superpower, the USA.⁴⁰

Second, we have to look at Putin’s personal experience and what has shaped him as a person. Putin is believed to be cautious by nature and willing to take only well-calculated risks.⁴¹ He is also aware that although Russia has made substantial progress during his presidency, the 2008/2009 crisis set Russia back. Russia is currently in no position to confront the US the hard way: Although US global hegemony is under pressure, Russia is no strategic match for the US. Only in 2007 did Russia return to the Soviet, pre-collapse level of BNP. The current political elite seems to believe that what Russia needs is modernization, not confrontation, and that cooperation with the West is beneficial, not least due to the fact that it generates huge economic windfalls.

Third, we have to explore the impact of Soviet and Russian traditions shaping the thinking of Putin and other policymakers as regards their ideas about Russia’s rightful place in the world; how this thinking is being translated into actual policy in the Arctic and elsewhere; and finally, what the Russian strategic goals and patterns of strategic action are. For example, there seems to be a certain level of genuine anti-Westernism among the Russian political elite which is fuelled partly by traditional Russian scepticism towards Western values, partly by Russian suspicion that the West has been exploiting Russia’s strategic weakness following the Soviet collapse to undermine Russia’s international position.⁴²

³⁹ Murdock & Kallmyer 2011.

⁴⁰ For a recent analysis of the US Arctic policy see Conley, Heather A., Terry Toland, Jamie Kraut & Andreas Østhagen. 2012. *A New Security Architecture for the Arctic. An American Perspective*. Washington, D.C.: CSIS (http://csis.org/files/publication/120117_Conley_ArcticSecurity_Web.pdf).

⁴¹ For more on this see Gessen, Masha. 2011. *The Man without a Face. The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin*. New York: Riverhead Books, and Roxburgh, Angus. 2011. *The Strongman. Vladimir Putin and the Struggle for Russia*. London: I.B. Tauris.

⁴² See Tsygankov, A.P. 2001. ‘The final triumph of the Pax Americana? Western intervention in Yugoslavia and Russia’s debate on the post-Cold War order’. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* no. 34 (2): 133–156.

All these factors have made Russia adopt a strategy that Andrey Tsygankov has labelled ‘great power pragmatism’.⁴³ Putin’s and Medvedev’s Russia has had to cope with serious challenges. However, the country has two important strategic assets – nuclear weapons and its enormous energy resources. The latter generate almost 50 per cent of Russia’s state revenues and represent the most important economic and political means the Russian state has at its disposal in pursuing its strategic goals.⁴⁴ While the nuclear arsenal is seen as crucial for Russian national security and survival as a state, the energy commodities represent a more flexible asset in the on-going international game of economic interests and the implementation of Russia’s applied grand strategy.

Russia’s renewed focus on the Arctic thus seems to be a function of the Russian political elite’s realization that the future of Russia as a great power depends on the development of the Arctic as an energy province. This development, in turn, can take place only in cooperation with the West, as Russia needs the transfer of know-how, financial support and sharing of economic and technological risks. Simultaneously, the possible opening up of the Northern Sea Route would make it possible for Russia to diversify its energy markets and to strengthen its global role: Russia would control a sea lane that reduces the distance between some of the most important economic centers of the world as well as eliminates the risks associated with transporting goods via turbulent southern sea routes.⁴⁵

Alternative Arctic futures

The year 2012 represents continuity in Russian history with the return of Putin as president. His recent election confirms Putin’s dominant position in the Russian political elite. Although there have been speculations about a Putin 2.0, one can expect that he is going to continue to lead Russia in the same direction as during the last twelve years.

At the same time, though, Putin’s return can also be viewed as representing a break with recent developments. Even if Putin was the real master of the political scene also during Medvedev’s presidency, Medvedev launched – at least rhetorically – several projects that had the potential to change Russia in a mid-term perspective. Putin’s return is putting an end to the hopes of those who believed that Medvedev would implement the more liberal strategy which he had been talking about ever since he became Russia’s third president.

