

# ARCTIC REGION: THE NEW GEO-POLITICAL THEATRE OF RUSSIA

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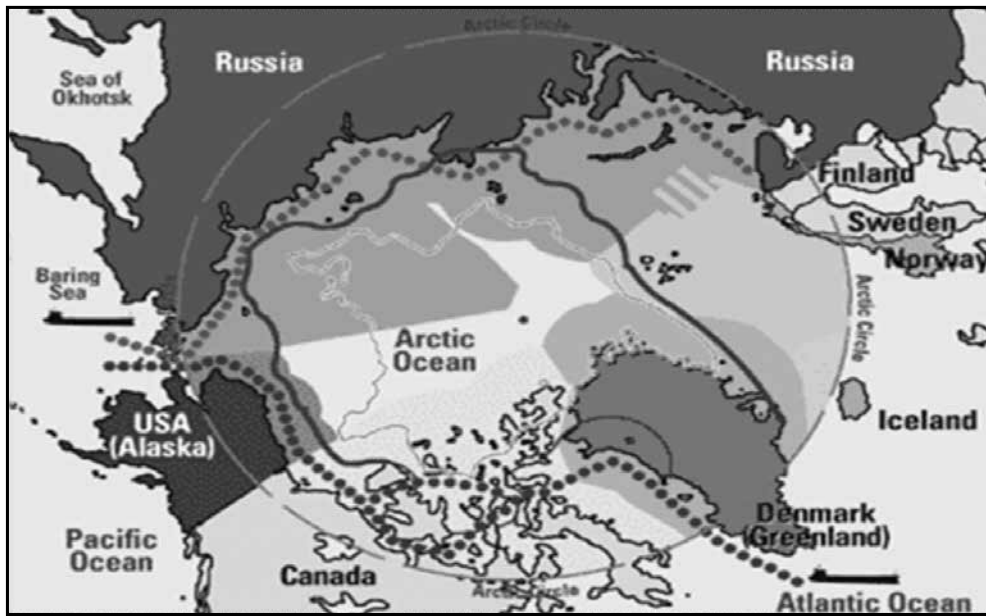
## INTRODUCTION

Known as the 'Frozen Desert', the Arctic region occupies a unique position covering one-sixth of the planet's landmass and spans 24 time zones. The region is blessed with enormous amounts of natural resources, including fish, oil, gas and various minerals. The Arctic Ocean is the smallest and shallowest of the world's five major oceanic divisions, with an average depth of nearly a 1,000 m (about 3,450 ft). Vast ledges of sub-sea land extend from the surrounding continents and underlie nearly two-thirds of the ocean.<sup>1</sup> The Arctic littoral states are: Russia, Canada, the United States, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, Finland, Sweden and Iceland.

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1. "Arctic Facts", <http://arctic.ru/arctic-facts>, accessed on September 30, 2014.

Fig. 1: Arctic Littoral States



Source: <http://moneyweek.com/profit-from-the-scramble-for-the-arctic-57932/>

In recent years, there have been megatrends in the North Pole as catastrophic global climatic change has led to commercial shipping, oil politics and militarisation in the region. Moreover, due to its strategic location, the Arctic is seen as the future alternative communication route. Consequently, the above factors have catapulted inter-state competition and rivalry for sea expanses between the Arctic littoral states as the region holds the key to supremacy in the global arena of the 21st century. Bearing in mind the geo-politics of the littoral states in the region, it is important to evaluate the Russian geo-strategic discourse in the Arctic territory and to what extent the region will contribute in restoration of Russia's global power status in international politics.

Before one looks into Russia's geo-political ambitions in the Arctic region, it is crucial to elucidate various aspects that have contributed to the resurgence of the Arctic region in the geo-political discourse of the international community. The following section will attempt to provide an overview of the Arctic region.

**BRIEF SURVEY OF THE ARCTIC***Impact of Global Warming*

Environmental pollution and degradation have emerged as a threat to the Arctic environment. While environmentalists fear the negative impact of global warming in the region, it has, however, benefitted the Arctic littoral states in expanding oil and gas exploration and has also created new commercial routes to these countries.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the melting of the Arctic ice has introduced lucrative opportunities as well as geo-political competition among the Arctic nations.

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*Featured Resources and Their Relevance*

Recent estimates have also shown that nearly 13 percent of the world's undiscovered oil and 30 percent of its undiscovered natural gas can be found in the Arctic, which almost lies in the offshore marine environment. The combination of the melting of the Arctic sea ice and the economic and political attractiveness of non-renewable resources, especially sub-sea hydrocarbons has given rise to Arctic geo-politics and geo-economics. Therefore, there is increased competition among the five coastal states for control over the continental shelf and maritime zones alongside another conflict between the Arctic-5 (Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the US) and the non-coastal states (such as Finland, Sweden, the UK, China, Japan, South Korea, India, etc.) that are also keen to exploit the Arctic's natural resources.<sup>3</sup>

