# The Race for the Arctic: A Neorealist Case Study of Russia and the United States

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For most of human history, the very top of the world has remained out of play: too cold, too remote, and too hazardous for the intense exploitations that have reshaped other regions. However, today, the Arctic is warming faster than any other place, and its protective sea ice barrier, which had once kept economic and military activities in check, is melting away. NASA (2020) studies discovered that the region loses 13.1% of its ice mass every decade. 2020 has shown the second-lowest sea ice extent since records began (cf. Ramsayer 2020), and recent projections emphasize that the Arctic Ocean may be ice-free as early as 2035 (cf. Guarino et al. 2020). Indeed, an ocean is opening up in front of us, and the world above 66° latitude may become the new frontier for global competition, with potentially vast natural resources and the prospect of drastically shortened shipping routes.

The Arctic is open for business. And many want to participate in this 21st-century gold rush. Several circumpolar states are already struggling to access the region's rich stores of gas, oil, fish, and precious minerals. Even nations without Arctic borders are striving for their share. The United States, by most measures, has lagged far behind others, including Russia and even China, in this race. That may be about to change.

This paper evaluates the behavior of Arctic states in an era of newly emerging opportunities and threats. The purpose is to analyze whether power politics are the dominant driver behind Arctic disputes, and therefore if and how neorealism can explain the events shaping Arctic international relations. I test the theory's validity by examining a case study on Arctic state behavior based on four hypotheses: 1) the opening Arctic will result in states pursuing economic development based on the region's riches, boosting their latent power; 2) this will increase human activity and security threats in the region, leading to greater military activity; 3) weaker Arctic states are then expected to pursue security by seeking alliances; 4) states will ignore or break established rules of regional regimes and institutions when it suits their interests.

## The Concept of Neorealism

The discipline of international relations (IR) provides several theories that seek to explain state behavior in the international environment (cf. Schieder & Spindler 2010). Among those, realism is one of the most influential (cf. Schörning 2010; Jacobs 2010). Realist theories have a pragmatic approach, intending to explain the world "as it is, not as it ought to be" (Jørgensen 2010, p. 78). However, supporters of other influential IR theories have consistently questioned realism's explanatory capacity in the light of global political events (cf. Jacobs 2010, p. 57).

Nevertheless, the phenomenon of a melting Arctic offers an opportunity to be analyzed using realist theory. Realism, however, is a broad concept — ranging from classical realism as conceptualized by Hans J. Morgenthau (1948) to the neorealism of Kenneth N. Waltz (1979). This paper explores the neorealistic explanations of the events shaping the Arctic. Chapter I will therefore discuss the theoretical background to provide a basis for further analysis.

### *The International Structure*

In his 1979 book, Theory of International Politics, Waltz responded to the liberal challenge to realism and sought to

cure the shortcomings of classical realism (e.g., Jacobs 2010, pp. 54-58; Link 1965; Waltz 1979, p. 62 et seq.) with his more scientific approach, known as structural or "neo" realism.

The neorealists' ordering principle of the international system is anarchy (cf. Crawford 2000) its units are states (cf. Schweller 1996; Waltz 1979, pp. 93-94). While Waltz acknowledges the presence of non-state actors, he opposes them as relatively unimportant:

States set the scene in which they, along with non-state actors, stage their dramas or carry on their humdrum affairs. Though they may choose to interfere little in the affairs of non-state actors for long periods of time, states nevertheless set the terms of the intercourse

(Waltz 1979, p. 94).

Moreover, since all states want to survive, anarchy presupposes a 'self-help system' in which each state must take care of itself (cf. ibid., pp. 111 & 118). There is no division of labor or functional differentiation between states. Even if functionally similar (all units are perceived as sovereign[1]), they are nevertheless distinguished by their relative capability (the power represented by each of them) to perform the same task (cf. ibid., pp. 96-97).

Although the distribution of capabilities between states can change, the international system's ordering structure (anarchy) remains the same. In this framework, Waltz (1979, p. 105 et seq.) discusses two reasons why collaboration among states is restricted: insecurity and unequal benefits (relative gains). Each state is uncertain about other states' intentions and thus fears that the potential benefits resulting from cooperation may benefit other states more than themselves, leading to their dependence on others. "States do not willingly place themselves in situations of increased dependence. In a self-help system, considerations of security subordinate economic gain to political interest." (ibid., p. 107)

Like classical realists, Waltz (1979, p. 88) believes that, unlike in nation-state systems, there is no hierarchy in international politics. Hence, power remains the primary variable. It is, however, not an end in itself but an indispensable means of ensuring the states' basic need: security (cf. ibid., p. 91).

*The Struggle for Power*

John Mearsheimer (1995, p. 91) summarizes the conventional view of how power is interpreted within the realist perspective: "Realists believe that state behaviour is largely shaped by the material structure of the international system." Indeed, Morgenthau and Waltz both see the international environment as a competitive area where power is the main currency. However, while Morgenthau rooted his theory in the struggle for power, which he attributed to human nature (cf. Morgenthau 1948, p. 13 et seq.), Waltz tried to avoid any philosophical debate and instead constructed an IR theory similar to microeconomics:

International-political systems, like economic markets, are individualist in origin, spontaneously generated, and unintended. In both systems, structures are formed by the coaction of their units. Whether those units live, prosper, or die depends on their own efforts. Both systems are formed and maintained on a principle of self-help that applies to the units

(Waltz 1979, p. 91)

He argues that states in the international system are like firms in the domestic economy (cf. ibid., p. 89 et seq.) and have the same fundamental interest: to survive; "In anarchy, security is the highest end." (ibid., p. 126) Survival is a prerequisite for achieving any goals that states may have. It is the foundation of actions in an environment where safety is not guaranteed (cf. ibid., p. 92). To overcome what Waltz regards as insufficiencies in Morgenthau's work (cf. Waltz 1959, pp. 28 & 166; 1979, pp. 65 & 74), he attempts to locate causation at the systemic rather than the individual level. According to Waltz, states are subjected to the dictates of an international system to survive in an order without a global leviathan (cf. Hobbes, 1984) to offer them protection (cf. Waltz 1979, p. 87).

