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THE END OF ARTIC EXCEPTIONALISM? NEW ARTIC APPROACH AFTER FEBRUARY 24, 2022

Since the end of the Cold War, the Arctic has often been portrayed as a symbol of model cooperation. The individual states were prepared to cooperate extensively despite controversies in other areas. Under the slogan of maintaining the Arctic as the “zone of peace and cooperation,” the eight Arctic states built a framework of cooperation with the Arctic Council as a focal point (Kobzeva, 2022). The cooperation of states, which competed in other areas, was so unique that “Arctic exceptionalism” was commonly and widely talked about. In his famous 1987 speech in Murmansk, Mikhail Gorbachev called the region the “zone of peace,” and the Arctic was declared a “territory of dialogue.”

The Arctic was therefore customarily treated as an area with little potential for conflict. If a dispute were to arise, it would not be a result of the activity in the region itself, but a transfer of conflict from other areas or a consequence of global superpower policy. Arctic states have successfully cooperated with each other on environmental protection, sustainable development of the region, promotion of indigenous peoples’ rights, and scientific research. However, hard, traditional security issues were carefully avoided. It was felt that there was no need, e.g. within the Arctic Council, to raise sensitive issues that could lead to sharp disagreements, in particular those with Russia.

From the beginning, however, this was not an accurate picture, and over time the somewhat idyllic picture of the Arctic proved to be an illusion. As a number of authors have pointed out (e.g. Raspotnik, Østhagen, 2020; Østhagen, 2021; Käpylä, Mikkola, 2015; Gjørsv, Hodgson, 2019), such perception of the region has often resulted from an oversimplified understanding of the Arctic as a homogeneous area that can be easily categorized and described by the same common categories. At least since 2014, researchers have tried to show bluntly that the picture deviated from the reality.

In fact, the image of the Arctic as an area of harmony and common interests has been often juxtaposed with a view of the region as another training ground for political competition and rivalry. Thus, the contemporary Arctic remains within the brackets of modern international relations. It is not a closed and isolated system immune to processes and dynamic changes in the outside world (Käpylä, Mikkola, 2015). Governance of the region needs to take into account that the Arctic influences, and it is itself strongly influenced, by the developments in the contemporary world. The war in Ukraine has deprived defenders of “Arctic exceptionalism” of their last illusions.

This article examines the most up-to-date Arctic strategies of the states directly involved in the region. The analysis encompasses changes that took place over the

past few years, which have mostly been a consequence of Russia's offensive actions (implemented since 2014) and the strong militarization of the region. Furthermore, the article considers the initiated process of Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO and the consequences of this historic change for the High North. Finally, it analyses decisions taken by a number of Arctic organizations to exclude, freeze or "suspend" their relations with Russia, as a consequence of the February 24, 2022 attack on Ukraine. This, however, raises questions about whether the Arctic can be managed while disregarding Russia and whether any such measures can be effective.

WHEN EXCEPTIONALISM IS OVER

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has consequences that clearly extend beyond the war theatre itself, and its reverberations will also reach the Arctic. Of course, the gradual stripping of the Arctic of its "exceptionalism" did not begin in February 2022. It has continued at least since 2014. For more than a decade, Russia has been consistently increasing its military presence in the Arctic, which raises strong concerns for other actors in the region. This is all the more so because Russia's predominance in the Arctic is significant. The illusion of a permanent "zone of peace" has somehow lulled at least some of the other Arctic powers rendered them inactive in the region. Any prediction of the current situation impact in the High North is subject to a considerable margin of uncertainty as it is impossible today to assess how long and what type of operations may be conducted in Ukraine, or in which direction Vladimir Putin's regime will evolve. Since the outbreak of war, however, it is the Arctic – outside of the main area of warfare, of course, that has swiftly attracted extensive research into international security (Urban, 2021).

Although Nordic states took different paths to their security, for several years they have recognized an increasingly stronger need for closer cooperation. The rapprochement has depended on the Russia's strong military presence in the High North. In particular, since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Nordic governments have sought common ground for cooperation in the security area (Mazrek, 2022).

The fact remains that for the past decades the Arctic has considered an area of low potential for conflict. The only unresolved issues in the region have been the maritime boundary in the Beaufort Sea which concerns Canada and the United States and disputes to delineate the extended continental shelves around the North Pole. The possibility of extending their own Exclusive Economic Zone beyond 200 nautical miles is currently claimed by Russia, Canada, Norway, Denmark (Greenland) and the US. Moreover, some of these claims (Danish, Canadian and Russian) involve the same areas. However, when it comes to access to raw materials already, hydrocarbons, minerals, and fisheries, are located in the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) or territories of the Arctic littoral states (Østhagen, 2022: 55). Individual states thus exercise their strict control over them (apart from aforementioned continental shelf dispute). Even the Canadian-Danish dispute over the small Hans Island (often known as the "whiskey war"), which had been going on for almost 50 years, came to its end in June 2022 with the signing of an agreement that divided the uninhabited, half-kilometer-long island.

Representatives from Denmark and Canada stressed the importance of this agreement at a time when respect for the international order is under so much pressure. Mélanie Joly, Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, referred to solutions that need to be sought in accordance with the international law, especially when “global security is being threatened” (*Canada and the Kingdom...*, 2022).