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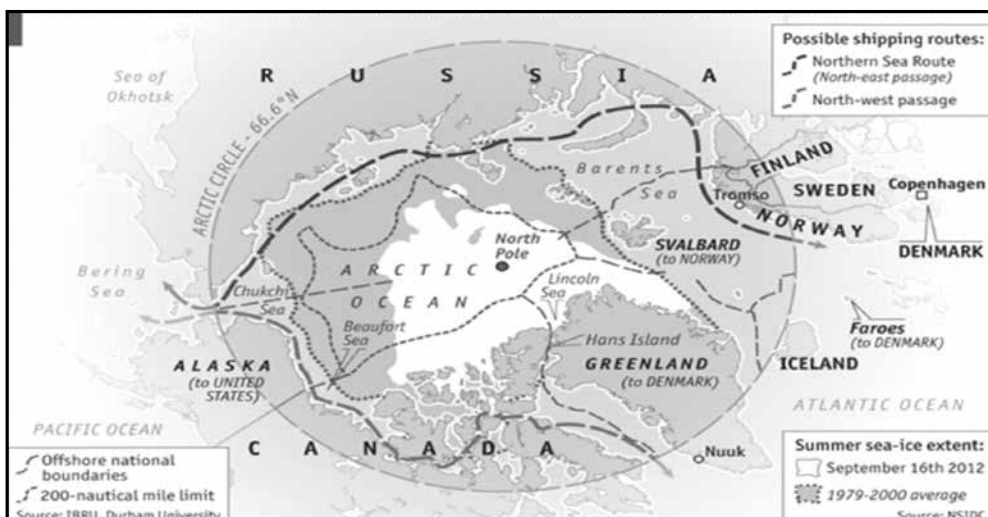
2. Adnan Vatansever and Anna Korppoo, "A Climate Vision for Russia: From Rhetoric to Action", *Policy Outlook*, August 1, 2012. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/08/01/climate-vision-for-russia-from-rhetoric-to-action/d4tq#> accessed on August 10, 2014.

3. "Resource Extraction in the Arctic Domain", Arctic Climate Change and Economy and Society, [http://www.access-eu.org/en/economic\\_sectors/ressource\\_extraction.html](http://www.access-eu.org/en/economic_sectors/ressource_extraction.html)

### *Arctic Trade Route*

The continuous shrinking of the ice caps in the Arctic has piloted opening of trade routes. The littoral states of the Arctic are exploring all possible options to exploit shipping lanes in the region to complement the conventional trade routes during the summer months. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its second report, claimed that the North Pole will become a navigable ocean by the end of the 21st century. The three principal routes are the Trans-Polar Route (TPR), the Northwest Passage (NWP) and the Northern Sea Route (NSR). Each route passes through the Arctic Ocean and links the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.<sup>4</sup> The Arctic Ocean is also seen by major energy companies as a shipping route for energy supplies.

**Fig 2: Arctic Trade Routes**



Source: <http://www.thegeotradeblog.com/2013/05/new-trade-routes-through-artic-between.html>

As the Arctic has now emerged as a particularly active place for claims submission considering the recent discoveries of natural gas and oil in the

4. Ian Storey, "Will Arctic Shipping Routes Eat Singapore's Lunch? Not Anytime Soon, and Maybe Never", *Institute of Southeast Asian Studies*, no. 27, April 28, 2014, [http://www.iseas.edu.sg/documents/publication/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2014\\_27-Arctic\\_Shipping\\_Routes\\_rev2.pdf](http://www.iseas.edu.sg/documents/publication/ISEAS_Perspective_2014_27-Arctic_Shipping_Routes_rev2.pdf), accessed on September 17, 2014.

region,<sup>5</sup> let us also focus on the international governing institutions as many of the littoral states of the Arctic are engaged in multiple territorial disputes.

### **INTERNATIONAL GOVERNING INSTITUTIONS OF THE ARCTIC**

The legal status quo in regard to the territorial claims and geopolitical exploration of the Arctic has sovereignty issues looming as the predicted prosperity of the Arctic has propelled countries to compete over territory and the natural resources lying beneath the water. Hence, the international law has provided transparency and answers to some extent regarding the same. The following section will evaluate the role of governing institutions in facilitating cooperation and resolving boundary claims by the littoral states of the Arctic region.

#### ***United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)***

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea establishes a comprehensive legal framework to regulate all ocean space, its uses and resources. It contains provisions relating to the territorial sea, the contiguous zone, the continental shelf, the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the high seas. One of the most important parts of the convention concerns the exploration for, and exploitation of, the resources of the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil thereof, beyond the limits of national jurisdiction (the area). The convention declares the area and its resources to be “the common heritage of mankind”.<sup>6</sup>

#### ***Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS)***

Under the UNCLOS, the continental shelf is that part of the seabed over which a coastal state exercises sovereign rights with regard to the exploration and exploitation of natural resources, including oil and gas deposits as well as other minerals and biological resources of the seabed. Based on this factor, the legal continental shelf extends to a distance of 200 nautical miles

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5. “Arctic Region Facts”, <http://arcticfocus.com/arcticregionfacts/> accessed on September 24, 2014.

6. International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, <http://www.itlos.org/index.php?id=15> accessed on July 12, 2014.

(nm) from its coast, or further if the shelf naturally extends beyond that limit.<sup>7</sup> The Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) is a body created by the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention.<sup>8</sup>

### *International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea*

The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea is an independent judicial body established by the UNCLOS to adjudicate disputes arising out of the interpretation and application of the convention. The tribunal is composed of 21 independent members, elected from among persons enjoying the highest reputation for fairness and integrity and of recognised competence in the field of the law of the sea. The tribunal has jurisdiction over any dispute concerning the interpretation or application of the convention, and over all matters specifically provided for in any other agreement which confers jurisdiction on the tribunal (Statute, Article 21). The tribunal is open to state parties to the convention (i.e. states and international organisations which are parties to the convention). It is also open to entities other than states parties, i.e., states or inter-governmental organisations which are not parties to the convention, and to state enterprises and private entities in any case expressly provided for in Part XI or in any case submitted pursuant to any other agreement conferring jurisdiction on the tribunal which is accepted by all the parties to that case (Statute, Article 20).<sup>9</sup>

### *The Arctic Council*

The Arctic Council, created in 1996, is an inter-governmental forum that aims to promote cooperation and interaction among the Arctic states with regard to issues concerning the Arctic Circle. The permanent members are: the Russian Federation, Norway, Canada, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Denmark (with representation of Faroe Islands and Greenland) and the

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7. "What is the Extended Continental Shelf?", <http://www.geolimits.com/services/extended-continental-shelf/continental-shelf/> accessed on July 12, 2014..

