

ISBN - 978-9934-564-29-1

ARCTIC NARRATIVES AND POLITICAL VALUES

RUSSIA, CHINA AND CANADA IN THE HIGH NORTH

PREPARED BY THE
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Riga, September 2018.

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Introduction

With almost 30% of the world's remaining natural gas supply and 13% of oil located under the Northern Polar ice, the Arctic represents a place of great untapped potential.¹⁾ After the record-breaking summer ice melts of 2007 and 2012, previously impassable stretches of Arctic waters became ice-free and navigable for the first time. This allowed oil companies to send drilling ships northward and begin the first phases of oil and gas extraction. The decline of Arctic sea ice also significantly impacts the global shipping trade, opening up shorter and more lucrative trade routes between Asia and Europe, and cutting nearly 4000 nautical miles from the route in the process.²⁾ For Russia and Canada, countries with extensive Arctic shorelines, the receding ice has also exposed significant vulnerabilities in their collective defence and security. Unrestricted passage through their internal Arctic waters means

access to Russian and Canadian territory has increased exponentially. For some governments, however, the security risks and grim long-term environmental costs of the melting Arctic ice are dwarfed by the enormity of the short-term economic opportunities on offer. Commercial interests in the Circumpolar North have never been greater. And with such high economic stakes, efforts to secure political influence and regional access to the Arctic have increased dramatically.

1. 'Assessment of Undiscovered Oil and Gas in the Arctic', Donald L. Gautier et al, Science, June 2009.

2. Heather A. Conley, Arctic Economics in the 21st Century, The Benefits and Costs of the Cold, 2013, p. 33.

For the eight countries with land or sea borders above the Arctic circle,³⁾ the melting ice has provoked hawkish attempts to defend their Arctic sovereignty and, in some cases, has resulted in complex legal disputes over shipping rights and continental shelf claims. Indeed, the legal status of Arctic waters remains highly contested. Default maritime borders extend 200 nautical miles from each nation's coastline, leaving the rest defined as 'international waters'. Frameworks of Arctic governance are also relatively unregulated, with the majority of the region governed by the domestic law of the eight Arctic states. The Arctic Council represents the highest-level intergovernmental forum of Arctic governance; however, it works solely based on consensus and lacks the power to enforce any form of international law. The growing interest of non-Arctic states complicates the question of Arctic governance even further.

Indeed, as heated as regional and border-related debate has become over the last decade, interest in the Arctic and its lucrative natural resources is by no means 'regional'. The ambitions of non-Arctic states are also being widely felt, with countries as distant as Singapore and South Korea setting down their own distinct visions for Arctic development. For China however, the Arctic has taken a particularly dominant role in foreign policy; interest has been increasing steadily since President Xi Jinping came to power in 2013, culminating in January 2018 with the publication of their first 'formalised' expression of Arctic policy. The growing influence of non-Arctic nations such as China, together with Russia's militarization of its old Soviet bases and the ongoing legal dispute over Canada's internal waters, has thrust the Arctic back into the foreground of international politics.

3. Canada, Kingdom of Denmark (Greenland & The Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Russia, and the USA)

The Importance of Narratives

For China, Russia, and Canada, the three subjects of this study, interest in the Arctic is, to a varying degree, 'material'—anchored in tangible assets such as oil, gas, and ice-free shipping channels. China is the relative 'newcomer' to Arctic affairs, whilst Russia and Canada are two of the most influential players in the High North, with over 75% of the Arctic landmass located within their national borders. Yet as 'quantifiable' as some of these interests are, they are also concerned with complex and qualitative questions of identity, culture, and soft power projection. This study situates itself in the latter, exploring the competing narratives and political values that Russia, China, and Canada are projecting in the Far North. Narrative analysis provides a number of useful insights, allowing us to look at the different ways governments communicate their political intent in the Arctic, and to explore the various social, historical, and value-based constructs used to express this intent. In simple terms, narrative analysis enables us to better understand how these countries perceive themselves, other actors, and the Arctic as a geographical region. This, in turn, creates a more meaningful picture of

Arctic political discourse, shedding light on the perception each country creates about itself, which may help us to better predict how it might behave in the future. In the context of strategic communications, narratives are designed to provoke a particular behavioural or attitudinal change in the audience. Therefore, breaking down a narrative in terms of its value, character, and directive is extremely important, as this process reveals which behaviours the narrative is designed to actively promote and which are to be discouraged. Narratives are a significant, yet relatively underexplored dimension of Arctic research. However, in order for governments to function effectively, communication must be placed at the heart of planning. Therefore, communicating one's political intent requires the careful design and implementation of narratives. It is necessary to be aware of existing narratives and how they may conflict with or undermine the goals of one's own narratives. In our global information era, the 'good old' concept of winning hearts and minds has become more important than ever.

Methodology

As this research is ‘narrative driven’, meaning it focuses on the particular narratives or stories that Russia, China, and Canada construct about itself and the Arctic, the methodology is based on a qualitative interpretation of the sources. The sources were drawn from official government resources only—press statements related to the Arctic and official policy, doctrine, and speeches that have been made publicly available in English since 2012. The subjects of this study—Russia, China, and Canada—have radically different models of governance, international political alignment, and status within the Arctic Council. They were selected deliberately in order to draw wider and more meaningful points of comparison.

The content analysis for this study was conducted through first identifying the key issues emphasised in each source document, and then identifying the main narratives used to frame these issues. Once the narratives were identified, they were coded by their ‘strategic frames’, and categorised according to their national power dimensions.⁴⁾ The narratives were divided into three categories: ‘self’—the identity each country builds in the Arctic, ‘region’—the vision a country projects upon the region itself, and ‘others’— how a

country frames its relations with other actors in the Arctic. The political value, character, and behavioural directives of each narrative were identified using a method adapted from Ethel Albert’s ‘classification of a value system’.⁵⁾ The term ‘political value’ refers to the basic prescriptive belief that shapes individual or group political behaviour, whereas the ‘directive’ guides other actors towards desirable action and steers them away from destructive behaviour. Consider this narrative as an example of a political value: ‘Russia is the natural leader of Arctic affairs.’ Here we can identify two opposing behavioural directives. The first, encourages other actors to accept Russia’s leading role in Arctic governance, whilst the second discourages behaviour that may challenge the existing status quo and Russia’s authority in the Arctic. A narrative can also provide a sense of moral character, indicating the ‘virtues’ and ‘vices’ each country considers supportive or harmful to their overall strategic interests. For Russia, virtues include strength and rationality, whilst qualities such as weakness and indecisiveness are framed as moral ‘vices.’

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

5. