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# ARCTIC NARRATIVES AND POLITICAL VALUES: ARCTIC STATES, CHINA AND NATO

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Authors: Iona Mackenzie Allan

Content Editor: Troy Bouffard

Peer review: Dr. Elana Wilson Rowe and Dr. Andrea Charron

Project manager: Elīna Lange-Ionatamišvili

Design: Kārlis Ulmanis

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NATO STRATCOM COE

11b Kalciema Iela

Riga LV1048, Latvia

[www.stratcomcoe.org](http://www.stratcomcoe.org)

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This report is a continuation of the previous research titled "Arctic Narratives and Political Values: Russia, China and Canada in the High North" that was completed in September 2019 and covered the period of January 2012-June 2018. Current report covers January 2012 - June 2019.

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# **ARCTIC NARRATIVES AND POLITICAL VALUES: ARCTIC STATES, CHINA AND NATO**

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## GREENLAND

Nationalism, patriotism,  
environmentalism,  
authority, sovereignty,  
prosperity, co-operation.



## CANADA

Patriotism, leadership,  
traditionalism, sovereignty,  
authority, stability,  
pragmatism, co-operation.



## UNITED STATES

Leadership, authority,  
territorial sovereignty,  
environmentalism,  
strength, deterrence,  
protectionism.

## ICELAND

Patriotism, sovereignty,  
stewardship,  
pragmatism, prosperity,  
internationalism,  
co-operation, respect.



## NATO

Strength, deterrence, pragmatism,  
solidarity, peace, stability, co-operation,  
multilateralism.

## NORWAY

Leadership, territorial sovereignty, environmentalism, peace, progress, prosperity, multilateralism, pragmatism.



## FINLAND

Authority, innovation, progress, prosperity, environmentalism, multilateralism, co-operation, inclusivity, rule of law.



## SWEDEN

Environmentalism, stewardship, peace, rule of law, prosperity, multilateralism, social equality, pragmatism.

## RUSSIA

Authority, leadership, traditionalism, pragmatism, territorial sovereignty, prosperity, stability, co-operation, social obligation.

## KINGDOM OF DENMARK

Leadership, environmentalism, rule of law, peace, stability, multilateralism, co-operation.



## CHINA

Rule of law, integrity, environmentalism, internationalism, prosperity, progress, co-operation, social obligation.

# Introduction

The following research is based on discourse analysis of official statements, speeches and policy documents published by the governments of the eight Arctic states as well as China and the NATO alliance between January 2012 and June 2019.

This document provides a brief summary of the key narratives promoted by each of these 10 Arctic actors, drawing particular attention towards how they frame their identity in the Arctic (**self**), how they conceptualise the region (**region**) and how they frame relations with other Arctic stakeholders (**others**). The narratives identified in the discourse were coded according to the different national power dimensions<sup>1</sup> and political values<sup>2</sup> that they communicate. This summary is intended to give an over-view of the narrative landscape of the Arctic as indication of key national interests and areas of strategic priorities for each of these 10 Arctic actors.

Narrative analysis is a useful approach to analysing national discourse and the communication efforts of governments and other international actors. Applying this method to the Arctic allows us to look at the different ways governments communicate their political intent in the region and explore the various social, historical and value constructs used to express this. This, in turn, paints a more meaningful picture of Arctic political discourse, shedding light on the perception that each country is trying to create about itself and how it may behave in the future. If one accepts that strategic communications are narrative-lead, then it is important to remember that narratives and messages derived from them are crafted to provoke a particular behavioural or attitudinal change in the audience. Breaking down the narrative in terms of its values and character reveals which type of behaviour is being actively promoted and which behaviour is being discouraged.

## **Key findings:**

Whilst China tends to internationalize the Arctic space and project a more global, future oriented vision of the region, the Canadian, Russian as well as American narratives are aimed at maintaining the status quo of the Arctic governance and limiting the influence of outsiders. However, this research also shows that Nordic states like Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Norway adopt a more flexible attitude towards the involvement of outside stakeholders, including China, but especially the EU.



Every single Arctic actor- albeit to a varying degrees – seems to be willing to isolate the Arctic from developments in other parts of the world, compartmentalising problematic aspects of foreign policy to main international co-operation in the Arctic.

Without any official Arctic strategy, it has been a challenge for NATO to communicate it's role and vision in the Arctic, although there is an increased recognition within NATO that the melting Arctic alongside political dynamics in the world are impacting Alliance's security.

1 National power dimensions include historical, societal, economic, political, military, and informational.

2 The term 'political value' refers to the basic prescriptive belief that shapes individual or group political behaviour.