Consequently, Waltz considers power and state behavior differently than classical realists. For Morgenthau, power was both a means and an end, and states were understood to act reasonably when their behavior accumulated maximum power (cf. Morgenthau 1948). Neorealists, however, believe that a state's fundamental interest is security. They hence focus on the distribution, not the accumulation, of power (cf. Waltz 1979, p. 117 et seq.). Thus, each state will behave in such a way that it believes will best serve its objectives. When force is used or intended to be used by one state, other states' options are either to use force or to be prepared to use it (cf. ibid., p. 113).

Neorealists interpret power under two categories: military and latent economic power (cf. Keohane 1984, p. 55). As the most straightforward indicator of a state's strength, military power can be measured in the military's tangible assets. Latent power, on the other hand, is "related to the socio-economic ingredients that go into building military power; it is largely based on a state's wealth and the overall size of its population." (ibid.) While the former is the crucial factor in realist terms, the latter is significant too, as it shows the level of latent reserves it can draw from to launch war.

Empirically, these considerations result in the concept of the balance-of-power: "If there is any distinctively political theory of international politics, balance-of-power theory is it." (Waltz 1979, p. 117) Within the theory, states are viewed as unitary actors who, at least, seek their own preservation and, at most, seek to dominate all other states. They, hence, try to use the means at their disposal to achieve their goals. These means fall into two categories: 'internal efforts', i.e., moves to increase economic capacity, military strength, etc. –logically, however, there are limits to these efforts– and 'external efforts', i.e., moves to strengthen and enlarge one's alliance or to weaken and shrink another. For this process pattern to hold true, two requirements must be met: (1) the order must be anarchic and (2) it must be populated by units wishing to survive (cf. ibid., p. 121).

The theory explains the constraints that emerge from the structure generated by internal and external efforts, and it shows the expected result: namely, the creation of power balances. In this context, Waltz again draws from economic theory and attempts to make parallel deductions: "Balance-of-power theory is micro theory precisely in the economist's sense." (ibid., p. 118) In economics, profit maximization is believed to be the fundamental incentive of any market participant; according to Waltz, states aim for self-preservation in the same way. Just as market participants strive for money, a state strives for 'security units' (cf. Vogt 1999, p. 50).

*Regional Power and Alliances*

The structure of the international system does not dictate state behavior, according to Waltz's theory, yet it leaves them with little freedom of action. Nevertheless, factors such as a state's geographical position, the quality of its armed forces, and, above all, the effects of anarchy on the perception of its environment can lead to differing state behavior (cf. Masala 2017). Consequently, depending on how these variables are weighted in terms of their effects on state action, states may act very differently under otherwise similar conditions (cf. Jervis 1985). Schweller (1996), for instance, assumes that, alongside the status quo-oriented state (as conceived by Waltz), there are also revisionist states in the international system, i.e., states whose objective is not to maintain their position but to expand their power.

John J. Mearsheimer took up this concept. According to him, a general rule applies, suggesting that "states in the international system aim to maximize their relative power position over other states. The reason is simple: the greater the military advantage one state has over other states, the more secure it is." (Mearsheimer 1994, pp. 11–12) This theory is called 'offensive realism' and it suggests that "states seek not to avoid gaps in gains favoring partners but instead to maximize gaps in their favor." (Grieco 2002, p. 70) Hence, offensive realism's main argument is that states maximize their power to improve their relative position over others.

Additionally to the estimation of latent and military state power, the geographical distribution of power is crucial. Mearsheimer (2001, p. 13) places high significance on the power relation between them to explain interstate behavior. When arguing that states pursue power in order to survive, he draws from Waltz. Yet, Mearsheimer extended Waltz's hypothesis, indicating that states that gain considerable influence are "strongly inclined to seek regional hegemony." (ibid., p. 232) Other states may then favor building alliances (cf. ibid. , p. 344).

Power is a crucial but not the most important factor in choosing allies. Instead, according to Stephen M. Walt (1987, pp. 21-22), it is the awareness of danger that dictates what a state does. Therefore, power factors interact with factors of "geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions." (ibid., p. 22) Threats do not always have to be explicit. The military capability of a regional power alone could be enough to generate fear in weaker states. Consequently, structure and state behavior can fuel threat perception. In this case, weaker states have two alternatives, to 'balance' or 'bandwagon'. While balancing happens when states ally with other smaller forces to counter a greater regional power, bandwagoning refers to a regional alliance between a weaker state and a greater power that is more threatening (cf. ibid., pp. 178–179).

In this chapter, I have provided the theoretical background for a neorealist analysis of an opening Arctic. Chapter II will focus on the Arctic structure, the consequences of the exponentially fastening Arctic melt, and possible security issues within the region.

**Arctic Background and Governance**

The Arctic is geologically complex, unexplored, and full of conflicting sovereignty claims. States with territorial borders are Canada, Denmark (via Greenland), Norway (via Svalbard), Russia, and the USA, known as the 'Arctic Five'. While Finland, Iceland, and Sweden have no direct borders on the Arctic Ocean, they are usually considered Arctic states, too (cf. AC 2021a). However, as evidenced by the number of signatories to the Svalbard and Spitsbergen Treaties[2], countries on every continent have a longstanding interest in the region; among them, some that claim it should remain open to all nations as a 'Common Heritage of Mankind'[3] (e.g., Gautam 2011; Rainwater 2013).

