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RUSSIAN
EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY



ARCTIC NARRATIVES AND POLITICAL VALUES

RUSSIA, CHINA AND CANADA IN THE HIGH NORTH

PREPARED BY THE
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Russia's Arctic Strategy

This is a summary of research based on a discourse analysis of official statements, speeches and policy documents published by the government of the Russian Federation in English from 2012-2017. The narratives derived from the discourse are coded according to the different national power dimensions and political values which they communicate. Sources were identified through a key word search of these publicly available resources.

Introduction

Although Russia's Arctic policy has evolved considerably over the last decade, its messaging strategy has remained focused on two thematic priorities; sovereignty and economic development. Both are expansive themes which encompass a range of more nuanced sub-narratives explored below.

Looking at official strategic documents, press statements and speeches made by President Putin and published by the Kremlin over the last five years, the tone of Moscow's Arctic strategy has been characterized by a mix of cooperation and rule abiding diplomacy on

the one hand and an unmistakable sense of leadership and assertiveness on the other. Moscow's Arctic messaging strategy is aimed primarily at constructing its own self-image, shaping perceptions of the region and, to a lesser extent, framing relations with other actors. Each narrative identified also communicates a specific political value to the audience. Some of these values overlap, for example 'Stability' and 'Peace', but each are expressed in different language and are tied to a variety of different national power dimensions.



'Russia has consistently been increasing its presence in the Arctic. This is natural for the largest Arctic state.'

President Putin, Franz Josef Island, 29 March 2017.

RUSSIA- AN ARCTIC LEADER

Political values – Authority, Pragmatism & Traditionalism

Overall Russia presents itself as a pragmatic yet assertive leader of Arctic affairs. In the military dimension, Russia frames itself as rational and non-aggressive actor, explaining its build up as pragmatic measure to protect its interests and critical infrastructure in the region. These values, and Russia's Arctic image more generally, are expressed through a range of national power dimensions, including political, military, societal, and historical.

The overarching image that the Putin government tries to project about its Arctic identity that Russia is the natural leader and principal stakeholder in the High North. This label is often justified by the fact that Russia

is the 'largest Arctic state' and accounts for over a third of Arctic territory. With this vast physical presence also comes greater responsibility and greater diversity of political values and moral directives projected.



'I would like to stress that Russia, almost a third of which is located in the Far North, feels special responsibility preserving its environmental stability.'

President Putin, St Petersburg, 5 June 2014.



authority
stability
pragmatism
social obligation peace
tradition control
prosperity patriotism
expansionism
national-identity

Russia



Other narratives are more defensive in nature; responding directly to accusations from the international community of an aggressive military build-up in the Arctic.

These emphasize the fact that military expansion has taken place solely on Russian territory, meaning that it is 'local in nature' and they 'are acting no differently to any other country here.'

Russia's military expansion in the North is justified by its intention to recapitalize legacy infrastructure, support new industrial growth, and develop a maritime enterprise along the Northeast Passage.



President Putin with Arctic explorer Artur Chilingarov in 2012

Russia's historical and cultural connection to the Arctic is another important element of the self-image Moscow is constructing in the Arctic. Speeches are often delivered in historically symbolic locations, such as Arctic island communities and the headquarters of the Russian Geographical Society.

This narrative attempt to reinforce Russia's long history of polar exploration and close assimilation with Arctic culture. This also is one important means of justifying Russia's expanding presence in the Arctic today.



'It is important that you continue you your predecessors wonderful traditions with honour and increase Russia's presence on the white continent.'

President Putin, Moscow, 21 May 2017



Members of the Russian Polar Expedition of 1900-1902



THE PEACEFUL ARCTIC

Political Values – Peace, Stability & Pragmatism

The Arctic is painted as a region of exceptional peace and stability, where cooperation is maintained despite hostile international relations in other parts of the world. Although this sense of cooperation is strongly emphasized, the Arctic is also framed as a place of high political and economic stakes and a region where many of Russia's national security interests are concentrated. Peace, stability and pragmatism are the key political values that Russia uses to frame the region. These support the Kremlin's military, political and economic national power objectives, presenting the Arctic as an economically competitive but politically peaceful space.

One of the most prominent narratives that Russia projects onto the Arctic is that it is a region of peace and dialogue. Unlike other regions of high strategic value and overlapping international interests, Moscow presents the Arctic as an area where peace and cooperation are the norm.

This is a recurring narrative and a consistent feature of Russia's Arctic messaging strategy. It serves as a potentially useful way of deflecting responsibility should any conflict arise in the future, because, as far as Russia is concerned, the Arctic is a place of mutual respect and cooperation. This also feeds into the idea of Arctic exceptionalism, a commonly invoked narrative stating that peace and stability will be maintained in the Arctic regardless of how strained relations become in other areas of the world.



'Russia has always considered the Arctic as a territory of mutually respectful dialogue.'

Sergey Lavrov, Shared Voices Magazine, 25 Jan 2016



Map outlining Russia's expansive Arctic territory

Another narrative often emphasized in Moscow's official Arctic statements, is that the 'Far North' has always been a territory of special interest for Russia. The Arctic is presented as a region which has traditionally been part of Russia's sphere of influence, and, today Russia's presence in the region is justified by the fact that 'virtually all aspects of national security are concentrated there.'

The frequent use of words such as 'restore' and 'reestablish' to describe Russia's actions in the Arctic is designed to both invoke a sense of nostalgia for the Soviet era and Russia's vast presence in the High North, as well as present the Kremlin's current interest in the region as historically justified.