# Canada



## Self

Canada is an inherently Northern nation. The Arctic plays a fundamental role in shaping Canadian national identity. (Historical)

Canada is the responsible steward and leader of the Arctic. (Political)

Canada's vast territory and indigenous population means that Canada has the highest stakes in the Arctic. (Political)

The sustainable development of natural resources and preservation of environmental integrity is at the core of Canada's Arctic strategy. (Economic)



## Region

The climate change is disproportionately impacting Canada and threatening Northerners way of life. Climate change is the most serious security challenge. (Social)

Canada must protect its Arctic sovereignty and strengthen its military presence in the North as global interest in the region increases. (Military)



## Others

Canada prioritises improving its relations with the Indigenous communities of the North and integrating Indigenous leaders closer into structures of Arctic governance. (Social)

The Arctic Council is the leading and most effective structure of Arctic governance. (Political)

The participation of Observers like China in Arctic Council should not compromise the central role or authority of Arctic states. (Political)

Canada continues to co-operate with Russia in the Arctic despite concerns about their military adventurism elsewhere in the world. (Military)







## Self - Canada's Northern Soul

**Political Values - Patriotism, leadership, traditionalism**

For both the Harper and Trudeau Jr. governments, Canada's identity in the High North has been expressed overwhelmingly in historical dimensions. Canadian narratives draw attention to a long history of polar habitation and emphasise how deeply the Arctic is embedded into its national psyche in support of sovereignty principles established by the Montevideo Convention. The projection of Canada's polar history and emphasis on the values of patriotism and sovereignty help reinforce Canada's status as a 'true Arctic and 'inherently Northern' nation.

As well as its strong sense of its historical legitimacy in the Arctic, Canadian narratives also communicate values of leadership and authority. Canada is often portrayed as a global leader of Arctic affairs and positions itself as the responsible steward of the Arctic environment.



## Region - The Arctic as a Sovereign space

**Political Values - Sovereignty, authority, stability**

Canadian narratives tend to emphasise the regional rather than international nature of the Arctic territory. For both the Harper and Trudeau governments, asserting national sovereignty, particularly over the contested Northwest Passage, has been a dominant narrative within its Arctic communication. Canadian narratives therefore emphasise the importance of maintaining the territorial status quo in the Arctic and adhering to a rules-based system of governance. Indeed, the Arctic Council is framed as the 'pre-eminent' forum for Arctic governance based upon the relational authority and decision-making powers of the eight Arctic delegations and influence of indigenous representatives. Although Canada has been resistant to the involvement of outside

stakeholders like China and the EU, it goes to great lengths to demonstrate the importance of integrating Indigenous leaders and organisations closer into structures of Arctic governance.



## Others - Tumultuous Relations with Russia

**Political Values - Pragmatism, sovereignty, cooperation**

Canadian narratives indicate a tumultuous and inconsistent relationship with Russia in the Arctic, drawing particular attention to the military dimension of their bi-lateral relationship. Canada imposed heavy sanctions on Russia in 2014 following their invasion of Crimea and even boycotted an Arctic Council meeting held in Moscow later that year. Although Canadian narratives on occasion indicated a willingness to compartmentalise Russia's actions in Ukraine and separate the 'Russia of Crimea to Russia of the Arctic', these narratives also recognise the potential destabilisation that Russia could impose throughout the region. Indeed, in more recent years, Canadian narratives express growing concern about Russia's ability to project force in the Arctic and to control large stretches of the Northern Sea Route. Statements draw attention to the general sense of Russian adventurism and emphasise the need to closely monitor their military developments in the Arctic.

Canadian sources also place a huge emphasis on improving relations with Indigenous communities of the North. Narratives promoted by the recent Canadian administrations portray a sense of inclusive and respectful relations with the Indigenous community while promoting their role in 'co-developing' Canada's Arctic strategy. Such narratives help Canada confront contentious wrongdoings inflicted on Indigenous communities in the past as well as addressing ongoing issues of food security, education and mental and physical well-being.



# Denmark



## Self

Denmark is a key Arctic stakeholder. (Political)

Denmark is a responsible and environmentally friendly actor. (Social)



## Region

The Arctic Council is an effective system for Arctic governance and co-operation. (Political)

The Arctic is a place of low tension and high levels of co-operation regardless of conflict elsewhere in the world. (Political)



## Others

China is trying to gain greater influence in the Arctic and profit from resource exploitation. (Economic)

The EU is an important and relevant partner for Denmark in the Arctic. (Political)





## Self - Denmark, A Central Arctic Player

Political Values - Leadership, environmentalism

Overall, Denmark positions itself as an active and engaged Arctic nation which sits at the very centre of the Arctic community. For Denmark, maintaining a strong presence in the Arctic helps elevate its 'global status' and strengthen its position as a leading international player in the Arctic.

Generally, however, Denmark does not construct a particularly distinct sense of 'Danish' national identity in the Arctic outside of the world-class Danish Naval and Sirius Sledge Patrol, and instead frames its engagement in the region through environmental issues and the role as a driver for sustainable development of Arctic resources.



## Region - Denmark, Peaceful, rules based Arctic region

Political Values - Rule of law, Peace, stability

Denmark promotes the Arctic Council as the most important international forum for Arctic governance and highlights its role in helping to ensure that Arctic has remained a region of co-operation and low tensions. Although Denmark acknowledges Russia's military build-up and recognises a shift in the balance of power in the Arctic, it generally avoids framing the Arctic through a military-centric dimension. Instead, it calls for pragmatic co-operation with Russia in the Arctic and frames the Arctic as a region of significant consensus and common interests in maintaining stability and preventing tension escalation.