With increased human activity, the Arctic is facing a multitude of management and sovereignty challenges. While tourism is increasing (cf. D'Aprile 2018), strengthened legal and regulatory structures will be essential to attract international investment and development (cf. Ebinger & Zambetakis 2009). The discussion on future Arctic governance focuses on establishing new multinational frameworks or relying on existing ones. While several organizations play some role in the region, I will focus on the two most commonly considered the most relevant (cf. Wegge 2010): The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Arctic Council (AC).

*The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*

UNCLOS was created in 1982. It outlines territorial limits though zones, defined as internal, territorial, and contiguous waters, exclusive economic zones (EEZs), and continental shelves:

- Internal waters are all waterways within a state. States may regulate and use any resource within their internal waters. Foreign vessels do not have the right to pass through these waters without permission (cf. UN 1982, Art. 2; Art. 8; Art. 25; Art. 111).
- Territorial waters extend 12 nautical miles (nm) from a state's coastline. The coastal state can set laws, regulations and exploit resources within this area (cf. ibid., Art. 3; Art. 21; Art. 24). Yet, foreign ships have the right of 'innocent passage'[4] (cf. ibid., Art. 17–19).
- Contiguous waters extend 24 nm from a state's baseline. Within them, states can enforce laws regarding customs, immigration, pollution, and taxation (cf. ibid. Art. 33).
- EEZs extend 200 nm from a state's coastline. Within this zone, a state has the sole exploitation rights over natural resources (cf. ibid., p. 43 et seq.).[5]
- Finally, continental shelves are natural extensions of the seabed to the continental margin. Any UNCLOS signatory that can scientifically prove that the undersea continental ridge is an extension of its territory beyond 200 nm from its shoreline is automatically entitled to legal rights allowing it to extend its EEZ and, hence, to exploit natural resources in that zone (cf. ibid., Art. 77). Given the difficult and varied geology of overlapping claims, the process is highly complex, costly, and time-consuming (cf. Ebinger & Zambetakis 2009). Extensions must be claimed within 10 years of the signing of the Convention (cf. UN 1982, p. 146, Art. 4) and are limited to a maximum of 350 nm (cf. ibid., Art. 76).

The possibility of territorial extensions led to overlapping claims within the Arctic Ocean. The issue is exacerbated by the fact that the US has not yet ratified UNCLOS (cf. UN DOALS, 2020). As a non-signatory, it has little credibility in any discussion on Arctic sovereignty and cannot declare rights over resources beyond its EEZ off its Alaskan coast. While the US is determined to obtain significant territories through ratification, a handful of politicians are resistant to doing so, afraid of ceding too much power to an international regime (cf. Ebinger & Zambetakis 2009). Accordingly, the US relies on customary international law to regulate its Arctic operations, which, as codified in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, derives from consistent general state practices out of a sense of legal obligation (cf. UN 2005). Other opponents of UNCLOS have cited the lack of clarity, the vague language of Article 76, leaving unclear the crucial meanings of specific terms, as well as the different timetables for territorial extension applications (cf. Ebinger & Zambetakis 2009).

*The Arctic Council*

Formed in 1996 by the Ottawa Declaration, the AC is not an international treaty-based body with a firm legal charter but an intergovernmental forum working on a consensus basis to facilitate cooperation and collaboration on Arctic concerns (cf. Arctic Council, 2021b).[6] It focuses on issues relating to sustainable development and environmental conservation. Explicitly, its mandate excludes military security (cf. DoS 2021). As the AC is built on consensus-based decision-making, individual actors can block clauses they oppose. For several reasons, almost all members are objected to setting up a new framework, expanding the Council's mandate, or ceding sovereignty over the region to an international regime (cf. Ebinger & Zambetakis 2009).

While the US affirmed its commitment to the AC, claiming to "strengthen the Arctic Council as a consensus building forum" (AESC 2016, p. 27), it frequently emphasizes its opposition to any extension of the Council's limited mandate. Eventually, the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration, signed by the Arctic Five, stresses that UNCLOS (although not ratified by the US) is a group-wide commitment and, hence, that no new international legal regime is required (cf. Ilulissat Declaration 2008).

*Climate Change and the Issue of Arctic Melt*

This paper does not discuss specific debates regarding climate change but recognizes that the Arctic is warming and, hence, continues to become more accessible to human activity. This position is based on the suggestions of the 2018 IPCC Global Warming Report (cf. IPCC 2018) and the most recently published UN Environment Programme (cf. UNEP 2021) on the likely progress and implications of global climate change. The studies detail general trends in rising global temperatures, rising sea levels, and declining ocean oxygen levels. They further state that some regions are "[w]arming greater than the global annual average […], including two to three times higher in the Arctic." (IPCC 2018, p. 6) While forecasts for ice-free Arctic summers vary widely, there is multidisciplinary consensus on the reality of Arctic melt. Moreover, recent data show that the thaw happens far quicker than anticipated and freezing seems to occur later every year (cf. The Economist 2017; 2020). Over the past four decades, Arctic sea ice extent has more than halved.

The Arctic is a rapidly changing region with significant economic and security interests for the states that surround it:

Global climate change has catapulted the Arctic into the centre of geopolitics, as melting Arctic ice transforms the region from one of primarily scientific interest into a maelstrom of competing commercial, national security and environmental concerns, with profound implications for the international legal and political system

Ebinger & Zambetakis 2009, p. 1215

Levy (1995, p. 43) contends that "[f]or any environmental threat to be a security threat, there must be some demonstrable connection to some vital national interest." Due to global warming, the Arctic will become more accessible, leading to increased human activity, causing ice cap greying. The usually reflective surface will, then, absorb more sunlight, melt, and warm the water, thereby accelerating further enlargement of dark areas (cf. Marshall 2018; The Economist 2019a). Melting Arctic permafrost may then expose "large quantities of methane […] as well as

pollutants such as mercury" (The White House 2013, p. 5), further accelerating the melt. A so-called positive-feedback loop — or in this case: a vicious circle.