ARCTIC SPILLOVER

Recent years have significantly expanded the catalogue of Arctic actors. In addition to the main traditional Arctic players (called Arctic-8: USA, Russia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Canada), new states have also expressed their interest in the presence in the region (mainly China, but also Japan, India, Korea). Many European countries that do not neighbor the Arctic have also developed strategies towards the region, demonstrating how important the area has become in recent years. Undoubtedly, the 2022 events necessitate an update relevant documents. It is expected that security issues will be increasingly stressed (both in their traditional and extended sense). Numerous parties claim that the cooperation in the region may be “overshadowed by the emphasis on military security, which ruled the ground during the Cold War,” and that hard security will once again dominate the dynamics of events in the Arctic (Edvardsen, 2022).

Already in previous years, especially after 2014, some states updated their Arctic policies, which was mainly driven by Russia’s aggression, strong militarization of the region, and China’s growing aspirations. Although China’s actions and policy papers cannot be called confrontational, it is clear that China has been trying to move the Arctic discourse from the regional level, where the Arctic 8 had a voice, to the global level, where China already has taken a full seat at the Arctic table. Although the Russia’s unprovoked attack on Ukraine has become a new caesura in the Arctic cooperation (e.g. suspension of Russia’s membership in many Arctic bodies), a change in the approach of states has been taking place for the past several years.

The United States has gone through “slow maturation” of its own Arctic policy over the past few years (Herman, 2022). Previously, the region did not attract much attention in the 2017 National Security Strategy. Arctic is mentioned only once, and the National Defense Strategy, published a year later, does not mention the region at all. Under the D. Trump administration, the focus was mainly on maintaining freedom of navigation in the region, given its growing importance for global trade and the potential for further oil and gas extraction. It was clearly a departure from B. Obama’s policy, with the administration was mainly interested in environmental cooperation (Markiewicz, 2020). It is worth noting that the current (and the first) US national Arctic Strategy was developed in 2013, during B. Obama’s term of office. It was only after the events of February 2022 that the J. Biden administration began to work on the update of the policy.

A certain (forced) impetus to adapt the US approach, or rather to catch up with the distance separating the US and Russia and gradually China, was provided when China declared itself as a “near-Arctic state” and the White Paper published in 2018.

Soon after, the US Department of Defense issued an Arctic strategy document in 2019, and the Air Force and Navy have their own versions. However, as Herman notes, these are isolated documents with no common vision of the overall policy for the US presence in this part of the world. It should be noted that in 2021, the United States Army released a document titled “Regaining Arctic Dominance. The U.S. Army in the Arctic” (*Regaining...*, 2021). In general, this is the first Arctic strategy developed by the US military. The overall objective indicates the need for the US military need to be prepared to operate in harsh Arctic conditions in the face of increasing (mainly Russian) militarization of the region. The operating environment itself is a challenge, as it requires special equipment and tactics. In different times of the year, the same areas may be or may not be passable, they may need different camouflage techniques, surveillance, engineering support and orientation (Dąbrowski, 2018).

During the presentation of the document, US generals said “the country has lost our ability to dominate in the environment” (Schreiber, 2021). The US military has realized its backwardness, especially vis-à-vis Russia, when it comes to icebreaking. Today, Russia has more than 40 active icebreakers, the United States has only two, i.e. one heavy icebreaker, commissioned in 1976 and one medium icebreaker operational since 2000 (Perez, 2022). To reduce this disparity at least slightly, the Polar Security Cutter program has been launched. As a result, three heavy-duty polar vessels are to be built by 2027. The program is intended to upgrade and strengthen the icebreaker fleet to ensure continued access to polar regions and support US economic, commercial, maritime and security needs. The program rationale emphasizes that the US has vital state interests in the polar region. The new vessels will ensure defense readiness in the Arctic and Antarctic regions and enhance the enforcement of treaties and other laws to protect the economy and the environment. They will also contribute to the security of ports, waterways, and the provision of logistics support, including ship escorts (*Polar...*, 2021).

It was also highlighted that the opening of the Arctic caused by progressing climate warming increases competition in the Arctic. This not only makes the region more accessible in terms of shipping and natural resource extraction opportunities, but also makes it more vulnerable to attack. The region itself has been described as a contested space and an area of competition between superpowers.

However, the Americans are not only looking more closely at Alaska, but they are also rebuilding and expanding their contacts with other countries in the region. This is particularly evident in the intensified relations with Greenland. In June 2020, Washington decided to reopen its consulate in Greenland’s capital Nuuk after a break of more than 60 years. According to Mike Pompeo, this was to prove “America’s commitment to deepening our cooperation with the people of Greenland and the entire Kingdom of Denmark” (Pompeo, 2020).

Greenland, which enjoys considerable autonomy (although foreign and security affairs are still in Danish hands), emphasized that Greenland is part of the “national community,” remaining an ally of the “Western world.” Greenland’s Prime Minister fully condemned Russian aggression in Ukraine. The war also influenced the decision to strengthen the strategic partnership with the US. Although Greenland is not a member state of the European Union (it has OCT status), after the invasion of Ukraine, in

solidarity with the Union's decision, it imposed sanctions on Russia despite expected economic consequences. According to Múte B. Egede, the Greenland's Prime Minister, the decision will affect around 15 percent of the country's total exports. This has prompted a search for new and expansion of existing markets to minimize the negative impact on the island's vulnerable economy.

While Greenland has been attracting inward investment from the US and Canada for several years, recent developments have made the matter even more pressing. The Greenland Prime Minister referred to the US as "the most important strategic partner" during his visit to the US in 2022. He called for even stronger economic and political ties.