## Others - Denmark, Cautious co-operation

Political Values - Multilateralism, co-operation

Denmark recognises the growing influence and presence of outside stakeholders in the Arctic, paying particular attention to Southeast Asian actors such as China. Whilst Denmark generally promotes an inclusive attitude to the involvement of observer states in the Arctic Council, it acknowledges that large-scale investments involving Chinese companies in Greenland could lead to counter-interest dependence.

Alternatively however, with regard to the European Union, Denmark promotes a much more supportive narrative, suggesting that the EU should be integrated more closely into its Arctic agenda.



# Greenland (Kingdom of Denmark)



## Self

Greenland has strong Arctic identity rooted in geography, history and culture. (Historical)

Greenland is the natural 'care-taker' and guardian of Arctic fragile eco-system. (Social)

Greenland has a familiarity and superior knowledge of the Arctic environment. (Social)



## Region

Environmental change in the Arctic has opened opportunities for Greenland to develop its natural resources and gain greater economic independence. (Economic)

Arctic decision-making should be led by the Arctic residents themselves. (Political)



## Others

China and other non-Arctic states are key partners for the future economic development of Greenland. (Economic)





## Self - Greenland - A historically Arctic Actor

Political Values -National identity,  
patriotism, environmentalism

For Greenland, which has a self-government arrangement, its identity in the Arctic is tied to a much stronger sense of history and cultural connection to North. These narratives portray Greenlanders as the natural inhabitants of the Arctic and communicate a sense of belonging and intimate familiarity with the Arctic environment. Such characteristics help distinguish Greenland as distinct and separate actor from Denmark regarding the Arctic.

Greenland uses its historic connection to the natural environment and its longstanding of inhabitation of the Arctic to present itself as the natural 'care-taker' and guardian of the its fragile eco-system. In efforts to deflect international criticism for its continued reliance on fossil fuel extraction and perceived inaction over climate change, Greenland uses its superior knowledge and traditional understanding of its own surroundings to argue that it is better placed than others to navigate its own environmental challenges.



## Region - Greenland: A Region of Opportunity

Political Values -Authority, Sovereignty,  
Prosperity

Greenland tends to adopt a more sovereign-centric and territorial approach to framing the Arctic region. Greenlandic narratives emphasise the authority of geographically Arctic nations and argue that Arctic decision making should be led by Arctic residents themselves.

Greenland frames the Arctic more in terms of economic opportunities rather than any potential for conflict, partially as a means toward eventual independence. Despite the heavy environmental cost

that Greenland experiences in the region, Greenlandic narratives also recognise the commercial possibilities that Arctic climate change and increased maritime accessibility has opened. The exploitation of mineral resources is presented as an important means of enhancing Greenland's economic agency and asserting its self-determination in the Arctic.



## Others - Greenland - China as an important Arctic partner

Political Values - Co-operation,  
prosperity

In contrast to the Danish sources, Greenland frames China as an important economic partner and key to the future development of Greenland. Although Greenland oversees its own economic issues, recent Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) economic has raised several national security concerns and triggered intervention from the Danish government. Nevertheless, Greenlandic narratives continue to welcome increased economic co-operation with China and other South-Asian actors.



# Finland



## Self

Finland is a true Arctic nation and key player in the region. (Political)

Finland is an innovative problem solver and leading expert in shipping and maritime industries. (Economic)



## Region

The Arctic is a region where cooperation and respect of international law takes precedence over conflict. (Political)

The sustainable development and responsible exploitation of Arctic resources is a key priority for Finland. (Economic)

Arctic climate change poses serious environmental challenges as well as opening important economic opportunities to develop the region. (Economic)



## Others

The Arctic Council is a unique organisation and is the most important forum for Arctic governance. (Political)

The EU is a key actor and a stakeholder in the Arctic. (Political)

It is important to co-operate and engage with non-Arctic stakeholders. (Political)





## Self – An Arctic Innovator and Problem Solver

**Political Values - Authority, prosperity, progress**

Finland defines itself as an 'Arctic nation' and frames the entire Finnish territory as such. With its large Arctic territory and long experience of Arctic maritime navigation, Finland positions itself as a leading expert and authority across different polar industries. Finland's identity in the region is based around its substantial knowledge of the Arctic maritime environment and the 'competitive edge' it enjoys within the shipping and maritime industry. Finland's experience and knowledge of the Arctic environment enables it to fulfil the role of 'problem solver' and innovator in the region, drawing particular attention to the innovative strategies and green technology it has developed in addressing regional climate change. Finland's slogan for its Arctic Council Chairmanship - 'Exploring Common Solutions' - reflects the knowledge and solutions-based dimension of its Arctic identity.



## Region – Sustainable Development in the Arctic

**Political Values - Prosperity, environmentalism, multilateralism**

Finland tends to conceptualise the Arctic region through an economic lens, recognising the growing geo-strategic competition and possibilities for increased commercial shipping as well as natural resource development. However, the promotion of economic priorities is often balanced by narratives emphasising the importance of environmentally friendly business practices and a focus on 'people-centric' development. Finland's 'far-reaching' environmental ambitions are also framed as an opportunity for Finland to bolster its position in the Arctic region.