Since 1951, the Arctic has warmed nearly twice as much as the global average. In that time, the temperature in Greenland increased by 1.5°C, compared to around 0.7°C globally (cf. The Economist 2012a). The most well-known consequence of this process is rising sea levels. Although melting sea ice does not raise water levels, Greenland's melting ice sheet does (cf. The Economist 2019a). This has critical consequences: saltwater contamination from rising sea levels has already reached groundwater sources in Israel and Thailand as well as Island states and river deltas around the world (cf. Treverton et al. 2012). Since water cannot be substituted (cf. Postel & Wolf 2009), "[t]he most obvious […] effects that might pose national security issues are those driven by water scarcity" (Treverton et al. 2012, p. 4).

However, the decline in sea ice offers more opportunities for countries to extract hydrocarbons and minerals and enables greater access to commercial shipping and fishing. The Northwest Passage (NWP), along Canada's coasts, for instance, has been navigable for more than two weeks in recent summers. Similar ice shifts have been observed along Russia's northern coast and the Northern Sea Route (NSR), giving Moscow greater access to its vast Siberian reserves.

Indeed, the region has already opened up to global commerce (cf. German Arctic Office 2019). Compared to conventional routes leading via the Panama or Suez Canal[7], the increased usage of trans-Arctic sea routes is based on considerably shorter distances and travel times. The NSR provides a 30–40% shortening of the distance between Northwest Europe and East Asia, according to the German Arctic Office (2019). Additionally, the route from Asia to the US could be shortened by 8,000km (cf. Ebinger & Zambetakis 2009). These are obvious economic benefits, but the rise in traffic will also pose security challenges for Arctic states.

Eventually, "[t]he Arctic is [..] home to important bio-marine resources. Cod in the Barents Sea and pollock in the Russian Far East […] represent roughly 25% of the global catch of whitefish." (Kefferpütz 2010, p. 5) Such resource opportunities, together with the likelihood of improved shipping economies, make it difficult to ignore the Arctic's importance to circumpolar states. However, as ice melts and waters warm, fish migrate ever further north, ignoring national borders, making fisheries management increasingly challenging. Moreover, animals such as the walrus are seeing protein sources vanish as fish travel north — affecting human communities too: Inuit tribes record massive declines in walrus and seal populations, two essential commodities for their own livelihoods (cf. Krupnik 2018).

Within the region, environmental changes have a significant effect on indigenous peoples. On the one hand, melting ice will be to their disadvantage concerning their traditional way of life, based on hunting and fishing. On the other, a more open Arctic that is more accessible to profitable activities such as fossil fuel exploitation and fishing will necessarily attract greater governmental attention that could benefit the Arctic population (cf. Ebinger & Zambetakis 2009). Furthermore, tundra warming would allow substantially more plant growth and enable agriculture to flourish, making it easier for local populations to find new food sources (cf. Marshall 2018).

*Arctic Management and State Security Issues*

Since the Arctic is a semi-enclosed sea surrounded by coastal states, most problems lie in overlapping territorial extension claims and maritime boundary delimitations.

Titley (2011, p. 35) claims: "What stops the Arctic from being the Wild West? As it turns out, there is an internationally agreed governance regime for how we work on the oceans." His statement, referring to UNCLOS, is valid to a degree, but given the various unresolved sovereignty conflicts in the region, it may be an over-simplification. Although UNCLOS is the basis of international cooperation in the Arctic, one should not overlook that the US remains a non-signatory. After all, assuming that the Convention can provide the only needed framework to solve the complex and evolving issues of an opening Arctic seems daring. Power politics and the struggle for cooperation and competencies of bodies like the AC may well play a crucial role.

For instance, recognized extended territory is considered essential for Russia when it comes to force protection in the Atlantic or, under the worst possible case, for a strategic nuclear offensive on the American east coast. Ebinger and Zambetakis (2009, p. 1228) argue that "Moscow's worst fear is that NATO[[8]] could bottle its fleet up, severely affecting the balance of power in a major conflict." They further state that Russia has remained nervous that listening platforms could be mounted on offshore drilling platforms, providing NATO with substantial capabilities to track its commercial and strategic operations.

Conflicting claims by Russia, Denmark, and Canada over the Lomonosov Ridge make up one of the most sensitive territorial extensions under UNCLOS Article 76 (cf. The Economist 2014; Lanteigne 2019). Each nation claims that its territory is a natural prolongation and collects geological data to prove its claims.

Although Russia has so far adhered to the region's rules, it is regularly testing its limits. In 2007, two nuclear-powered Russian icebreakers set off on a research expedition containing two submarines to map the ocean floor. Once the subs reached the Arctic seabed, they planted a Russian titanium flag at the bottom of the North Pole and beamed videos and photos of the happening around the world (cf. The Economist 2012b).

In 2009, Moscow announced plans to improve its Arctic military capabilities to protect its regional interests, expecting the Arctic to be a crucial provider of future energy resources (cf. Parfitt, 2009). Speaking to the Russian Security Council, former president Medvedev even trumpeted that his country's "biggest task [..] is to turn the Arctic into Russia's resource base for the twenty-first century." Identifying Russia's "main issue is […] reliably protecting its national interests in the region." (Medvedev 2008)

Given the 2009 United States Geological Survey (USGS) postulate, these claims are reasonable. Geologists assume that the Arctic contains up to 13% of the world's undiscovered oil and 30% of its undiscovered natural gas (Bird et al. 2008). A bitter diplomatic row may at some point break out among nations who want to expand their territorial claims, those who argue that some of the Arctic belongs to no one and should therefore have unlimited access, and those who believe that, given its vulnerable and unique nature, the region should come under international jurisdiction as a Common Heritage of Mankind.