Closer cooperation with the US, also in the sense of attracting both public and private investment from the USA for the development of sustainable tourism, trade or investment in clean energy sources, has an additional dimension for Greenland. Funds raised can expedite the island's financial independence from Denmark, which is essential on the route to full independence. In the case of Greenland, the question is not "whether" to move towards full sovereignty, but rather "when" and "under what conditions."

The visit to Washington by the Greenland Prime Minister was seen as an important step towards a new era, even – or perhaps especially – at the expense of weakened relations with the Kingdom of Denmark. Prime Minister's words "we need to rethink our partnership and develop our partnership for the future" were read as a strong indication of further rapprochement with the United States and Canada (McGwin, 2022).

Canada published its current Arctic policy in 2019. The document is titled the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (ANPF) (*Canada's...*, 2019) and has been seen by many as too vague and lacking a clear vision and priorities in the region. The Arctic has not been a prominent topic in the Canadian discourse over the past few years (Greaves, 2022a). As W. Greaves put it "in the more than two years since it was released [ANPF – TB], little has happened, but everything has changed." It is the events of 2022 that have pushed Canada to take more specific actions. Interestingly, it was highlighted that Canada had disputes in the Arctic region with its close allies. One of them, the Hans Island dispute, which continued for almost 50 years, has just come to its end with the signing of an agreement. However, two disputes remain, one with the United States over the maritime boundary in the Beaufort Sea, and over the legal designation of the Northwest Passage (NWP) as Canadian internal waters. The current increased cooperation in the Western world may facilitate and accelerate negotiations to resolve these disputes. This is all the more so given that the first one of them applies more more to a question of principle than obtaining specific tangible benefits (Greaves, 2022a), and the second one has been already partly resolved. While in practice positions of Canada and the US on the status of the NWP remain different. There has been a viable solution for years. Canada and the United States created a workaround by signing an agreement whereby the U.S. would not enter the NWP without Canadian permission, but Canada guaranteed that such permission would always be granted (Greaves, 2022).¹

¹ However, the challenge for Canada is the increased activity of other countries that intend to exploit Arctic routes.

Canada, in conjunction with the authorities of its northern territories, is now preparing its response to the Moscow's policy. In April 2022, National Defense Minister Anita Anand announced the transfer of almost \$5 trillion to modernize the Canadian part of NORAD.² This, in the short term, is expected to increase significantly Canadian capability in the Arctic in terms of the continent's ability to defend itself against air strike. The minister also announced the purchase of new military equipment, including two polar icebreakers. Meanwhile, in March, Canada announced plans to purchase 88 US-made F-35 stealth fighter jets to replace its aging fleet, and meet new threats including from Russia (*Canada to buy...*, 2022). First deliveries of the equipment are expected in 2025.

The UK's policy shift is part of a tougher rivalry with Russia, including its Arctic dimension. In March 2022, the UK published "Defence Contribution in the High North," a document that contains the new guidelines for the UK presence in the Arctic for the next 10 years. The document responds to the dynamic changes in the region resulting from the increasing accessibility of the Arctic and its growing importance to the UK. Ben Wallace, the Secretary of State for Defence, explicitly pointed out that "the High North, including the Arctic, matters to the UK and UK Defence. Developments impact upon our environment, prosperity, energy supply, and security" (*The UK's...*, 2022).

The UK sees the Arctic as a region of constructive international cooperation and historically low tension. The UK perceives the strong militarization of the region by Russia and increased Chinese presence as risk. In the UK's view, Beijing intends to develop infrastructure and capabilities that have the potential of dual use. As the region becomes increasingly accessible, threats from elsewhere around the globe could spill over into the Arctic (*The UK's...*, 2022). Thus, the deteriorating global security environment has been identified as the largest threat to the region. As the British MoD document puts it "The era of Arctic exceptionalism is ending" (*The UK's...*, 2022: 5).

In the case of the Russia's new strategy, adopted in October 2020, the title itself indicates the operating priorities in the coming years, which reads Strategy for Developing the Russian Arctic Zone and Ensuring National Security through 2035 (*Ukaz...*, 2020). The main goals are to ensure the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Russian part of the Arctic and the military modernization in this region. Importantly, the priority related to sovereignty and integrity is a new element that was not so clearly addressed in the 2008 Russian strategy.

Sanctions on extracting technologies that have been imposed on Russia may slow down the Russian expansion in the north (*Wielka...*, 2022). However, this does not mean that Russia intends to abandon its activities in the region. In fact, V. Putin even announced to "maximize the pace of activity." He acknowledged that, in the face of sanctions, he does not intend to abandon or change the expansion plans adopted for the Arctic. Individual Russian ministries and state agencies have even been obliged to

² The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) is a bi-national command, centralizing operational control of continental air defenses between USA and Canada. NORAD mission is an aerospace warning and aerospace control for North America. In 2006, a maritime warning mission was added to the command's existing missions.

push harder and faster for the development of Arctic infrastructure, such as railway, ports and icebreakers.