Although Finnish sources occasionally acknowledge the possibility for a resurgence of East-West tensions in the Arctic, Finland generally promotes the narrative that the Arctic is a peaceful region where the risk of conflict is very low. Like other Arctic states including Canada and the Nordic nations, Finnish sources also imply that Russian aggression in Eastern Europe and the ongoing tensions in the Baltic Sea region have not compromised their co-operation with Russia in the Arctic. Indeed, Finland tends to avoid expressing its relationship with Russia through the military dimension, and makes very little reference to Russia's strengthened military posture in the Arctic.



## Others – Inclusive Co-operation

**Political Values - Co-operation, inclusivity, rule of law**

Finland promotes an open and inclusive narrative towards the participation of outside stakeholders in the Arctic and is particularly supportive of the European Union's role within the region. Maintaining a close relationship with the EU and expressing support of its admission onto the Arctic Council could help Finland influence the development of the EU's future Arctic policy.

Finland frames the Arctic Council as the most important forum for political co-operation in the Arctic and emphasises the importance of adherence to a rules-based system of governance in the region. Whilst Finland recognises the leadership and decision-making authority of the eight Arctic nations, it also celebrates the increasingly global dimension of the Arctic Council and, like other Nordic nations supports the admission of non-Arctic observer states onto the Council.



# Iceland



## Self

Sustainable development is the guiding principle of Iceland's Arctic policy. Iceland is a model for sustainability. (Economic)

Iceland is Arctic coastal state and an historically Arctic nation. Iceland's socio-economic development has depended on the Arctic for centuries. (Historical)

Iceland is a responsible Arctic actor and caretaker of the region. (Social)

Iceland is optimistic about the future of the Arctic. Despite difference, co-operation will persist. (Political)



## Region

Arctic climate change brings economic opportunities as well as environmental challenges. (Economic)

Arctic climate change has global implications and is a challenge which requires a global response. (Social)

The Arctic should not be limited to a narrow geographical definition – should be viewed as an extensive area when it comes to ecological, political and security matters. (Political)



## Others

The Arctic Council is the leading political forum for Arctic co-operation. (Political)

Iceland places a huge emphasis on protecting Indigenous rights, including them in decision making and ensuring their social wellbeing. (Social)

Building bridges and co-operating with non-Arctic states is crucial for the security and prosperity of the region. (Political)

Arctic states have a shared interest to avoid conflict and ensure the Arctic remains a region of low tension. Arctic relations are insulated from political tensions elsewhere in the world. (Political)







## Self - An Arctic Coastal State

Political Values - National identity, sovereignty, stewardship

Despite lying just outside the Arctic circle, Iceland's Arctic identity is built around the narrative that Iceland is an Arctic coastal state with equal status to the rest of the 'Arctic 5'. Sources argue that Iceland has land and sea rights above the Arctic circle since the northern part of the Icelandic Exclusive Economic Zone extends to the Greenland Sea adjoining the Arctic Ocean. The Icelandic government also promotes the narrative that Iceland is the only State located entirely within the Arctic, in efforts to geographically support and justify its status as an equal Arctic stakeholder.

Iceland's identity in the Arctic is also strongly expressed through the historical dimension. Despite having no indigenous Arctic populations, Iceland frames itself as a historically Arctic nation, where the harsh natural environment touches every aspect of life in Iceland. As the smallest of Arctic states, Iceland also places a huge emphasis on cultivating a strong environmental aspect of its identity. Iceland positions itself as a driver of sustainability and as one of the most responsible environmental 'caretakers' amongst the Arctic states.



## Region - Frozen opportunities

Political Values - Pragmatism, prosperity, internationalism

Although Iceland positions itself as responsible steward of the Arctic environment, it also presents Arctic climate change as an important opportunity to develop the Arctic shipping industry and 'reap the benefits' of mineral mining and oil and gas extraction. The Arctic is sometimes framed as a high stakes region where it is possible to strike a delicate balance between preservationism and conservationism with regard to environment and responsible exploitation of its natural resources. This narrative plays into Iceland's generally optimistic vision for the future Arctic and its ongoing efforts to transform Iceland into the premier hub for the Atlantic side of polar maritime activity.

Compared to other Arctic states, Iceland tends to adopt a more flexible and looser sense of territoriality, arguing that the Arctic should be viewed as an extensive area rather than through a narrow geographical definition. This emphasis on multilateralism strengthens Iceland's claims of being an Arctic coastal state and also legitimises the interests of non-Arctic states within the region.



## Others - Shared interests and low tensions

Political Values - Co-operation, multilateralism, respect

Overall, Iceland promotes an inclusive attitude towards outside stakeholders in the Arctic. In particular, Iceland pursues increasingly closer economic ties with China – the only European nation to have a free trade agreement with China. Additionally, Iceland describes Arctic climate change as a global rather than regional challenge and, in a similar way to China, encourages the Arctic Council to take a more globalist perspective to approaching challenges in the Arctic.