However, although the Arctic may have immense potential in the long term, its short-term contribution to energy supplies should not be overestimated, considering that other areas are cheaper, less challenging, and less technologically complex to exploit. Natural gas also requires costly and complicated infrastructure. Arctic seasons (e.g., polar nights) and weather conditions (e.g., mega waves) are another obstacle (cf. Depledge 2016; Marshall 2018). Despite low prices for drilling land, energy companies regard these risks as not worth taking yet (cf. World Finance 2014; Lanteigne 2019; The Economist 2015; 2021). Moreover, since much of the geology that supports the existence of hydrocarbons is found already within the Arctic coastal states' EEZs[9], a continental shelf expansion may not necessarily yield much more oil and gas. However, the sole perception of strategic discoveries and sovereign rights may be enough to motivate conflict over territory.

Arctic shipping routes are another source of conflict with countries other than the Arctic states involved too.[10] As stated earlier, two alternative ways through the Arctic Ocean can be considered realistic abbreviations for future global trade: the NWP, through the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, and the NSR, along Russia's northern coast.

Although Canada is a strong ally of the US, there are disputes between the two countries over the Canadian Archipelago waters that Canada claims internal waters and not subject to the right of innocent passage. The US, however, regards them as an international strait through which ships should be able to pass without Canadian authorities' intervention. Former US Secretary of State Pompeo (2019), speaking to the AC, recently stated that Canada's sovereignty claims over the NWP are considered "illegitimate." This position is based on the Corfu Channel case, which divides the coast of Albania from the Greek island of Corfu. The International Court of Justice ruled that because it was an "international highway", Albania could not claim the channel as territorial waters (The International Court of Justice 1949, p. 29). There are similar conflicts between Iran and Oman over the Hormuz Strait, Yemen and Djibouti over the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and parts of the South China Sea (cf. The Economist 2019b).

In 1988, Canada and the US settled their dissent with a political rather than legal solution (cf. Government of Canada 1988). America agreed to seek Canada's consent for any transit through waters it has claimed. Yet, it did not grant Canada's claims legitimacy, as this would set a precedent for China to claim the South China Sea, Iran to claim the Hormuz Strait, and Russia to claim the NSR as internal waters (cf. Huebert 2009). The latest statement by Mr. Pompeo further indicates that America is no longer satisfied with its 1988 deal now that the Arctic is opening up to more shipping. Moreover, it remains "concerned about Russia's claim over the international waters of the Northern Sea Route, including its newly announced plans to connect it with China's Maritime Silk Road." (Pompeo 2019)

Unlike the Arctic states, China has no territorial sovereignty and related rights to resource extraction in the Arctic. Nevertheless, to stress its growing Arctic interests, it has developed a self-defined Northern identity as a 'near-Arctic state' and acquired observer status in the AC (cf. Grieger 2018). China's first white paper on Arctic policy seeks to justify its ambitions through its history of Arctic research and the opportunities rapid climate change presents. Its interests are part of a new China-led cooperation initiative to build a 'Polar Silk Road' connecting it with Europe through the Arctic (cf. Xinhua 2018). To achieve this, China is deepening its ties with Russia (cf. Sørensen & Klimenko 2017), shifting the regional balance of power. While the US openly denies it the status of an Arctic state (cf. Pompeo 2019), Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, even corrected an interviewer to stress that China belongs to the Arctic as well (cf. Putin 2019).

**The Case of Russia and the United States**

An opening Arctic will bring dormant and unresolved problems to the fore as states compete for shipping routes and access to large resource deposits. This chapter will test the neorealist theory, as defined in Chapter I, against the events shaping Arctic international relations. I am therefore conducting a case study of Russian and American actions in the High North. The expectations of state behavior in neorealism are clear: states will seek to maximize their security by improving their position. Therefore, they use military power, conducting several strategies, including army development and force projection, increasing national power through economic means, and seeking alliances. Thus, several predictions arise for this case study: first, an opening Arctic would result in states pursuing the region's resources to boost their power by economic development. Second, this race will increase human action and security threats to the region, leading to higher military activity. Third, based on the regional structure, weaker Arctic states would then pursue security through an alliance with the US. Finally, states may ignore or break the rules set by international regimes (e.g., UNCLOS, AC) when it suits their interests.

*Arctic Policy I: The Russian Federation*

Of all states, Russia has by far the most significant intrinsic interests in the Arctic. The Russian North accounts for "20 percent of [its GDP] and 22 percent of the total Russian export […]. The region's economic promise lies primarily in its rich natural resources and its potential as an attractive maritime transit passageway" (Zysk 2010, p. 105), making Arctic resources a matter of strategic importance. Its Arctic coastline is 24,140km long, stocked with several large cities, and inhabited by two million Russians. Canada and the US have combined Arctic populations equal to less than a quarter of that number (cf. Shea 2019a).

In its Arctic Strategy Through 2035, the Russian government emphasizes the need to ensure military security, defense, and protection of its state borders and highlights the importance of the Arctic as Russia's resource base (cf. Kluge & Paul 2020).