8. Ted L. McDorman, "The Role of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf: A Technical Body in a Political World", *The International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2002, p. 301.

9. International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, <http://www.itlos.org/index.php?id=15>, accessed on July 12, 2014.

USA. However, the council also hosts non-permanent members that include countries like Poland, France, Germany, Spain, the UK and the Netherlands, multiple international organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The Arctic Council concentrates on preservation of the environment and on relevant research of the Arctic zone.<sup>10</sup>

### **GEO-POLITICAL ASPIRATIONS OF RUSSIA IN THE ARCTIC**

The peripheral status of the Arctic was exemplified during the Cold War with geo-political dynamism. The East-West stand-off was centred on the people and economic and political systems of continental Europe; as a result, the rival sides devoted their resources and first order of response to the Arctic. Unlike other parts of the world, which served as proxies in the Cold War struggle, the Arctic played an auxiliary role as a region that afforded the shortest route through which increasingly advanced defence technologies, such as long-range bombers, submarines and missiles might be trained on an adversary. In other words, the Arctic was not viewed as a prize in itself during the Cold War, but was instead valued for its strategic utility.<sup>11</sup>

With the development of modern technology and the Industrial Revolution, the North Pole became a transit area for many nations, including Soviet Russia, for transcontinental communication between countries. The period also escalated the projection of military might in the region between the two superpowers. Soviet Russia viewed the Arctic geo-politics as an opportunity to project primacy of naval supremacy against adversaries like the US to gain command over the Arctic. The end of the Cold War, however, had a mixed impact on the Arctic's ranking among the geo-political issues of the circumpolar states. With the implosion of the Soviet Union and the eventual end of bloc politics, Russia, the successor state of the Soviet Union, struggled with a staggering economy and crippling technology. This, in a way, diluted Russia's focus in the region.

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10. Crieckemans and Mols, "Towards Security in the Arctic Region?", Model United Nations - Flanders, OXIMUN 2011, p. 5.

11. Natalie Mychajlyszyn, "The Arctic: Geopolitical Issues", *International Affairs, Trade and Finance Division*, October 24, 2008, pp. 2-4.

**The scope for new economic prospects in the energy, mineral and maritime transport sectors has offered significant opportunities for the traditional Arctic states, some of which are already active players in the region.**

However, since 2000, Russia has made a major comeback in international politics post-Soviet disintegration. With new found confidence and the revamping of its economy and military modernisation, Russia has been clear about its intentions to exploit and access the Arctic to project its influence in the region. In addition, it should also be noted that, in contrast with the Cold War era, the aim of the current military efforts being made by Russia in the Arctic region is the protection of its economic interests and establishment of its

sovereignty claim over the maritime zones and trade routes.

Hence, this paper attempts to look at how the Arctic in the 21st century has become the new political theatre for Russia.

### *Russian Geo-political Discourse of the Arctic in New World Order*

In recent times, the impact of climatic change has led to a resurgence of the Arctic as a new geo-political theatre for power projection of the major international players, including Russia. The scope for new economic prospects in the energy, mineral and maritime transport sectors has offered significant opportunities for the traditional Arctic states, some of which are already active players in the region. The Arctic's profile in the foreign policies of the countries concerned has been raised over the last 20 years. Moreover, melting sea ice has facilitated the efforts of states such as Russia, Canada and Denmark to carry out mapping exercises to delineate their respective continental shelves according to the 1982 UNCLOS and to stake their legal claims to potentially lucrative rights and, hence, has resulted in perceived increase in suspicion and distrust among the countries. Russia in this regard is labouring hard to justify its claims on this part in the UN Commission on the Continental Shelf. For instance, expeditions have been organised to get scientific evidence of its claim over the Lomonosov ridge which will be dealt with later in the paper. Moscow plans to prepare a new



application for the extension of its exclusive economic zone by 2015.<sup>12</sup>

As for access to commercial trade routes, the Northern Sea Route was first opened in 2005 for international shipping; however, in order to complete the passage, ships must be escorted by icebreakers.<sup>13</sup> Ships from other countries have now begun to use the route, and the Russians also want to develop an international trade route. However, the level of activity is still lower than it used to be. New prospects in the region have also attracted new players that are keen to tap into the economic potential

and to access, exploit and govern the frozen dessert. The net effect of these and other developments is that the Arctic today is a global Arctic: it can no longer be perceived as a spatially or administratively confined region, but is instead taking on a new form and dynamics in the midst of contemporary global politics.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, with growing geo-political competition in the region, tensions over the region escalated when a Russian expedition called Arktika 2007 descended to the seabed to collect evidence and planted a Russian flag, transforming the issue from a scientific one to a political matter. The North Pole is a strategic location for the Arctic countries. Canada has already announced plans to build two military bases relatively close to the North Pole; an action which has caused a great amount of resentment in the Russian Federation.

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12. Heininen, Sergunin, Yarovoy, "Climate Change in the Arctic: Geopolitical and Security Implications", September 24, 2013. <http://valdaiclub.com/economy/63020.html>, accessed on September 12, 2014.