Like other Arctic states, Iceland indicates a willingness to set aside political differences with regional actors and tensions elsewhere in the world in order to preserve peace and co-operation in the Arctic. Iceland portrays relatively co-operative bilateral relations with Russia and suggests that despite its unacceptable aggression in Ukraine, isolation from Russia in the Arctic is 'not an option.'

Although Iceland has no indigenous Arctic peoples, the Icelandic government makes a great effort to demonstrate its overall support of the rights and interests of other legitimate indigenous population of the Arctic, particularly their participation in the Arctic Council. Moreover, Iceland suggests that since it has a 'small state' mentality, it naturally supports and respects the interests of indigenous peoples. In language which could potentially provoke criticism from other Arctic nations, Iceland has on occasion argued that 'powerful countries' in the region have a tendency to 'overlook and trivialise' issues involving indigenous peoples.



# Norway



## Self

Norway is a leading Arctic state. Major jurisdiction of Arctic territory. Has great responsibility (Political)

Norway is an Arctic knowledge leader. Knowledge is at the foundation of Norway's Arctic policy. (Political)

Norway is a responsible steward of the Arctic environment. (Social)



## Region

The Arctic is a region of great economic potential as well as environmental challenges. Norway will transform the Arctic into 'The Silicon Valley of the North'. (Economic)

The Arctic is a peaceful region with high levels of co-operation, despite tension elsewhere. There is no race for resources. (Political)

Norway's North is an economically thriving region. (Economic)

Arctic climate change has implications for the whole world. (Societal)



## Others

Norway seeks constructive, predictable relations with Russia, despite their aggression in Ukraine. (Political)

The Arctic Council is the main political forum for Arctic co-operation. Existing structures of Arctic law are sufficient. (Political)

Norway co-operates effectively with non-Arctic states. (Political)





## Self - A Leading Arctic state

**Political Values - Leadership, territorial sovereignty, environmentalism**

Overall Norway presents itself as a leading and assertive Arctic actor, indicating a departure from the traditional 'small state' mentality it adopts in other areas of its foreign policy. These leadership claims are strongly connected to an idea of Arctic statehood and the large geographic distinction that Norway assigns within its Arctic land and seas. Like Russia and other countries with large Arctic territories, Norway's uses its substantial Arctic population and physical jurisdiction within the region to reinforce its identity as a leading Arctic coastal nation and 'flag state.'

Norway also positions itself as an Arctic knowledge leader which sits at the cutting edge of circumpolar research, renewable energy technology and marine conservation. Norwegian narratives make frequent reference to knowledge being the driving force of the High North policy and seeks to fulfil the role of a valuable informer and source of Arctic knowledge and know-how.



## Region - Silicon Valley of the North

**Political Values - Peace, progress, prosperity**

Norwegian sources follow the general consensus in framing the Arctic as a region of exceptional peace and stability which is largely insulated from other tensions elsewhere in the world. Norwegian narratives emphasise the high levels of consensus that exist in the region and argues against any notion of there being a competitive 'race' for Arctic resources.

However, Norway's most dominant 'region-based' narrative is expressed through the economic dimension. Norway generally conceptualises the Arctic through economic interests and ambitions to

transform the region into a 'Silicon-like Valley' and develop space technology and 'knowledge-based enterprises.' Norway's 'North' is often described as a 'thriving' region and a source of 'future' orientated jobs for the entire country.

Norwegian Arctic narratives consistently balance commitment to environmentalism and dedication to sustainable development of Arctic's natural resources. According to Norwegian sources, pursuit of Arctic-related economic growth and innovation does not conflict with an ambitious environmental agenda.



## Others - Policy of Engagement

**Political Values - Multilateralism, rule of law, pragmatism**

Norway's relationship with Russia has been a defining factor and key theme within its Arctic communications. Norwegian narratives indicate that although the military-strategic balance may be tipping in Russia's favour and stability in the Arctic cannot be taken for granted, Norway has maintained co-operative bilateral relations with Russia in the region for many decades. These narratives also tend to highlight Norway's long history and 'special' relationship with Russia, arguing that their shared geography requires enhanced levels of co-operation.

Like all Nordic Arctic states, with the potential exception of Denmark, Norway also promotes an inclusive attitude towards non-Arctic stakeholders like China. Norwegian narratives generally welcome the involvement of observer states onto the Arctic Council, framing it as an important way increasing awareness over climate change issues and incorporating the knowledge and expertise of other countries into the Arctic. For Norway, the Arctic has also become another important platform to increase co-operation and economic interests between Norway and other South Asia actors.