Overall, the Arctic is of outstanding importance for Russia […] economically and strategically with the vast hydrocarbon resources found and expected to be found, as well as ideologically, given […] its ambition to restore Russia's political standing internationally

Keil 2014, p. 170

Russia will increasingly look to the Arctic for resource development as current supplies shrink. Its interests lie in claiming potentially resource-rich territory. While UNCLOS already gives Russia a significant maritime presence in

the region, it is yet claiming continental shelves to expand its sphere of influence (cf. Howard 2010). Besides, in terms of resources, the Russian Security Strategy states that "it can't be ruled out that military force could be used for resolving emerging problems," naming the Arctic a new area of potential conflict, since "[t]he existing balance of forces near the borders of the Russian Federation […] can be violated." (Harding 2009)

Another main interest lies in the expected increase in traffic and activity in waters Russia claims internal. Much like Canada and the NWP, the Russians claim legal authority over the NSR and contest America's interpretation of it as an international waterway (cf. Zysk 2010). "In the Northern Sea Route, Moscow already illegally demands other nations request permission to pass […] and threatens to use military force to sink any that fail to comply with their demands." (Pompeo 2019)

Scopelliti and Conde Pérez (2016), with a particular emphasis on Arctic military dynamics, outline the radical changes that occurred following the Russian flag-planting in 2007. Although the event was considered a political gesture with no legal effect, it aroused the Arctic states' concern for regional security, causing anxiety over Russian behavior in particular. To restore its standing of great power, Moscow adopted an increasingly assertive posture through military presence in the region (cf. Murray & Nuttall 2014). More precisely, it has started to modernize its Northern Fleet and set up a new Arctic Brigade near the Finnish border (cf. Klimenko 2014). In addition to an 8.1% increase in general military spending, Moscow has published a new military doctrine indicating US and NATO enlargements as a major threat to its security (cf. Perlo-Freeman & Wezeman 2015).

Russia is determined to increase its presence in the Arctic to protect its national interests and security while at the same time adhering to the principles of international law and cooperation. This creates a conflict that Rowe (2009) described as the tension between the 'open' and 'closed' North, meaning that Russian Northern Policies often include both more external inclinations, exemplified by cooperation, as well as a tendency to increase securitization and defense of national interests. This tension is evident in the fossil fuel sector, where Moscow regularly must balance the market and strategic concerns (cf. Keil 2014).

Russia, under Putin, aims to develop the Arctic to boost its economy, which, in the aftermath of Crimea's annexation, is feeling the brunt of Western sanctions and economic isolation. This has shown that Russia is also seeking to protect Arctic assets in ways that have begun to attract the US and Northern European attention (cf. Lanteigne 2019). While the Russian Federation postulates that its expansion into the Arctic is purely economic, the reality of military hardware in the region tells otherwise.

A key obstacle to Arctic access remains technology. Icebreakers are necessary for presence and power projection. So are functioning naval bases. However, it is a heavy investment to build icebreakers, with production times of 8–10 years, costing about $1 billion each (cf. Ebinger & Zambetakis 2009). The various Arctic nations have widely divergent capabilities. Markowitz describes the year of the Russian flag-planting, 2007, as 'the shock', measuring significant behavioral changes by Arctic nation-states since then. Before the shock, Russia had by far the largest Arctic fleet. Yet, since 2007, it has built more icebreakers than any other state, hence accumulating power. Today, it has a fleet of 61 commissioned ships, with a further ten under construction. It is also the only country to operate nuclear-powered icebreakers (cf. Markowitz 2020). President Putin, at the International Arctic Forum, stated:

[Russia] will continue to update [its] icebreaker fleet and to increase the production of ice-class vessels. Three new nuclear-powered icebreakers […] are being built here in St Petersburg

Putin, 2019

This unique capability enables Russia to project power year-round in the Arctic Ocean. To put its ice-capable fleet in perspective, Canada, second only to Russia in Arctic territory, has eight active vessels (cf. Canadian Coast Guard 2021), while the US has only one functional icebreaker (cf. The Associated Press 2020).

Furthermore, Moscow is rushing to reopen Soviet military, air, and radar bases on Arctic islands and to build new ones. Regularly releasing images of troop training in the High North (cf. Osborn 2017), Russia has constructed four

new bases since the shock and reopened an additional thirteen. It had an astonishing 27 active bases above the Arctic Circle in 2017. Besides, it has invested more in building infrastructure and facilities that allow larger troops, more supplies, and advanced weapons systems to be stationed (cf. Markowitz 2020). By comparison, the US only maintains one military base above the Arctic Circle, on borrowed land in Greenland (cf. Cook 2020) and Canada has only three (cf. Shea 2019b).

Russia has, by most measures, become the dominant power in the Arctic. It has the world's largest fleet, capable of operating in extreme northern waters throughout the year and maintains dozens of military bases in the region. Moreover, it has stationed new troops, increased submarine activity, and returned warplanes to the Arctic skies, where NATO airspace is now routinely being buzzed (cf. Shea 2019a). However, Russia's build-up and swaggering, echoing moves in Crimea and Kaliningrad, has been noticed in Washington.

*Arctic Policy II: The United States of America*

Washington's interest in the Arctic has declined since the end of the Cold War, leading to the US being called the 'reluctant Arctic power' (c.f. Huebert 2009). Its absence from UNCLOS, and therefore its lack of ability to use Article 76, is one frequently mentioned case in point. Nevertheless, the publication of a new National Security Presidential Directive in 2009, including a recommendation to the Senate to ratify UNCLOS, was a post-shock sign of growing Arctic interest, stating that "[t]he United States has broad and fundamental national security interests in the Arctic region and is prepared […] to safeguard these interests." (The White House 2009, p. 2)

The US Department of Defense (DoD) published a subsequent report in 2016, emphasizing the improvement of US Arctic force capabilities. It highlights Arctic security as vital for homeland defense. One of the main supporting goals to achieve this is "operating in conjunction with like-minded nations when possible and independently if necessary" (DoD 2016, p. 2). Furthermore, the report stresses potential economic gains through fishing, trade, resource extraction, and international waterway access (cf. DoD 2016).

In 2019, the DoD updated its Arctic Strategy, reiterating the challenges that China and Russia present to security in the region, including concerns that, through its economic power, Beijing may seek to influence Arctic governance. The paper confirmed that the US should raise awareness of the Arctic challenges, strengthen regional operations, including exercises and cold-weather training, and reinforcing "the rules-based order in the Arctic." (cf. DoD 2019, p. 8)

Yet, Keil (2014) argues that, compared to other regions, the US has relatively little Arctic interests. Given how militarily active it is virtually everywhere else, this lack of American presence in the Arctic is particularly striking. It is reasonable to conclude that if Washington did not project power in the Arctic, it was not because it lacked economic or military capabilities but because it did not want to do so (cf. Markowitz 2020). However, that may be about to change.