13. Ian Storey, "Will Arctic Shipping Routes Eat Singapore's Lunch? Not Anytime Soon, and Maybe Never", Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, no. 27, April 28, 2014 [http://www.iseas.edu.sg/documents/publication/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2014\\_27-Arctic\\_Shipping\\_Routes\\_rev2.pdf](http://www.iseas.edu.sg/documents/publication/ISEAS_Perspective_2014_27-Arctic_Shipping_Routes_rev2.pdf), accessed on September 17, 2014

14. Kola Bay, "The Global Arctic: The Growing Arctic Interests of Russia, China, the United States and the European Union", *Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, August 2013. p. 3.

### THE ENERGY ASPECT

According to the United States Geological Survey, approximately 13 per cent of the world's undiscovered oil deposits and 30 per cent of its natural gas reserves are above the Arctic Circle. Anxious nations surrounding the Arctic have encouraged energy companies to drill in the region to tap into this resource.<sup>15</sup> Nearly 20 percent of undiscovered global hydrocarbon reserves are located in the Arctic area, most of them in the Russian Arctic.

It is a well-known fact that Russia's economy is heavily dependent on exports of oil and gas, and the government relies on its huge energy markets for much of its economic development.<sup>16</sup> It is stated that roughly 20-25 percent of the Russian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is derived from the oil and gas markets. Hence, energy resources are vital to the Russian national security and economy as the revenues derived from these markets are, in turn, diverted to Russian defence industries and military modernisation, so much Russia's domestic social programmes and infrastructure investments are critically dependent on revenues from the natural resource exports.

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15. Michael T. Klare, "Rushing for the Arctic's Riches", *The New York Times*, Sunday Review, December 7, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/08/opinion/sunday/rushing-for-the-arctics-riches.html?pagewanted=2>

16. Ibid.

Fig 3: Energy Reserves in the Arctic Region



Source: <http://sputniknews.com/business/20120418/172890279.html>

This economic factor of the Arctic plays an increasing role in this equation as a strategically vital resource base for Russia. So far, the Russian Arctic has been responsible for about 10-15 percent of the Russian GDP and 25 percent of its foreign exports and systematic efforts are on to increase these figures. Russia's increasing focus towards the North Pole is also due to the fact that Russia's mature hydrocarbon sources in Western Siberia are slowly drying up. Recent hydrocarbon activities in the Russian Arctic have taken place primarily through onshore projects in key locations such as the Yamal peninsula and in nascent offshore projects on the Arctic sea-bed in the Barents, Pechora and Kara Seas. These offshore projects have often taken the form of joint ventures between Russian and international energy corporations. This signals Russia's need to seek investments and technological knowhow through international cooperation.<sup>17</sup>

17. Bay, n. 14, p. 3.

With Russia already having explored drilling options in the Arctic, its energy giant Gazprom has installed its Prirazlomnaya platform in the Pechora Sea, above northwestern Siberia. Further east, in the Kara Sea, the state-owned Rosneft is collaborating with ExxonMobil to develop promising deposits; Rosneft has also teamed up with Statoil of Norway and Eni of Italy to investigate prospects in the Barents Sea.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, hydrocarbons provide important leverage for the Russian foreign policy posture. This was evident in the recent Ukraine imbroglio and imposition of sanctions by the international community on Moscow for its role in the Kiev uprising. Russia is Europe's main energy supplier, providing about 30 percent of Europe's natural gas and 35 percent of its oil imports. Given the substantial trade and economic cooperation between Russia and the members of the EU, any form of sanctions with regard to the energy markets of Russia will have repercussions on both regions and on market security.<sup>19</sup> According to European estimates, Europe's losses due to the sanctions amounted to about Euros 40 billion. The measures mostly affected the countries that had close ties with Russia: Germany, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Poland and Estonia.<sup>20</sup> It can be summarised that Russia's military posture and foreign policy assertiveness in the Ukraine crisis is due to the enormous dependence of the European countries on the Russian energy markets. This has also reasserted Russia's emerging global status.

Moreover, although the advent of shale gas is seen as an alternative to the Russian energy markets, its production cost is high. In order to continue its muscle flexing through the supply of energy resources to meet the growing energy demand, the energy reservoirs in the Arctic will act as an alternative to the depleting oil and gas resources in regions like Western Serbia. The Arctic which was a geo-political backwater for a long time, until the global warming scenario and its impact on the frozen dessert, has now become a bone of contention despite the advent of shale gas and existence

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18. Klare, n. 15.

19. Arvind Gupta, "Crimean Crisis: A New Phase of Cold War?", Institute for Defence and Strategic Analysis, March 21, 2014, p. 3 [http://idsa.in/idsacomments/CrimeancrisisANewPhaseofColdWar\\_agupta\\_210314](http://idsa.in/idsacomments/CrimeancrisisANewPhaseofColdWar_agupta_210314), accessed on May 10, 2014.

20. "Russia Prepares New Sanctions Against the West", September 16, 2014, [http://english.pravda.ru/russia/economics/16-09-2014/128543-russia\\_new\\_sanctions-0/](http://english.pravda.ru/russia/economics/16-09-2014/128543-russia_new_sanctions-0/)

of oil and gas reserves around the world. This has caused a paradigm shift in the geo-political relevance of the Arctic as it has now gained a unique geo-political discourse among nations and private players in the region.