Russia has planned several major investment projects in the region, such as the Arctic LNG 2 project and the Vostok oil field project. However, it is not going to be easy as EU sanctions prohibit to supply equipment necessary for LNG liquefaction, so Novatek's Arctic LNG 2 and Gazprom's Baltic LNG projects are blocked or at least will face a significant impediment (Jakubik, 2022). Novatek itself, the largest shareholder in the Yamal LNG and the Arctic LNG 2 under construction, has officially warned that both of these projects are at risk due to sanctions, and the company depends on foreign direct investment and technology. The Italians, for example, have frozen \$21 bn earmarked for the development of the investment. Moreover, the French firm TotalEnergies plans to exit the Kharyaga oil project in Russia.³ In the face of EU restrictions on coal imports from Russia affected Murmansk, one of Russia's largest coal handling ports (Nilsen, 2022). One of the expected consequences of the sanctions may be that Russia will turn to China as China has not only invested in Yamal LNG and Arctic LNG 2, but it has been an active promoter of its Arctic policy for many years and it is interested in further exploration of the area.

Numerous Arctic strategy updates highlight primarily on the strong militarization of the region by Russia, particularly evident after 2012. It is estimated that Russia has built at least 13 new military bases in the region. J. Bronk explicitly warns that the Arctic is an "important emerging zone of geopolitical competition and potential military confrontation" (Bronk, 2022). The growing potential for maritime transport through Arctic routes has been attracting much attention. It is mainly due to receding ice cover, especially during summer months. Enhanced Russian forces can control and benefit from the emerging Northern Sea Route (NSR) as a trade route connecting Asia and Europe. Back in 2013, Russia passed a law stipulating that ships using the NSR must pay for services of Russian icebreakers and pilots. Four years later, the provisions were extended, and non-Russian vessels cannot transport oil and gas through these waters (Bronk, 2022).

Intriguingly, the latest research may change the strategic perception of the area and benefits that Russia may derive from controlling it. The NSR is indeed the shortest possible route between Asia and Europe. In comparison with routes through the Suez Canal or the Panama Canal, it saves 14 to 20 days and it is 30–50% shorter. However, there are still a large number of carriers avoiding the northern routes due to, among other things, restrictions imposed by Russia. As mentioned before, Moscow requires all vessels sailing along the route to be guided by Russian pilots, charges tolls, and requires ships to provide advance notice of their passage (Lynch, Norchi, Li, 2022).

Authors of a recent report by Brown University point out that rapidly melting sea ice is opening up shipping routes beyond Russia's exclusive economic zone and closer to the North Pole itself. According to their simulation, "by 2065, the Arctic's navigability will increase so much that Russia's control over trade will diminish" (Lynch,

³ TotalEnergies, however, still owns stakes in non-state-owned Russian companies, including 19.4% in Novatek, 20% in Yamal LNG, 10% in Arctic LNG 2, and 49% in TerNefteGaz (*TotalEnergies to withdraw from Russian oil project* (2022), <https://www.ogv.energy/news-item/totalenergies-to-withdraw-from-russian-oil-project>).

Norchi, Li, 2022). “Exclusive” control over Arctic shipping routes may therefore shrink over time.

It is also worth explaining why the Arctic is such an important region for Russia. M. Kivinen suggests focusing on several elements (Mazrek, 2022; Paul, Swistek 2022):

- crucial nuclear submarine bases and the Northern Fleet. The Arctic and sub-Arctic serve militarily as a strategic bastion for deterrence and defense;
- significance of new Arctic shipping routes and the possibility to control them. However, Russia also sees the shrinking ice cap as a loss of security due to the easier access to the region;
- importance of natural resources (90 percent of current Russian gas production and 60 percent of its oil production occur in the Arctic, which also has 60 percent of Russia’s gas and oil reserves);
- importance of being an Arctic power (Russia’s coastline accounts for 53% of Arctic Ocean coastline and the country’s population in the region totals roughly 2 million people).

Germany also updated its Arctic policy in August 2019. Interestingly, this document features a new chapter on security and strategic issues, including the status of the northern shipping lines: Northwest and Northeast Passages (*Germany’s...*, 2019: 23). Germany directly supported the more intensive involvement of the EU and NATO in Arctic security policy (*Germany’s...*, 2019: 25). France, in its 2019 New Strategic Challenges in the Arctic, also stresses increased competition between different countries in the Arctic, somewhat surprisingly describing this region as a “second Middle East.” What is more, France expresses its “clear and unequivocal voice against growing ambitions” and states that “the Arctic belongs to no-one.” In April 2022, France adopted a strategy for both polar areas titled “Balancing the Extremes, France Polar Strategy” until 2030. It focuses much on cooperation and the importance of scientific research and environmental issues (e.g. maintenance of Mining Ban in Antarctic). The French strategy also links environmental and economic issues with security (Baudu, 2022). The strategy explicitly refers to the growing tensions in the Arctic. Russia’s behavior is bluntly referred to as a “threat to the region” and the area itself is described as a place “for potential international confrontation” (Baudu, 2022).

In early 2018, China published a white paper titled China’s Arctic Policy (*China’s...*, 2018). It does not contain new ideas in terms of quality, as most of the theses presented in the document have been already formulated and announced by China. However, this is the first such coherent and official document concerning Chinese activity in the Arctic. In the white paper, China defines itself as a “near-Arctic state” and “Arctic stakeholder.” The white paper emphasizes that China “highly appreciates” the role of the Arctic Council for its positive action in the Arctic. The message is mostly positive and non-confrontational. However, the above-mentioned concept of defining the Arctic as “the common heritage of humanity” has been abandoned. This does not change the fact that China clearly articulates its interest in the region and plans to play an important role in the Arctic.