# Sweden



## Self

Sweden is an environmentally friendly actor, has been model for sustainability and low carbon growth. (Economic)

Sweden shares a common Nordic commitment to maintaining peace in the Arctic promoting the sustainable development of its natural resources. (Political)



## Region

Despite tension elsewhere in the world, the Arctic is a region of low tension and respect of international law. Security challenges are not of a military nature. (Political)

Climate change has opened new economic opportunities in the Arctic as well as serious environmental challenges. (Economic)



## Others

Nordic countries share common interests in sustaining peace and are models for sustainability in the Arctic. (Political)

Addressing climate change in the Arctic must be a global effort. Challenges in the Arctic are too broad to overcome alone. (Political)

Sweden co-operates with Russia in the Arctic in pursuit of their common interests (Political)





## Self - Environmental leader

Political Values - Environmentalism, stewardship

Sweden's strong prioritisation of environmental issues in other aspects of its domestic and foreign policy appears to have influenced its identity and role within the Arctic. Sweden consistently presents itself as one of the most environmentally friendly Arctic actors, with 'high environmental ambitions' and a model of how to achieve low carbon growth.

Although Sweden has a substantial Sami population who have inhabited the Arctic since the Middle Ages, Sweden draws relatively little attention to the historical dimension of its Arctic identity. Instead, the emphasis tends to be placed on a sense of shared Nordic Arctic identity and their common values of peace, stability and environmentalism.



## Region - Peaceful and Prosperous

Political Values - Peace, Rule of Law, Prosperity

Sweden conceptualises the Arctic as a region of long-standing peace and stability and challenges the perception that there is any sort of conflict-related competition or 'gold rush' over the Arctic's lucrative oil and gas resources. The Arctic is framed as a region of well-functioning international law and high levels of cooperation.

Despite the emphasis Sweden places on its environmentally friendly credentials, the Swedish government also recognises the substantial economic opportunities at stake as the Arctic becomes more accessible and ice free. Sweden promotes the narrative that it is possible to both reduce energy-sector emissions and stimulate economic growth and innovative 'green solutions' in the Arctic. According to the Swedish sources, there need not be any contradictions between environmentalism, on the one hand, or progress and prosperity on the other.



## Others - Human-centred co-operation

Political Values - Multilateralism, social obligation, pragmatism

Sweden places a strong emphasis on the value of multilateral cooperation in the Arctic, (as do the other non-littoral Arctic states), welcoming the participation of outside actors including the European Union, which is consistently framed as 'relevant' and 'co-operative' actor in the region. Sweden tends to adopt a generally inclusive attitude towards the admission of observer states into the Arctic Council and argues that the challenges facing the Arctic are too 'broad and multifaceted' for anyone state to deal with alone.

Although Sweden has on occasion expressed concern over the 'worrysome' implications of Russia's military build-up in the Arctic, overall Sweden promotes the narrative that maintaining practical co-operation and dialogue with Russia in the Arctic is almost unavoidable.

Of note, the most striking narrative Sweden promotes regarding its relations with other actors in the region is its promise to prioritise the 'human dimension' of its Arctic affairs. This narrative places the needs of the Indigenous Sami community, including their resilience to the effects of climate change at the centre of Sweden's Arctic policy, helping to reinforce the values of respect and social obligation.



# Russia



## Self

Russia has a long history of polar exploration and expansionism in the Arctic (Historical)

Developing the Arctic is a domestic political priority for Russia. (Economic)

Russia is the natural leader and principle stakeholder in Arctic affairs. (Political)

Russia is responsibly developing the Arctic, its economic activity is environmentally conscious. (Economic)

Russian military build-up is not a sign of aggression, it is defensive in nature. (Military)



## Region

The Arctic has always been an area of special interest for Russia, where all their national interests are concentrated. (Political)

The Arctic is a place of peace and dialogue, no potential for conflict because Russia is a cooperative actor. (Military)

Russia should exploit the economic opportunities presented by climate change rather than worry about the causes. (Economic)



## Other

The Arctic states have the greatest authority and responsibility in the region. (Political)

Importing tensions from other parts of foreign policy will threaten Arctic peace. (Military)

Russia has respectful and harmonious relationship with Indigenous communities of the North. Russia's economic development will benefit local populations. (Economic)

Russia supports the resumption of military co-operation and dialogue between Arctic states (Military)





## Self - An Arctic Leader

Political Values - Authority, Pragmatism & Traditionalism

Russia presents itself as a pragmatic and natural leader of Arctic affairs; a role which is often justified by its geographic largess and the vast northern territory.

After 2014, Russian narratives became more defensive in tone, arguing that their military presence in the High North is 'regional' and defensive' in nature and should be seen as a pragmatic measure to protect its resource and defence interests as well as critical infrastructure in the region.

Russia's identity in the Arctic is also expressed through the historical dimension, emphasising the Russia's long history of polar exploration and close assimilation with Arctic culture. This projection of its Arctic heritage, from centuries of the polar exploration to the heavy militarization of the Stalinist era, helps frame Russia's current military presence in the High North as a natural continuation of history.



## Region - The Arctic as a sovereign space

Political Values - Territorial sovereignty, pragmatism, prosperity

Russia tends to conceptualise the Arctic region through a sovereign-centric lens, arguing that the region has always been part of Russia's sphere of influence and a territory of special interest for the Kremlin. Russian narratives frame the Arctic as a region where national, rather than global, interests prevail and communicate a distinct sense of ownership and territoriality over the High North, emphasised by the repeated statement of "Russian Federation Jurisdiction" throughout various strategies.