Although global warming is likely to reduce the extent of sea ice in the summer and fall, sea ice covers much of the area in winter, and storms pose a constant danger. Adding another layer of risk, many of the boundary lines in the Arctic are yet to be fully demarcated, and various Arctic powers have threatened to use military force in the event that one or another intrudes on what they view as their sovereign territory.<sup>21</sup>

### **RUSSIAN MILITARISATION OF THE ARCTIC**

Another important feature of the Arctic region is its military significance. The opening up of the northern sea lanes and the quest to formally claim parts of its seabed as national territory has also increased the possibility of militarisation of the Arctic. Current military activities such as airborne reconnaissance and submarine patrols as well as military escorts of icebreaker-led seabed mapping exercises are not always transparent to neighbouring nations and may well send the signal that the Arctic is no longer an area destined to remain peaceful and cooperative. And with so much potential wealth at stake, the possibility of unintended but still rapid escalation of military activity cannot be ruled out.<sup>22</sup>

During the Cold War period, militarisation in the Arctic accelerated with the development of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) and production of nuclear-powered attack submarines, with both the Soviet Union and United States cascading resources into building up their capabilities in the Arctic area. Moreover, the production of nuclear submarines became the foremost factor for regional dominance in the Arctic region. Till 1986, the Russian Northern Fleet comprised nearly 180 nuclear submarines while the United States had 140 nuclear submarines. Approximately 265 nuclear tests were conducted by the USSR in the Novaya Zemlya archipelago in North Serbia. A few underground nuclear detonations took place on an

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21. Klare, n. 15.

22. Daniel P. Fata, "Arctic Security: The New Great Game?", *Halifax International Security Forum*, November 2009. [www.gmfus.org](http://www.gmfus.org), accessed on September 17, 2014.

island near the Alaskan coast and the US-USSR maritime border. Mikhail Gorbachev called for the “Murmansk Initiative” for cooperation in scientific development and environmental issues, but to no avail. Between 1955- 2004, the Russian Navy built nearly 249 nuclear submarines.<sup>23</sup>

Post Soviet disintegration, Russia the successor state of the Soviet Union, struggled with an economic crisis, and its defence industry lost most of its client nations due to this crisis, clouded with endemic corruption and crippling of technology of the industry. This also impacted its military growth in the Arctic region. Many of the Russian Northern Fleet submarines were decommissioned. The Distance Early Warning (DEW) System line sites were handed back to Canada and the United States in 1990. From 1990-2000, cooperation initiatives related to the Arctic mushroomed in international relations and the most prominent one was the establishment of the Arctic Council.<sup>24</sup>

In 2013, when Russia announced its decision to reopen the northern naval base in the Arctic, it reignited the debate on militarisation of the Arctic region. As the northern ice-cap melts and critical sea-routes become navigable, it is undeniable that the Arctic nations will not be able to resist the impulse of militarising the region. The aim of exploitation of the region’s undiscovered natural resources has, in turn, resulted in increasingly assertive territorial postures being adopted by regional stakeholders, and the gradual dominance of a security-driven discourse.<sup>25</sup> In the same year, Moscow held a massive military exercise in the Russian Far East region, reportedly the biggest “snap-drill” since the era of the Soviet Union. The exercise involved more than 1,60,000 servicemen, 1,000 tanks, 130 planes and 70 ships, and came only a month after Russia submitted a claim to the UN to extend its 200-mile Exclusive Economic Sone (EEZ) by another 150 miles or 1.2 million sq km. But Moscow’s claim is being contested by other Arctic nations too.<sup>26</sup>

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23. Spohr, Horing, Cerioti, Lersch and Soares, *UFRGS Model United Nations Journal*, 2013, p. 17, <http://www.ufrgs.br/ufrgsmun/2013/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/The-Militarization-of-the-Arctic-Political-Economic-and-Climate-Changes.pdf>, accessed on October 9, 2014.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

25. Abhijit Singh, “The Creeping Militarization of the Arctic”, October 16, 2014. <http://thediplomat.com/2013/10/the-creeping-militarization-of-the-arctic/> pp. 1-3.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

There is a growing movement to establish the Arctic Circle as a nuclear weapon-free zone. Though both the US and Russia have reduced their operations in the Arctic, they have not eliminated them completely. The Kola peninsula remains the headquarters of Russia's nuclear forces with submarines, aircraft, nuclear-capable missiles and nuclear-capable submarines, plus research and development facilities for the modernisation of its Northern Fleet. Alaska provides a home to US nuclear weapons bases and the ground-based radar sites for its missile defence system.<sup>27</sup> However, the Arctic nations share increased patrolling and expeditions in the region and mutual espionage. Russia views the Arctic as crucial for its protection and is ready to defend its interests.

**Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark (via Greenland), and the Russian Federation each has asserted that the ridge is an extension of its own continental shelf.**

### **RUSSIA'S TERRITORIAL DISPUTES IN THE ARCTIC**

Some of the unresolved legal issues in the Arctic are of particular relevance as they will help to determine the future relationship between Russia and its northern neighbours. Unresolved territorial disputes have also become a major impediment in determining Russia's influence in the region. Given below are a few of the territorial disputes that Russia has been involved in.