The changed security situation of the Arctic region is reflected in the recent Finnish and Swedish strategy documents. In June 2021, a new strategy for the Arctic

was adopted by Finland. The update was necessary as the previous document was adopted in 2013. Finland's Strategy for Arctic Policy highlights how much the Arctic security situation is interwoven with (negative) developments in other regions (Ålander, Paul, 2021). Indeed, for Finland itself, the development in the High North has direct national security implications. The lead theme of the document, however, is sustainable development and respect for indigenous peoples ("All activities in the Arctic region must be based on ecological carrying capacity, climate protection, principles of sustainable development, and respect for the rights of indigenous peoples" (*Finland's...*, 2021)).

The strategy puts it, there has been growing interest in the region among Arctic and non-Arctic actors since the previous version of the document was adopted (*Finland's...*, 2021: 16). The document emphasizes the growing military activity in the region, but above all – in line with other documents treating the Arctic – it points to the turmoil in international politics and military tensions in the rest of the world (*Finland's...*, 2021: 17). These, in turn, affect the Arctic region and may lead to confrontation between the great powers. The strategy highlights Russia's methodical militarization of the region due to the desire to safeguard its economic interests and to ensure control over the Northern Sea Route. Consequently, also the United States, Canada and the European NATO members have increased their military presence and improved their readiness for military response in Northern Europe (*Finland's...*, 2021: 18). This approach is reflected in the warning included in the Finnish Military Intelligence Review 2021, which reads "in the Arctic region, states seek to promote the realization of their interests also through military means" (*Finnish...*, 2021: 7). The Finnish summary of current developments in the Arctic is equally pessimistic: "Even though the Arctic region has so far remained relatively isolated from the increasing tensions related to the global security situation, the situation may change in the coming years as the key actors in world politics seek to protect their growing interests in the region" (*Finnish...*, 2021: 8).

In its latest 2020 Arctic strategy, Sweden also stresses security issues (*Swedish...*, 2020). The previous 2011 version of the document stated that security challenges in the region were non-military in their nature (Ålander, Paul, 2021). However, rising tensions have led Sweden to change the perspective. Climate change, increased accessibility of the region (i.e. transport, raw material extraction), and a changing geopolitical situation are new challenges in the region. The Swedish document is yet another updated Arctic strategy that recognizes that the Arctic as a low-tension area has undergone significant changes. The document asserts that Sweden will further strengthen its military capability necessary to operate in the north of the country and in neighboring areas. Sweden is concerned by the growing militarization of the region, as it entails the risk of an arms race and increase in adverse incidents in the region. The strategy's authors even make comparisons to the Cold War, stating that "the military strategic importance of the Arctic has increased, and, as in the Cold War, the Arctic is a dividing line between western countries and Russia" (*Swedish...*, 2020: 23). The paper also recommends to keep an eye on Russian-Chinese military cooperation in the region. It also notes that so far the military dimension of China's activity in the area has been limited (*Swedish...*, 2020: 23).

Denmark has announced that it will adopt a new Arctic strategy, or will profoundly update the strategy that was adopted back in 2011.⁴ In line with its official policy, “Denmark needs to place more priority on its efforts in the Arctic” and the Arctic remains one of the priority areas of Danish foreign policy (Trellevik, 2019). The Danish Defense Agreement for 2018–2023 also emphasizes that strong engagement in the Arctic will continue with new initiatives (*Agreement...*, 2018). Denmark has appointed a special representative in Greenland to facilitate contacts between the government in Nuuk and the Danish Ministry of Defence. Major General Anders Rex, commander of Air Command Denmark for the Royal Danish Air Force, has announced that several of Denmark’s F-35 fighter jets will be equipped to operate in the Arctic (Breum, 2020).

HIGH TENSIONS IN HIGH NORTH

Moscow has threatened the West to retaliate in response to consecutive sanctions packages, stressing that their actions could be “very painful.” As a result, Russia took specific actions against individual countries. An example of the above is Norway. At the beginning of July 2022, the President of the Russian Duma commissioned an analysis of the treaty establishing the marine border between Russia and Norway. The treaty was adopted in 2010 and ended the conflict between the two countries in the Barents Sea.⁵ In essence, the move obviously applied to the Svalbard archipelago, which is part of Norway, but an earlier treaty of 1920 granted Russia the right to exploit its natural resources, and some of the settlements on the archipelago have been inhabited by Russians.

Russia has accused Norway of blocking the delivery of supplies to the archipelago. The main issue is the transport of food for Russian residents in Barentsburg, until recently an operated Russian coal mine. Russia has called attempts to deprive Russian citizens on Svalbard of food and supplies unacceptable and unfriendly, and announced “retaliatory measures.”

Norway rejects these accusations, as it has merely fulfilled its obligations in relation to the 5th sanctions package imposed on Russia. It adds that Moscow has effective options to transport supplies via other routes. The authorities in Oslo suggest to deliver food from the port of Murmansk rather than, as Russia prefers, through the Storskog border crossing (the only land border crossing between Norway and Russia) and then by Norwegian ships sailing from Tromsø. The Svalbard governor also assured that all residents of the archipelago have access to food and medicine. It is also worth noting that Svalbard itself is exempted from the ban to accept Russian vessels in seaports (Staalesen, 2022).

Furthermore, the Russians linked the current restriction with the provisions of the 1920 Svalbard Treaty. Moscow claims that current Norwegian actions violate provi-

⁴ Working on this document was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Originally, the new strategy was to be adopted by the end of 2020.