As mentioned above, the US has fewer icebreakers than any other Arctic state. Furthermore, it has not built new naval bases and thus has only one above the Arctic Circle: a radar station at Thule, Greenland. It operates two other bases in southern Alaska, well below the Arctic Circle and almost 1,500km south of its Arctic Ocean coast (cf. Markowitz 2020). Recalling that America is by far the most powerful actor in the Arctic in virtually every dimension (cf. ibid.) and the fact that it is largely absent because the Arctic ranks relatively low compared to other US interests (cf. Keil 2014), we can assume a regional power vacuum is arising. Accordingly, Russia has substantially increased its Arctic military presence and projected power to areas under dispute.

This uneven investment between Russia and the US has led to some tension and uncertainty about the region's future, further heightened by recent large-scale military exercises. In October 2018, NATO conducted its largest training exercise since the end of the Cold War, called 'Trident Juncture'. The operation, involving 50,000 troops from 31 nations, took two weeks and was held in Norway (cf. NATO 2018). The exercise involved an imaginary situation in which Northern Norway, sharing land borders with Russia, was invaded, and its NATO allies came to its defense. Some observers worry that disputes over fishing or exploitation rights between Russia and Norway could pull NATO

into a conflict for which it is not prepared (cf. Shea 2019b). Yet, NATO claimed the training "will show the world that NATO is relevant, united, and ready to defend itself in this Article 5 scenario[[11]]"

NATO's training can be viewed as a response to Russia's Arctic activity. A month before NATO, Moscow organized war games of its own. 'Vostok 2018' was a massive military exercise of 297,000 troops held in Russia's far east. Moreover, Chinese forces participated in the exercise, underlining the countries' strong Arctic relationship (cf. Hecimovic, 2018). Beijing has also made significant investments in Arctic oil and natural gas infrastructure, showing rising interest in the region (cf. Cook 2020).

Tackling the reopening of Russian military stations and regular incursions into or near NATO territory by Russian aircraft and submarines, the US has responded on many fronts. This includes developing the means to operate more visibly in the Arctic, reopening the Keflavik (Iceland) Naval Air Station, and finalizing plans to build new icebreakers to replace aging US Coast Guard vessels (cf. Lanteigne 2019). Arctic NATO-nations are also slowly expanding their military cold-weather infrastructure. For example, Canada is building a naval refueling base on Baffin Island. Simultaneously, the US has announced plans to re-establish its Navy Second Fleet to counter Russia's North Atlantic activities (cf. Shea 2019b).

In his 2019 speech, Mike Pompeo pointed to some Arctic actors as military threats, stressing that "the region has become an arena for power and for competition" (Pompeo 2019). His remarks contrasted sharply with the Trump Administration's previous policies, investing little in Arctic security. Moreover, under Trump, climate change and global warming have become unmentionable, and Pompeo used neither term in his speech (cf. Shea 2019a).

America's rise in Arctic interest can be traced back to increased Russian (and Chinese) influence and power projections in the region. Although Pompeo said he welcomed collaboration with both, he warned them against provocative action and criticized Russia's military build-up as "destabilizing". He also warned that both nations' Arctic activities will be judged by their behavior elsewhere. In particular, he mentioned Russia's "aggressive action in Ukraine" and China's territorial claims in the South China Sea (cf. Pompeo 2019). While his speech focused on melting ice, allowing for increased shipping, military operations, and new bases, he rarely mentioned indigenous concerns, wildlife, or climate disruptions that might follow.

*The Balance of Arctic Powers*

Neorealism, as discussed, predicts that states will attempt to maximize security by using military power. Therefore, they may pursue several strategies, including power projection, increasing economic capabilities, and seeking alliances. To pursue security in a self-help system, Moscow and Washington should increase military and latent power to, ultimately, reach regional hegemony. The brief case study shows that, following the largest retreat of sea ice in 2007 ('the shock'), Russia began increasing its Arctic activity by claiming resource-rich (e.g., Lomonosov ridge) and strategically significant (e.g., the NSR) territory to boost its national power. Besides, it increased its partnership with China and focused on infrastructure development to raise economic performance.

As noted in Chapter I, Mearsheimer believes that all great powers strive to accumulate power over rivals, with the ultimate goal of hegemony (cf. Mearsheimer 2001, p. 40). While the US is the most powerful state in the system, it cannot dominate the world. Due to its minor role in the Arctic, it motivates other states to increase their power to secure their position in the system. With Washington largely absent from the Arctic, Russia expanded its economic investment and military activity, becoming the regional hegemon as defined by Mearsheimer (2001, p. 232).

Neorealism differentiates latent and military power (cf. Keohane 1984, p. 55). When calculated in both terms, the balance of power between Russia and other Arctic states drastically favors Russia. With the largest Arctic territory and population, it generates a significant amount of its latent power in this resource-rich area. This allows it to operate the largest fleet of icebreakers, Arctic military bases, and troops. In these quantitative terms, the power structure in the Arctic is clear: Russia is a great power in the High North, and the US, with only one functioning icebreaker and not a single independent Arctic military base, is not.

This has substantial implications for the Arctic region. Mearsheimer states that if the structure is multi-polar and unbalanced, it will be much more prone to conflict since regional powers seek dominance. Other states may then seek alliances (cf. Mearsheimer 2001, p. 344). This is where Walt's balance of threat approach becomes a useful analytical tool. In predicting the formation of alliances between states, Walt (1987, pp. 21-22) defines threat perception as a crucial determinant. The threat –in this structure– comes from Moscow. As a reaction to Russian power projections and military build-up, neorealism would expect smaller powers to pursue security by bandwagoning with Washington.