Legitimizing the exploitation of oil and gas resources is an important part of Russia's Arctic messaging strategy. One way of doing this, has been to frame the Arctic as an essentially "unstudied" frontier, warranting further exploration of both onshore and offshore territories.

Whilst Russia's Arctic doctrine never denies the existence or severity of Arctic climate change, it makes a conscious effort to shift attention from environmental instability and toward the economic opportunities that should be exploited. Their messaging therefore suggests that climate change and economic prosperity can easily co-exist.



'Although the Arctic is no longer a terra incognita, the region is still one of the least studied places on the planet.'

Sergey Lavrov, Fairbanks U.S, 11 May 2017



ALLIES AND ADVERSARIES

Political Values- Social Obligation & Stability

Russia is keen to emphasize the authority and rule setting powers of Arctic states. Whilst it welcomes 'cooperation' with non-Arctic states on issues involving natural science and engineering, Russia makes it clear that issues of governance and decision making should be left to Arctic state actors alone. The Indigenous populations of the Arctic are the subject of much of Russia's Arctic messaging strategy and are framed as the ultimate benefactors of Russia's economic activity in the High North. Social obligation and stability are two of the most frequently articulated values in Russia's Arctic messaging. This helps shape the perceptions of other actors and garner support Russia's political and economic national power dimensions in the region.

Limiting the regional access and influence of non-Arctic states is one of the central objectives of Russia's Arctic strategy. However, given the cooperative tone that Moscow is currently promoting in its Arctic communications, this narrative is expressed in more indirect and conciliatory terms.

Emphasizing the responsibility of Arctic states and the authority of existing bodies such as the Arctic Council, is one approach adopted by the Kremlin. This narrative suggests that the privilege of Arctic decision-making should lie with Arctic states alone.



'The Arctic states bear primary responsibility for the situation in the region. At the same time, in order to ensure sustainable development of the Arctic [...] it is necessary to engage other international actors.'

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Shared Voices magazine, 25 Jan 2016.



President Putin at the 2017 Arctic Forum in Arkhangelsk



'It is highly important that the Arctic Council are not divided into blocs and that all decisions are adopted by consensus. This makes it possible to maintain sustained Arctic cooperation, which has been successful despite an unfavorable international situation.'

Information and Press Department, Moscow, May 2017.

The Arctic Council, in which there are only eight member nations with decision making privileges, is therefore framed as the preferred top-level international structure of Arctic governance.

The Indigenous community also features prominently in Russia's Arctic messaging. Official statements and documents often emphasize the positive impact that Russia's economic development will have on the wellbeing of the country's Arctic communities. In reality, however, the Kremlin's relations with the indigenous populations of the High North are less than harmonious, particularly following the ten month suspension of activity for the Russian Association of Indigenous People of the North, Siberia and Far East, (RAIPON) President Putin declared in 2012.

Nevertheless, Moscow's Arctic agenda still places a consistent emphasis on projecting the values of altruism, compassion and social obligation, describing their Arctic policy as something 'which combines environmental protection and measures to improve the quality of life, culture and traditions of the indigenous peoples of the North.'

The final narrative Russia projects about its Arctic neighbours is more assertive and confrontational in tone, warning that Arctic peace will be threatened if states decide to 'import tensions' from other areas of foreign policy.



'We hope that our Arctic council colleagues are aware of the danger of assuming confrontational approaches and importing tensions as well.'

Sergey Lavrov, Shared Voices magazine, 25 Jan 2016

This feeds one of Russia's overarching meta-narratives- Arctic exceptionalism. As previously mentioned, this strategic narrative of Arctic exceptionalism encourages other members of the Arctic Council, as well as participating non-

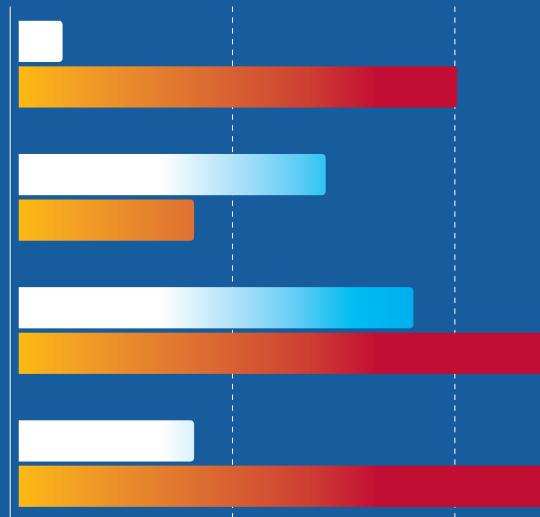
Arctic states to compartmentalize Russian foreign policy. This refers specifically to the diplomatic tensions and international rift following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

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

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

Russian economic development will benefit and respect the Indigenous community.

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



2012-2014

2015-2017



Developing the Arctic is a domestic priority for the Kremlin.

Russia's economic activity in the Arctic is environmentally conscious.

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

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

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

Russia has a long history of polar exploration and expansionism in the Arctic.

The Arctic has always been an area of special interest for Russia.

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

Russian military built up is not a sign of aggression, it is defensive in nature

The Arctic states and Arctic Council have the greatest authority in the region.

Russian economic development will benefit and respect the Indigenous community.



REGION
3 NARRATIVES



The Arctic has always been an area of special interest for Russia.

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

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

SELF
5 NARRATIVES



Russia has a long history of polar exploration and expansionism in the Arctic.

Developing the Arctic is a domestic priority for the Kremlin.

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

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OTHER
3 NARRATIVES



The Arctic states and Arctic Council have the greatest authority in the region.

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

Russian economic development will benefit and respect the Indigenous community.

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