⁵ On 15 September 2010, Norway and the Russian Federation signed the Treaty Concerning Maritime Delimitation and Cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean.

sions of Article 3 of the Treaty, which regulate transport. The recognition of Norwegian sovereignty over the archipelago is conditional on the compliance with the provisions of the treaty. In practice, the Russian action could undermine Norwegian sovereignty over the archipelago. In fact, this is not the first time that Russia has expressed dissatisfaction on the arrangements related to the archipelago. In 2020, Norway celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Svalbard Treaty. Minister of Foreign Affairs Ine Eriksen Søreide and Minister of Justice Monica Mæland emphasized the undisputable Norwegian sovereignty over the archipelago. In such circumstances, in his letter to the Norwegian Ministry of Justice, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that Russia feels “discriminated” at the archipelago (e.g. Fishery Protection Zone introduced by Norway or expansion of economic activity) (Staalesen, 2020).

In response, the Norwegian authorities again rejected in full the allegation that the sanctions could be linked to the Svalbard Treaty and a violation of its provisions. The government has emphasized that Russian shipments do not have to pass through Norway and that the status of the Storskog border crossing itself is in no way regulated by the 1920 Svalbard Treaty.

LESS NATO, MORE NATO

The many long-term consequences of the war in Ukraine are decisions made by Sweden and Finland to join NATO. Although both countries cooperated with NATO members, the war actually swayed the public mood and influenced the decision of the two governments. The war in Ukraine and Russia’s aggressive policy in the region, prompted Sweden and Finland to abandon their traditional neutrality and apply for membership of the military alliance. By his actions, W. Putin has brought about the scenario he so badly wanted to avoid. As Jens Stoltenberg put it: “One of the most important messages from President Putin ... was that he was against any further NATO enlargement. He wanted less NATO. Now President Putin is getting more NATO on his borders” (*Press...*, 2022).

The Finnish and Swedish societies underwent shock therapy in just a few months and for the first time in their history voted overwhelmingly in favor of joining the Alliance. At the very beginning of 2022, with tensions already high, but still almost two months before Russia started the war, Finnish President Sauli Niinistö spoke about “freedom of choice” (Ålander, Paul, 2022). There was no doubt that these words referred to NATO and were addressed to Russia. However, back in a January opinion poll, only 28% of Finns supported NATO membership and 42% wanted their country outside the structure. A few days after Russia started the war, for the first time citizens voted overwhelmingly in favor of integration (53% in favor, only 28% against, and 19% were unsure), and later support for NATO stabilized at around 60% (Ålander, Paul, 2022).

In Sweden, a similar scenario could be observed. Russia’s actions directly pushed the support for NATO upward. In a poll conducted after the outbreak of the war, early March 2022, for the first time Swedes were in favor of NATO membership. The majority support was both symbolic and historic (51% in favor of joining NATO).

The accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO changes the balance of power globally and regionally. While the decision itself has to be seen in the context of military events, which to a significant extent expedited the processes, the gradual rapprochement of Sweden and Finland with NATO is nothing new. It is worth emphasizing that there has already been close cooperation in the field of security and defense between the two countries and NATO members for many years. As early as 2020, Norway, Sweden, and Finland signed a memorandum of understanding to jointly conduct operations in case of emergency. The step was dictated by the increased Russia's military activity (Ålander, Paul, 2022). Moreover, in the view of the Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO, the Finnish representative suggested that the northern states should consider to establish a joint Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian air defense of the northern territories. It was emphasized that given the potential of these countries (they have relatively strong air forces) such cooperation would be natural (Kauranen, 2022). Although initially there were no plans to join NATO, a further rapprochement and deepening of cooperation with the Alliance was announced as early as 2021 (Ålander, Paul, 2022). From the NATO perspective, the previous cooperation was advanced enough that both countries could achieve almost immediate operational readiness within the Alliance (Ålander, Paul, 2022).

Decisions to join the organization were made in the shadow of warnings and political blackmail coming from Moscow. Still in March 2022, the Russian foreign ministry threatened that in case of the NATO accession "there will be serious military and political consequences" (Siebold, 2022). V. Putin warned that he would declare Finland an "enemy" if it joined NATO, Russian nuclear weapons would appear in the region, and forces in Kaliningrad would carry out simulated attacks with Iskander missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads (Ålander, Paul, 2022). Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev called the very decision to apply for NATO membership one of the new regional threats to Russia. He considered that the protection of national interests in border areas was crucial for his country (Staalesen, 2022).

The accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO is a paramount stepping stone. In a way, it is a symbolic "closure of NATO's presence in both the Baltic region (except for the Kaliningrad Region) and the Arctic (except, of course, for Russia). However, NATO's recognition of Russia as "the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area" (Madrit..., 2022) must be taken as equally important. Russia has changed from a difficult partner to a threat to the entire alliance. Consequences of the change can be seen, *inter alia*, in the suspended cooperation with Russia in the Arctic, its suspension from various Arctic bodies, and attempts to work out ways of operating in the region – at least temporarily – without Russia.

ARCTIC COUNCIL 2.0?

A historic breakthrough occurred within the Arctic Council, an organization founded in 1996 which has become the most important forum for Arctic talks. Already at the beginning of March 2022, i.e. less than 2 weeks after the Russian ag-

gression in Ukraine, 7 of 8 permanent members of the Council – all except Russia – announced that they would boycott any future meeting of the organization. This has coincided with Russia’s presidency in the Arctic Council, which should continue until May 2023.