This can be observed in several collaborations: while Canada, Denmark, and Norway have collectively increased their Arctic military activity in partnership with the US through NATO, Finland and Sweden are conducting regular Arctic military training with Norway and the US (cf. Hultqvist 2020). Eventually, Denmark and Iceland grant US military presence on their territories in Keflavik and Thule.

Finally, although the Arctic is shaped by cross-national cooperation through forums and regimes (e.g., UNCLOS, AC), we can find evidence that states ignore or break the rules established by such institutions: while President Putin officially claimed that "[a]ll decisions by the Arctic Council are nothing more than recommendations" (Putin 2019), Canada and the US boycotted an AC meeting following Russia's intervention in Ukraine (cf. Rahbek-Clemmensen 2017). Moreover, NATO issued a general ban on cooperation with Russia and, due to conflicting interests, a total of 15 bilateral events between Oslo and Moscow were canceled (cf. ibid.). Although giving lip service to Arctic cooperation, Russia increased flights, violated NATO-states' border sovereignty, and conducted unauthorized intercontinental ballistic missile tests in the region (cf. ibid.). Finally, due to the denial of climate change by the former US government, the AC was unable to release an official declaration after their meeting in 2019 (cf. Lanteigne 2019).

## Conclusion

Although neorealism has been much criticized for its revisionist character and inability to explain change (cf. Korab-Karpowicz 2017, Ch. 3.2), it has provided appropriate assumptions in an opening Arctic. The study found that thawing ice caps led the Arctic states to pursue resources to boost their economic and military power. Moreover, this pursuit of economic development has increased human activity and security threats in the region, leading to an expansion in Arctic military capability by both Russia since 2007 and, more recently, the US. Furthermore, the paper investigated Arctic power structures and found that Russia's regional geographic, economic, and demographic domination resulted in weaker Arctic states' bandwagoning behavior. This was primarily observable in military cooperation through NATO and the reopening and development of US bases on Icelandic and Greenlandic territories. Finally, as neorealism would expect states to ignore the rules established by international regimes when it is in their interest to do so, the illegal penetration of NATO airspace, the boycott of AC meetings, and the refusal to make joint declarations provided some grounds.

Nevertheless, one should note that collaboration is not impossible for neorealists. A realist would support, for example, a climate treaty with mandatory greenhouse gas emission limits, if national interests are better served (cf. Khan 2016). In a system of anarchy, no arrangement automatically protects natural resources from exhaustion, allowing for the 'Tragedy of the Commons' (cf. Hardin, 1968) to occur, meaning that everyone who has access to a common good is exploiting it to gain as many resources as possible before it is depleted. The Arctic is such a good — and climate change understood as "the most serious long-term risk to international security" (Sofer 2015), poses a significant threat to the region and countries around the world. Recognizing that security is of utmost importance in neorealism, one may argue that state security is composed of global environmental security as, in the wake of increasing environmental concerns, nations have more to lose than ever (cf. Levy 1995). Thus, the benefits of cooperation outweigh the potential gap between cooperating countries in relative gains, making environmental cooperation –even for neorealists– the best alternative. Hence, to overcome the threat of global warming, all Arctic states would be better off tackling it together as "an alliance against climate change" (Sofer 2015).

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**Notes**

[1] Waltz (1979, p. 96) clarifies that "to say that states are sovereign is not to say that they can do as they please […]. To say that a state is sovereign means that it decides for itself how it will cope with its internal and external problems, including whether or not to seek assistance from others […]."

[2] The Spitsbergen Treaty of 1920 recognized Norwegian sovereignty over Svalbard while giving mineral rights to various countries. The 1925 Svalbard Act made Svalbard part of the Kingdom of Norway (cf. Royal Norwegian Ministry of Justice 1988).

[3] The international seabed, i.e., the seabed beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, is not subject to national appropriation and has been designated a Common Heritage of Mankind by the Declaration of Principles Governing the Seabed and the Ocean Floor (UN General Assembly 1970, p. 24).

[4] Passage is innocent as long as it is not detrimental to the peace, good order, or security of a coastal state,

meaning that passing ships are not allowed to exercise or practice weapons of any kind; to gather information; to launch, land, or ship any aircraft or military equipment; to load or unload any goods, currency, or persons which are contrary to laws of the coastal state; to pollute; to conduct fishing activities; etc. (cf. UN 1982, Art. 19).

[5] States have sovereign rights but not full sovereignty in their EEZs. Foreign states have the freedom of navigation and overflight. When EEZs overlap, states involved must delineate their maritime boundary through bilateral/multilateral agreements (cf. United Nations 1982, p. 43 et seq.).

[6] Its members are Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark (incl. Greenland and the Faroe Islands), the Republic of Finland, Iceland, the Kingdom of Norway, the Russian Federation, the Kingdom of Sweden, and the United States of America. Furthermore, the AC consists of Permanent Participants, mostly indigenous groups, and Observers such as China, Germany, India, the UN, and the WWF.

[7] Currently the most important shipping abbreviations and alternatives to the otherwise thousands of miles of maritime routes around the African or Latin American capes (cf. The Geography of Transport Systems 2021).

[8] Canada, Denmark, Norway, and the USA are NATO member states (cf. NATO 2020) = four out of the Arctic Five.

[9] Indeed, estimates suggest that Russia already owns more than half of the Arctic's resources; the US ranking 2$^{nd}$, followed by Norway, Denmark, and Canada — from most to least (cf. Keil 2014, p. 168).

[10] These include China, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore — but also the EU (cf. Lanteigne 2019).

[11] Art. 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty defines collective defence: "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that […] each of them […] will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking […] such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area." (NATO 1949)