Although Russian sources acknowledge the threat posed by Arctic climate change, these environmental

conditions are also presented as an unmissable economic opportunity for the continued exploitation of oil and gas resources as well as shipping use of the Northern Sea Route.



## Others - Co-operative and Respectful Relations

Political Values - Stability, Co-operation, Social Obligation

Despite the measures Russia has taken to strengthen its military posture in the Arctic, Russia's Arctic communications paint a picture of co-operative multilateral relations with the other eight Arctic states as well as with the Indigenous communities living on Russian Arctic territory. Russian narratives stress that there is little potential for conflict in the Arctic and recently proposed a return to full-scale military dialogue between the Arctic states. Russian narratives also paint a harmonious relationship with the Indigenous communities of the North and highlight the efforts Russia has made to 'preserve their unique life-style.' Towards non-Arctic stakeholders however, Russia is less welcoming, consistently expressing the need to limit and monitor the influence of actors like China and the European Union.



# The United States



## Self

The United States is a true Arctic nation. (Political)

The United States is pursuing the responsible stewardship of the Arctic environment. (Social)

The United States is a strong Arctic nation, capable of defending its national security interests in the region. (Military)



## Region

The Arctic is a region of growing geo-strategic competition. (Military)

Arctic climate change poses a threat to U.S. national security. The U.S. must preserve the freedom of its Arctic seas. (Military)

The Arctic is a region of well-functioning governance and effective multilateral cooperation. (Political)



## Others

China's involvement in the Arctic lacks transparency. China has no role to play in Arctic governance. (Political)

Although the risk of conflict remains low, Russia's military build-up in the Arctic could pose a threat to U.S. national security. (Military)







## Self - A resurgent Arctic nation

**Political Values - Environmentalism, territorial sovereignty, leadership**

The sources have revealed a divergence in the narratives promoted by the Obama administration and those promoted by the current Trump government. In general, the Obama government did not communicate a particularly well-defined or distinct national identity in the Arctic, instead framing its engagement in the Arctic through broader questions of resource management, stewardship and protecting the sovereignty of its maritime domain. These narratives also present the U.S as a thoughtful Arctic actor with a prioritized environmental agenda for the region.

More recently however, U.S identity in the Arctic has become more military and security centric, with the Trump government promoting U.S national interests more authoritatively in the region and asserting its interests as an Arctic nation. The U.S is framed as a strong Arctic state which is capable of defending its Arctic 'homeland' and limiting the ability of Russia and China to compete for strategic advantages. Like the Obama government however, the current administration also tends to frame its engagement in the Arctic through its strategic interests rather than a profound sense of national identity. The U.S' Arctic territory is limited to the state of Alaska, which could explain the lack of a strong national Arctic identity.

For the Trump administration, the sense of uncertainty and instability in the Arctic comes more from military and security threats, particularly Russia's military build-up and their perceived violation of international maritime norms. The maritime sphere in particular is framed as a region which is vulnerable to Russian aggression and at risk of becoming a 'corridor' for geo-strategic competition, particularly in light of conflicting positions regarding the U.S. leading global maritime principle involving "freedom of navigation."



## Others - Wary of Chinese ambitions

**Political Values - Sovereignty, Protectionism**

The U.S generally adopts a cautious attitude regarding the involvement of outside stakeholders in the Arctic. The narratives promoted by the Trump administration in particular communicate a sense of possessiveness and authority in relation to Arctic governance and decision making. These narratives make it explicitly clear that China has no role to play in Arctic governance and often frames China's presence in the Arctic as lacking transparency and motivated largely by questionable economic and security ambitions.



## Region - Competition and threat

**Political Values - Sovereignty, strength, deterrence**

Both the Obama and Trump government communicate narratives which convey a sense of threat and uncertainty in the Arctic region. For the Obama government this is framed primarily in terms of environmental issues and the increasing national security threat resulting from the opening of a 'northern maritime avenue' of approach to North America as well as increased traffic from the Pacific side.



# China



## Self

China's economic activity in the Arctic is environmentally conscious. (Economic)

China is an indispensable investor in the Arctic (Economic)

China respects the rule of law and sovereignty of other Arctic states (Political)

China has long history of involvement in Arctic affairs (Historical)

China is a near Arctic state and important stakeholder in the region. (Political)



## Region

There is a need to seize the historic opportunities to economically develop the Arctic (Economic)

The Arctic is a trans-regional issue which impacts non-Arctic states and the future of mankind. (Political)



## Other

The future of the region depends on the increased co-operation between Arctic and non-Arctic states. (Political)

There is a need to create a more diversified system of Arctic governance. (Political)

Chinese Arctic development respects and will benefit the Indigenous population. (Social)

China co-operates fruitfully with other actors in the Arctic (Political)





## Self – A Near Arctic State

**Political Values - Rule of Law, Integrity & Environmentalism**

China's identity in the Arctic is rooted in its desire to be accepted as an equal partner and legitimate stakeholder in the region. China consistently identifies itself as a 'Near Arctic' state; a status it justifies through the disproportionate impact that Arctic-related climate change is having on Chinese economic and social development.