The slow evolution of Arctic strategies reflected growing tensions and disagreements evident within the Arctic Council. The Arctic Council ministerial meeting in Rovaniemi in May 2019 symbolically confirmed the intense competition in the region. For the first time in the history of the Council, the session was concluded without adopting the crucial document – a joint declaration that would identify the Council’s objectives for the following two years. It was at the meeting of the Arctic Council in May 2019 that the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo commented on Chinese activities in the Arctic in harsh words, stressing that they carried the risk of “transforming the region into ‘a new South China Sea’.” (*Walking...*, 2019). He also regretted Russia’s attempts to take more control of Arctic maritime traffic, which he called illegal (Johnson, 2019). It is worth noting that while the Council itself remains one of the main venues to discuss issues relevant to the Arctic region, military security was by definition excluded from these debates. It was understood that negotiations on such a sensitive topic as security were bound to lead to disagreements and controversies.

The current situation is unprecedented⁶: Russia is now the (formal) head of the Arctic Council, a council whose members have decided to pause cooperation. In their statement, seven members of the Council (called this time as the “Arctic 7”) condemned Russia’s “unprovoked invasion” of Ukraine and noted “the grave impediments to international cooperation, including in the Arctic, that Russia’s actions have caused” (*Joint...*, 2022). All cooperation with Russia has been temporarily suspended. Council representatives also refrain from official visits to and they do not participate in scheduled scientific events in Russia.

At the moment, any cooperation is therefore out of the question, especially when Russia has directly threatened two Arctic Council members – Finland and Sweden – due to their decision to join NATO. Kremlin’s press secretary Mariya Zakharova warned in her tweet that Finland accession to NATO would have “serious military and political consequences” (Rogoff, 2022). In this context, it is difficult to imagine joint sessions at the Arctic table. On the one hand, it is not possible to subscribe to the Council’s calls to maintain peace, stability, and constructive cooperation in the Arctic and, on the other hand, threaten members of the same organization with military consequences.

However, the Council deliberately used the word “paused,” not “suspend” or “discontinue.” This, as T. Koivurova points out, is to give the Council time to work out new rules for further cooperation. After all, it is difficult to ignore that a significant part of the Arctic region lies on the Russian territory (Koivurova, 2022). At this stage, it is unclear under what conditions the relationship could be “de-escalated.” Russia’s

⁶ There has been a similar situation before, but of limited scope. In opposition to Russian actions in the Donbass in 2014, the Council’s deliberations were boycotted by the US and Canada. In turn, after the 2014 annexation of Crimea, Russia was excluded from Arctic forums on security, including the Arctic Forces Security Roundtable.

Arctic ambassador Nikolai Korchunov found the decision “regrettable” and urged that the Arctic should not be linked with events beyond its territory (Paul, 2022).

The other Arctic states have been looking for a way to ensure coordination and continuity at least for those projects in which Russia was not involved. They emphasized negative consequences for indigenous peoples in case the cooperation in the region was to be put on hold for an extended period. In June 2022, in their joint statement, the Arctic 7 stated that “We intend to implement a limited resumption of our work in the Arctic Council, in projects that do not involve the participation of the Russian Federation” (*Joint...*, 2022a).

For the moment (at least until mid-2023, i.e. Norway’s presidency in the Council), the practical question remains whether the Council can actually function without Russia. T. Koivurova has emphasized that the Council is an intergovernmental forum for dialogue, established by declaration rather than legally binding treaties. This gives its members a greater margin of freedom than in the case of a classical international organization. The challenge remains how to work with Russia as the council’s chairmanship, and with it chairing key bodies (Koivurova, 2022). It is crucial especially that Norway has ruled out the possibility of taking over the Council’s chairmanship earlier. A solution could be to proceed with previously agreed plans, which would free other states from the competences held by the chair. Moreover, there have been discussions about the need to revise the Ottawa Declaration and to build an Arctic Council 2.0, but such a scenario is very unlikely at the moment.

Of course, as was expected, Russia indicated that any decision taken within the Arctic Council without Russia would be considered illegitimate and in violation of the consensus principle. Russia’s ambassador to the US also stressed that there was virtually no way that the challenges facing the region could be solved without Russia’s involvement (Jonassen, 2022).

The issue is important as the Council has been implementing a number of projects and studies in the region. There is no doubt that many scientific programs, research without Russian participation will be of lower quality and impact (Jonassen, 2022). Since Russia does not agree to publish results or recommendations as an Arctic Circle, other members could publish them under the auspices of individual member countries (Jonassen, 2022). In practice, Russian and Western scientists no longer collaborate in the Arctic. Arguably, the results and completion climate change research will suffer first due to the absence of the cooperation. Without data from Russia’s vast Arctic areas, the picture will be far from complete.

The Arctic Council is not the only organization to “pause” relations with Russia. Similar decisions to suspend relations were also taken by the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and Northern Dimension Policy. Brief statements on behalf of these institutions emphasize that in the face of Russia’s unprecedented military aggression against Ukraine, no further cooperation is possible. The latter can only be restored if the cooperation based on respect for fundamental principles of international law is restored (*Northern...*, 2022; *Russia/Belarus...*, 2022; *Barents...*, 2022).

Finally, the war affects indigenous peoples of the Arctic region. Although the peoples of the north have never formed one cohesive whole, their current attitude towards

the war creates another extremely strong divide. For example, the Saami Council is an organization that brings together Sámi leaders from the Sámi region.⁷ In April 2022, a decision was made to suspend formal relations with 2 Russian organizations: Kola Sámi Association and the Association of Sámi in Murmansk Oblast (Last, 2022). This happened after years of fruitful cooperation. After the collapse of the USSR, the Saami of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark actively sought greater integration of the Russian Sami. Thanks to such cooperation, they were able, among other things, to participate in Arctic Council discussions, as the organization has the status of a Permanent Participant in the Arctic Council.