When speculating about future developments in Russia’s Arctic policy, one has to take this change at the top of Russian politics into account. During the election campaign, Putin signaled that the announced large-scale re-armament of the Russian military was partly motivated by the other countries’ policies in the Arctic:

⁴³ Tsygankov, A.P. 2011. ‘Preserving Influence in a Changing World. Russia’s Grand Strategy’. *Problems of Post-Communism* no. 58 (2): 28–44

⁴⁴ A balanced overview of this is provided by Orttung, Robert W. & Indra Overland. 2011. ‘A limited toolbox: Explaining the constraints on Russia’s foreign energy policy’. *Journal of Eurasian Studies* no. 2 (1): 74–85.

⁴⁵ For more on the renewed geopolitical importance of the Arctic see Antrim, Caitlyn. 2010. ‘The New Maritime Arctic. Geopolitics and the Russian Arctic in the 21st Century’. *Russia in Global Affairs* (<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/The-New-Maritime-Arctic-15000>).

We aim to restore a blue-water (in the full sense of the word) navy, primarily in Russia's North and Far East. The activities of the world's leading military powers in and around the Arctic are forcing Russia to defend its own interests in the region.⁴⁶

In the same article Putin presented a lengthy list of military hardware which the Russian arms industry is to provide during the coming decade. Some of these items will contribute to changing the balance of forces in the Arctic, as the Russian army is to receive more than 400 modern land- and sea-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, 8 strategic ballistic missile submarines, some 20 multi-purpose submarines and over 50 new surface vessels that (mostly) are to be deployed in Russia's North and Far East. This remilitarization drive seems to contradict previous statements by for instance Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, who repeatedly has underlined that Russia is not interested in provoking rising tension in the Arctic.⁴⁷

The fact that Putin in his seven program articles mentioned the Arctic only once may be interpreted as Putin having little focus on Arctic issues. Hence, his call for a remilitarization of the Arctic may be viewed as purely electoral rhetoric; as an appeal to the more nationalistically inclined part of the electorate. Probably Putin's several outbursts of anti-Western rhetoric ought to be the reason for more concern among Western leaders. These outbursts may signal a more confrontational line in Putin's foreign policy, something which may in turn have an impact on the cooperation climate also in the Arctic.

What do these recent developments tell us about possible scenarios for the development of Russian policy in the Arctic? We see three possible scenarios being played out in relation to Russian Arctic policy over the next decade.

- *The business as usual scenario* implies that we will see much of the same as we have witnessed over the last twelve years. During this period Russia has sent mixed signals – occasional refusals to cooperate with the West, as during the early phase of the Kursk-accident in 2000, have been combined with an overall positive assessment of Russian–Western cooperation in Arctic issues. A good example is the border dispute with Norway, a contentious issue and a potential source of conflict which was finally settled in 2010. In addition Russia together with the other members of the Arctic Council have embarked on pragmatic cooperation in addressing issues of common interest as well as agreed on a set of rules of conduct in the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration. In a similar vein, the 2011 Nuuk Declaration expressed appreciation for past achievements of Arctic cooperation within the human dimension, in addressing the issues of climate change and environmental protection, Arctic marine environment, and science and monitoring. It thus seems that the spirit of Arctic cooperation is generally good, although it remains to be seen whether Putin's return will have any direct bearing on the cooperation.
- *The deterioration scenario* implies that the choice of an anti-Western rhetoric as a way of consolidating Putin's power as well as increasing tension in

⁴⁶ Putin, Vladimir. 2012. 'Being strong: National security guarantees for Russia', 20 February (<http://premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/18185>).

⁴⁷ See for instance Lavrov's statement from 2009 as presented at <http://en.rian.ru/world/20090429/150012831.html>

Russia's relations with the West due to a lack of agreement on anti-missile defence will have negative consequences for the cooperation climate in the Arctic. The realization of Russian re-armament plans in the Arctic, especially if this is presented as an anti-Western measure, may also have negative consequences for continued cooperation. The other Arctic states will probably have to respond by increasing their military presence in the region, something which may further undermine cooperation and result in increased tensions both at the regional and the global level.

- *The improvement scenario* represents the third, but probably least likely scenario. Realization of such a scenario would imply an even closer cooperation between Russia and its Arctic partners than in the first scenario, as here cooperation would be based not only on common interests but also on shared values. For this scenario to be realized, Russia has to embark on deep political reforms and seek closer cooperation with the West. With Putin at the helm of Russian politics, and in a situation where he is playing on Russians fears and presenting the West as Russia's rival, this seems like a highly unlikely outcome.