#### ***Lomonosov Ridge***

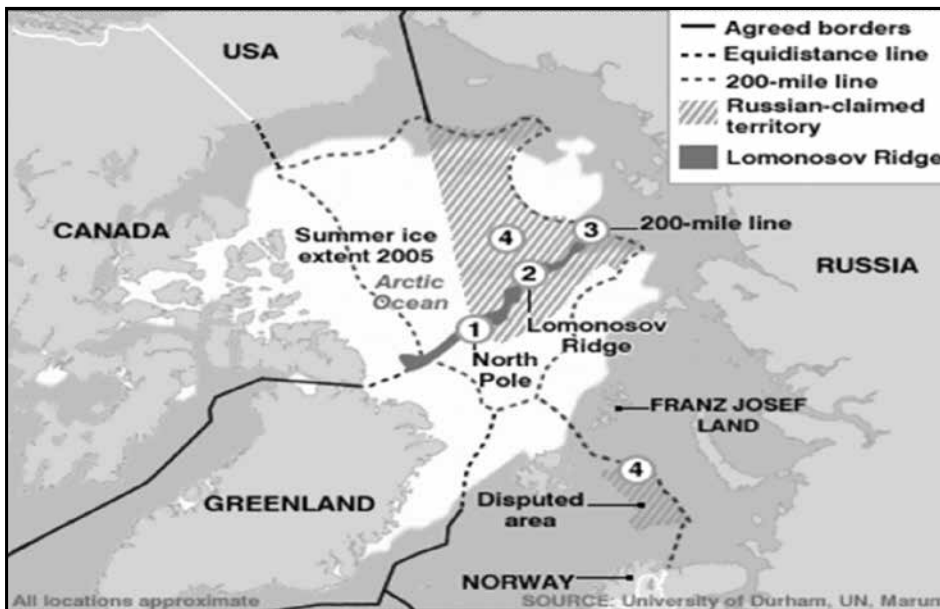
In response to Canada's claim that its boundaries extend into the Arctic and up to the North Pole, in 1925, Russia, the then USSR, declared that all lands and islands, between the USSR and North Pole, were the territory of the USSR. Following the establishment of UNCLOS in 1982, the commission allowed for a nation to extend sovereignty beyond the limits of the EEZ if the CLCS verifies that a country's continental shelf extends further. In accordance with UNCLOS provisions, the Russian Federation became

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27. "Arctic Security", <http://www.thesimonsfoundation.ca/arctic-security>, accessed on August 28, 2014.

the first Arctic state to submit its claim to 1.2 million sq km of territory, including the North Pole, to the CLCS in 1991.<sup>28</sup>

Fig 4: Lomonosov Ridge



Source: <http://truthmovement.com/?p=62>

In 2001, Russia again submitted a claim to the CLCS that the Lomonosov ridge was an extension of its continental shelf. Russia stood to potentially acquire nearly one-half of the Arctic Ocean, including the North Pole. In 2002, the UN commission neither rejected nor accepted the proposal, recommending that additional research was necessary. On August 2007, Russia symbolically claimed the North Pole by planting a titanium deep-sea flag on the seabed (14,000 ft) below the North Pole during the Arktika sea expedition. Samples were submitted as evidence to the CLCS that the Lomonosov ridge is an extension of the Eurasian continental shelf. This would give the Russian

28. "Evolution of Arctic Territorial Claims and Agreements: A Timeline (1903-Present)", September 15, 2013, <http://www.stimson.org/infographics/evolution-of-arctic-territorial-claims-and-agreements-a-timeline-1903-present/> September 15, 2014.



Federation sole access to nearly one-half of the Arctic and the region of the North Pole. Canada, on the other hand, is also expected to claim that the ridge is an underwater extension of Ellesmere Island. Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark (via Greenland), and the Russian Federation each has asserted that the ridge is an extension of its own continental shelf. If proved that the Lomonosov ridge is an extension of the respective country's continental shelf, that Arctic state would obtain unfettered access beyond its EEZ of 200nm, and would, in turn, gain access to the seabed and its resources across the continental shelf. The United States claims it to be an oceanic ridge and, thus, not an extension of any state's continental shelf, and, therefore, refutes any claim to Russia's ownership.<sup>29</sup>

### *Bering Sea: US-Russia Dispute*

**Fig 5: Bering Sea Dispute**



Source: <http://arcticfocus.com/arcticregionfacts/>

In 1867, the United States purchased Alaska from the Russian government but mutually accepted marine claims were limited to a narrow band of

29. Ibid.

**Oil and gas deposits have been discovered in both the offshore and onshore territories near the Bering Sea. But the main 'apple of discord' is not the Bering Sea itself but the adjacent Chukchi and East Siberian Seas (parts of the Arctic Ocean) where the US and Russian maritime and continental shelves' boundaries are not settled.**

coastal zone. The 1867 Treaty defined a boundary between the two nations through the Bering Sea. As the Law of the Sea principles began to govern the world's oceans, the 1867 Treaty gradually became the most contentious marine boundary issue. Aggravating the issue further, neither of the countries has produced the original or other authenticated maps used during the negotiations to resolve the issue. In 1977, the United States and the Soviet Union implemented a 200 nm EEZ, and exchanged diplomatic notes depicting their interest to respect the line set forth to delineate the marine boundaries

based on the 1867 Convention. Ironically, differences in each country's interpretation of the 1867 Treaty became apparent, placing an area of nearly 15,000 sq nm in dispute. Following nearly a decade of negotiations, a new agreement was reached between the two countries in 1990 which apparently ceded territory of both countries from their previous claims; the US still controlled a far greater amount of area in the Bering Sea.<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that before the USSR could make any efforts to ratify its claim, it disintegrated and, hence, the claim came to a vague end.