However, Chinese narratives indicate Beijing's concern of being perceived as an external 'gate-crasher' to the region, and therefore go to great lengths to portray itself as a trustworthy, law-abiding actor in the Arctic. China emphasises its long-standing respect for international law in the Arctic, citing its adherence to the Svalbard Treaty in 1920 and highlighting its historic engagement in environmental issues. China also emphasises its role as a source of investment, 'scientific wisdom' and technological know-how in Arctic affairs. Overall, China frames its engagement and activities in the Arctic as responsible, environmentally friendly and of no consequence to the existing regional norms.



## Region – A global Arctic Commons

**Political Values - Internationalism, prosperity, progress**

In efforts to legitimise China's status as a 'Near Arctic state' and its involvement in a region over which it has no territorial claims, Chinese narrative tends to steer the Arctic toward a 'global commons' perspective. China presents the Arctic as an international space and rebrands Arctic-related climate change as a 'trans-regional' issue which has implications for countries far beyond the Arctic Circle.

Alongside efforts to reimagine the Arctic as communal international space, Chinese narratives also portray the Arctic as a region of considerable

economic opportunity. Although China acknowledges the destabilising impact of rising sea temperatures and melting Arctic sea-ice, Arctic climate change also offered an important justification for the continuation of its oil and gas exploitation and the development of China's Polar Silk Road in the Arctic.



## Others – Inclusive co-operation

**Political Values - Co-operation, multilateralism, social obligation**

China frames its relations with other Arctic stakeholders in co-operative, inclusive terms. Through the political dimension, Chinese narratives reinforce its respect for the territorial sovereignty of other Arctic states but also suggests that true multilateral co-operation in the Arctic requires a 'broad perspective' and the participation of a wide variety of stakeholders including China. Whilst China recognises the authority of the Arctic Council, per charter membership requirements, Chinese narratives frequently imply and/or advocate for more inclusive and diversified systems of Arctic governance.

Chinese narratives also make several appeals to the various indigenous populations of the North, accentuating the importance of China's social and historical traditions while promising to improve living standards and infrastructure in the North and deliver overall 'win-win' result to different indigenous Arctic communities.



# NATO



## Self

NATO is present in the Arctic. The Alliance is increasing its military presence in the High North as a proportionate response to Russia's actions. (Military)

NATO is committed to defending all its territory including the High North. Article V still applies. (Military)



## Region

The Arctic is a place of extraordinary strategic significance, heightened by climate change. (Political)

The Arctic is a place of low tension and co-operation, despite conflict elsewhere in Europe. (Political)

There is no contradiction between having a strong military presence in the Arctic and peaceful co-operation. (Military)



## Others

NATO will continue to co-operate with Russia in the Arctic in order to avoid tension. (Political)

The Arctic Council is not a collective defence organisation. The Arctic Council should not replace NATO. (Political)





## Self - NATO is present in the Arctic

Political Values - Strength, pragmatism, solidarity

Overall, it has been challenging for NATO to construct a unified identity in the Arctic. This is partly due to NATO's lack of formal Arctic strategy, the omission of the Arctic from several key strategic documents as well as the considerable internal division over the Alliance's security role in the region. Nevertheless, the current NATO Secretary General has made more concerted efforts in recent years to reassure allies and demonstrate NATO's collective presence in the High North. NATO Exercise Trident Juncture 2018 was an important opportunity for NATO to strategically communicate its position in the Arctic and demonstrate itself as a capable military force. However, NATO's narratives are also keen to emphasise that the Alliance is not competing or engaging in an arms race with Russia in the High North, but rather is taking a measured and proportionate position.



## Region - A Place of Low Tension

Political Values - Peace, stability

As a multinational organisation, NATO generally promotes a less rigid narrative in framing the Arctic region, acknowledging both the sovereign and global dimensions at play. One of the few references NATO makes to the any territorial definition of the Arctic is that the region falls within NATO's operational jurisdiction and thus under the provision of Article V – collective defence. As a result, NATO emphasizes the responsibility to secure it.

Similar to many Arctic stakeholders, NATO generally frames the region as place of low tension and high levels of international co-operation. However, NATO does not subscribe to the narrative of 'Arctic exceptionalism', arguing that region is not completely immune from tensions elsewhere in the world.



## Others - Maintaining Dialogue and Co-operation

Political Values -Co-operation, pragmatism, multilateralism

NATO's relationship with Russia emerges as one of the central themes within its Arctic narratives.

Despite expressing some concern over Russia's military build-up and the development of anti-access and area denial capabilities in the Arctic (A2/AD), NATO generally frames its relations with Russia in conciliatory, pragmatic terms. This narrative is expressed primarily through the political rather than military dimension, and emphasises that even during times of tension, NATO has a 'pragmatic working relationship' with Russia. Of note, statements casting Russia as a serious tangible threat to NATO and alliance interests in the Arctic are relatively rare, far outweighed by narratives emphasising the level of co-operation and dialogue that has been achieved in the region.





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