Activists and employees emphasize that contacts with the Russian Sami have been almost completely severed and joint environmental and cultural projects frozen. In the long term, there are concerns about consequences of polluting Sami areas by Russian opencast mines and pipelines, especially considering that international environmental monitoring is virtually halted.

The Arctic region has experienced fundamental changes in its overall security structures and infrastructure. Arctic institutions and organizations are transformed due to, among other things, Russia's actions, whereas a significant portion of joint activity has been temporarily put on hold. With no prepared scenario for a swift end to the conflict in Ukraine, and thus little prospect of a change in the situation, the Arctic-7 will probably have to work out changes that will allow them to manage effectively at least some of their Arctic projects without Moscow's involvement. These changes will have consequences for the international system in the foreseeable future (Huebert, 2022).

Until recently, the diverse Arctic region has been subject to admittedly, rapid change brought about by global warming, increased geopolitical competition between traditional and new Arctic actors (or pretenders), the growing importance of natural resources, and new shipping routes. Nevertheless, it was still described with what Norway called "high north – low tension."

However, this image of the Arctic as a unique part of the world has been gradually blurred. According to Raspotnik and Østhagen, since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Arctic collaboration has been virtually dead.

Due to Russia's dominant geographic position in the Arctic, as well as the strategic importance of the Arctic for Russian defense and economy, there are concerns that non-Arctic disputes could spill over into the Arctic (Hanlon, 2022). Such a vision is supported by the growing decade-long military presence of Russia and, in recent years, of other states in the region. This evokes prospects of the Cold War arms race. The largest concern is the possible spillover of the external conflict into the Arctic. Therefore, the Arctic could simply be used as a proxy theater for conflicts in other parts of the world. It is not the regional relationships and events taking place in the Arctic,

⁷ An area covering the northern parts of the Kola Peninsula and the Scandinavian Peninsula. It lies within the territory of four countries: Russia plus Finland, Sweden and Norway. It covers an area of approximately 380,000 km².

but rather the strategic interactions between global superpowers elsewhere that could hit the High North (Raspotnik, Østhagen, 2022). Like any other region, the Arctic turned out to be enmeshed in a series of interconnections and relationships. Thus, the symbolic cooperation slogan “High North, low tension” would need to be redefined to “High North, outdoor tension.” We would then progress towards treating the region as it is, and not as we would like it to be.

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ABSTRACT

Since the end of the Cold War, the Arctic has often been portrayed as a symbol of model cooperation. Individual states were prepared to cooperate extensively despite disputes in other areas. The Arctic was therefore customarily regarded as an area with little potential for conflict. Cooperation between states that were in strong competition with each other in other regions or areas was so rare that the “Arctic exceptionalism” was commonly recognized.

This article examines updated Arctic strategies of states directly involved in the region. It analyzes the changes over the past few years, which have mostly been a consequence of Russia’s aggression (as early as 2014) and its strong militarization of the region. The article discusses the initiated process of Sweden and Finland’s accession to NATO and the consequences of this historic change for the High North. Finally, it analyses decisions taken by a number of Arctic organizations to exclude, freeze, or “pause” their relations with Russia in consequence of the February 24, 2022 attack on Ukraine. This raises questions about whether the Arctic can be managed without Russia and whether measures adopted can be effective.

Keywords: Arctic, Arctic Strategies, Arctic exceptionalism, Sweden and NATO, Finland and NATO

ZMIERZCH „WYJĄTKOWOŚCI ARKTYKI”? NOWE PODEJŚCIE DO ARKTYKI PO 24 LUTEGO 2022 R.

STRESZCZENIE

Od zakończenia Zimnej Wojny Arktyka nader często przedstawiana była jako symbol modelowej współpracy. Poszczególne państwa gotowe były do szerokiej kooperacji mimo sporów w innych obszarach. Region ten zwyczajowo postrzegany był zatem jako obszar o niewielkim potencjale konfliktowym. Współpraca między państwami, które silnie konkurowały ze sobą w innych wymiarach, była tak unikalna, że niemal powszechnie uznawano „wyjątkowość Arktyki” (*Arctic exceptionalism*).

Artykuł bada zaktualizowane strategie arktyczne państw bezpośrednio zaangażowanych w tym regionie. Analizuje zmiany na przestrzeni ostatnich kilku lat, które w większości były konsekwencją agresywnych działań Rosji (już od 2014 roku) i silnej militaryzacji regionu. Artykuł omawia zainicjowany proces przystąpienia Szwecji i Finlandii do NATO i konsekwencje tej historycznej zmiany dla regionu. Wreszcie, analizuje decyzje podjęte przez szereg organizacji arktycznych o wykluczeniu, zamrożeniu lub „wstrzymaniu” relacji z Rosją w konsekwencji ataku na Ukrainę z 24 lutego 2022 roku. W konsekwencji, rodzi to pytania o to, czy Arktyka może być zarządzana bez Rosji i czy przyjęte środki mogą być skuteczne.

Słowa kluczowe: Artyka, strategie arktyczne, Szwecja wobec NATO, Finlandia wobec NATO, „wyjątkowość” Arktyki