The three major causes for the continuation of the Bering Sea dispute between the two countries are:

- The Bering Sea constitutes a strategically important area for both the US and Russian fishing industries. It supplies a third of Russia's and a half of the United States' total annual catch. Hence, for both the Alaskan and Russian Far East's regional economies, fishery is important in terms of revenues, employment and sustainable development.
- Another important aspect to the ongoing dispute between the two

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30. Vlad M. Kaczynski, "US-Russian Bering Sea Marine Border Dispute: Conflict over Strategic Assets, Fisheries and Energy Resources", *Russian Analytical Digest*, 20/07, pp. 2-3.

countries is the 'hydrocarbon factor'. Oil and gas deposits have been discovered in both the offshore and onshore territories near the Bering Sea. But the main 'apple of discord' is not the Bering Sea itself but the adjacent Chukchi and East Siberian Seas (parts of the Arctic Ocean) where the US and Russian maritime and continental shelves' boundaries are not settled.

- Moreover, the Bering Sea is an important transport junction between the Russian Far East and East Asia and Alaska. Additionally, with growing importance of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) (controlled by Russia) and Northwest Passage (controlled by Canada) the Bering Sea, especially the Bering Strait, constitutes an important transit area for the future traffic from East Asia to Europe and North America (and back).<sup>31</sup>

**In 1926, Moscow established the borders of maritime territories in the region, using the principle of sector division. End points were located in the North Pole and the extreme point of the land boundary, between which a straight line was drawn to separate the waters.**

### *Russia, Norway and the Barents Sea Dispute*

The Barents Sea is a part of the Arctic Ocean. Named after the Dutch explorer Willem Barents, it is bounded by the Norwegian and northwestern Russian mainland (south), the Norwegian Sea and Svalbard (west), Franz Josef Land (north), and the Kara Sea and Novaya Zemlya (east). It is 1,300 km long and 1,050 km wide and covers 1,405,000 sq km. Its average depth is 229 m, with a maximum depth of 600 m in the major Bear Island Trench.<sup>32</sup> According to an agreement signed in 1872, the rights to the Svalbard archipelago were solidified simultaneously for Russia, Sweden and Norway. The issue of the Barents Sea began in February 1920: eight countries (the US, Denmark,

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31. Valery Konyshov and Alexander Sergunin, "Russia's Policies on the Territorial Disputes in the Arctic", *Journal of International Relations and Foreign Policy*, vol. 2, no. 1, March 2014, pp. 56-58.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

**Russia needs to overcome its apprehensions about the other Arctic littoral states and work towards addressing the threats arising from environmental degradation of the Arctic.**

France, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, the UK and Sweden) without the consent of Russia, gave Norway sovereignty over Svalbard during a civil war in Russia. Norway was only entitled to own and develop the land. The sea around Svalbard and the continental shelf remained a free zone. The agreement did not allow Norway to consider the waters around the archipelago as its territorial waters; however, Oslo tried its best to demonstrate that it owns this territory. Norway, thus, practically annuls the agreement from 1920.<sup>33</sup>

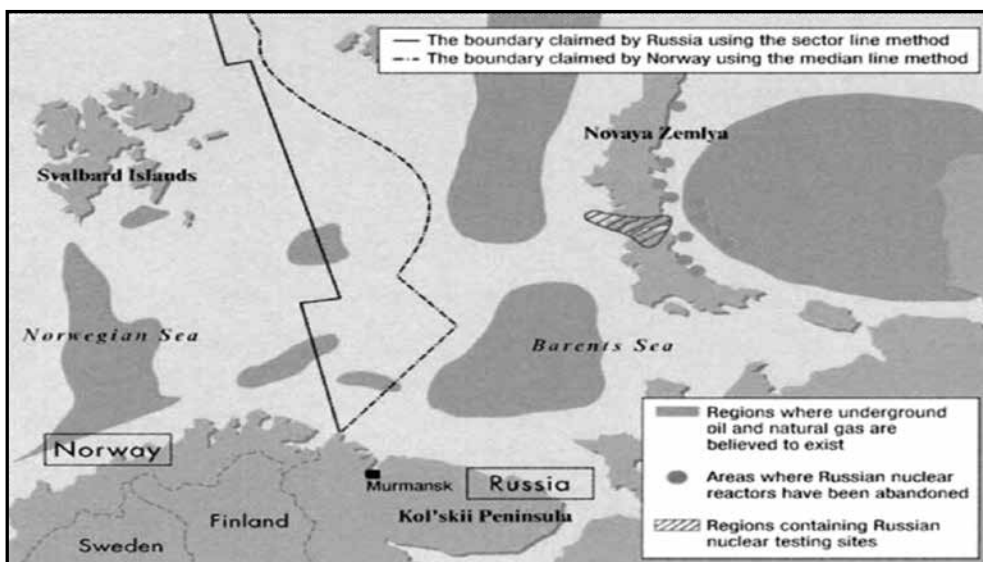
The Soviet Union, on the hand, joined the agreement from 1920 with a right to continue economic activity on the island. It is noteworthy that the USSR considered the 1920 document to be discriminatory. In 1926, Moscow established the borders of maritime territories in the region, using the principle of sector division. End points were located in the North Pole and the extreme point of the land boundary, between which a straight line was drawn to separate the waters. The Norwegians, on the other hand, used the demarcation of the median line between the insular territories of the two countries. The result was a controversial area of about 155,000 sq km. It was a piece that exceeded all Norwegian maritime territories in the North Sea. Dissatisfied with the 1920 agreement, Norway gave up sovereignty over Svalbard, as it was the only agreement on which Oslo could count on for full jurisdiction over the island. Thus, the situation rolls back to the agreement of 1872, when the status of Svalbard was determined by only two states: Russia and Sweden-Norway.<sup>34</sup>

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33. "Barents Sea of Discord for Russia and Norway", March 7, 2013. [http://english.pravda.ru/business/companies/07-03-2013/124001-russia\\_norway-0/](http://english.pravda.ru/business/companies/07-03-2013/124001-russia_norway-0/) accessed on August 14, 2014.

34. Ibid. [http://english.pravda.ru/business/companies/07-03-2013/124001-russia\\_norway-0/](http://english.pravda.ru/business/companies/07-03-2013/124001-russia_norway-0/)

Fig 6: Barents Sea Dispute



Source: <https://nippon.zaidan.info/seikabutsu/2003/00160/contents/0003.htm>

While the dispute continued over sharing the shelf, in 2010, Russia and Norway ended the 40 years tiff by signing a treaty that allowed access for exploration of new oil and gas resources in the Arctic region. Delimitation of the Barents Sea dispute is viewed by many experts as a model to settle the Arctic disputes between the concerned nations.

Fig 7: The New Russia-Norway Barents Sea Border



Source: <http://02varvara.wordpress.com/2010/09/29/ria-novosti-infographics-russia-and-norway-divide-disputed-barents-sea-territory/01-russia-and-norway-divide-disputed-barents-sea-territory-ria-novosti-infographics/>

## FUTURE PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR RUSSIA IN THE ARCTIC

In view of the relevance of the Arctic region as the new political theatre for Russia's resurgence, it is important for Russia to address several issues related to the region in order to establish peaceful coexistence and regional stability.

### *Address the Impact of Climatic Change*

The catastrophic climate change has had a severe impact on the Arctic ecosystem although it is not due to the act of an individual country but due to the negligence of all active nations in the Arctic zone. Russia needs to overcome its apprehensions about the other Arctic littoral states and work towards addressing the threats arising from environmental degradation of the Arctic.

### *Regulate its Military Activities*

Though resource rivalry and threat perceptions in the Arctic are inevitable, Russia should take a leap of faith by taking up initiatives that do not endanger the stability of the region. This can be done through coordination with militarily active Arctic nations and by curbing nuclear activities and

militarisation in the region and also by monitoring sustainable use of the Arctic resources.

### *Settlement of Disputes*

There are unresolved disputed areas and issues involving Russia. With the successful resolution of the Barents Sea dispute, Russia can resolve the longstanding Lomonosov ridge and Bering Sea disputes on similar lines, in order to make the Arctic region a zone of peace, stability and cooperation. Countries like the US and Canada should also shun the residual Cold War geo-political storylines involving Russia. Like the rest of the Arctic countries which promote their national interests in the region, Russia is no exception. It is important for these countries to realise that the Arctic is the next geo-political reality; therefore, all the Arctic nations should work in conjunction and not isolate Russia, to establish not a zone of conflict but rather a zone of stability and peace in the region.

### *Enhance the Role of International Governing Institutions*

The scope of the international governing institutions should be further enhanced and expanded in order to provide unlimited participation by the members involved. Peaceful coexistence can be achieved not by creating 'balance of power' in the region but by 'accommodating' all active members of the Arctic, including Russia. Hence, the international convention should specifically provide instructive and politically feasible conduct of activities in the Arctic that address the wider issues involved in the region. This would, in turn, result in governance of the Arctic region in which there is equal participation among the Arctic nations and private players, NGOs and non-member states of the Arctic like India and China.

### *Align with Traditional Partners*

The Ukraine crisis and the imposition of sanctions on Russia has not only had a major impact on Russia's fragile economy but also decreased Moscow's influence in the international community. As a response, Russia has now shifted its focus from the European region to the 'Asia Pivot'. Russia has strong

partnerships with India and China, and, hence, should take both countries into confidence in order to enhance its geo-political discourse in the North Pole. Moreover, the exploration of the Arctic's rich natural resources by Russia, will, in turn, lead to geographical expansion of its energy markets in the future, with India and China being the two largest client nations. Recently, Russia and China launched the construction of the world's largest pipeline, the 'Sila Sibiri (Power of Siberia)' pipeline.

Besides, Moscow is desperately in need of foreign investment and technology to develop its shipping and oil and gas industries, as well as overcome environmental risks in the Arctic. Without large-scale investment and expertise, these initiatives are likely to be poorly implemented. At the same time, security concerns are pushing Russia to bolster its military modernisation in the Arctic by reestablishing bases and reequipping its forces and protecting its sovereignty in the region.<sup>35</sup> China, as Russia's strong ally, can play a major role in enhancing Moscow's capability in the North Pole.

The recent turn of events and changing geo-political situation may have deterred Russia's progress in attaining global power status but the Arctic region will be a key region in the resurgence of Russia in the international community. The geo-strategic location, commercial routes and the rich oil and gas deposits have led to a 'New Grand Game' in the Arctic Circle which has just begun. The international power politics in the region will determine Russia's future in security interests and energy trade. It is, however, important to see if the Arctic Ocean will indeed bring back Russia's lost glory, or lead to a 'clash of titans'; or will the Arctic emerge as a region for 'cooperation' between the conflicting countries in the region? Russia should behave responsibly and avoid getting involved in any form of military adventurism in the region. It should rather take the initiative to resolve the territorial disputes on amicable terms and find ways through which it can cooperate with other major players in exploiting the future prospects of the Arctic Circle.

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35. Nadezhda Filimonova and Svetlana Krivokhizh, "A Russian Perspective on China's Arctic Role", *The Diplomat*, September 27, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/09/a-russian-perspective-on-chinas-arctic-role/> accessed on November 14, 2014.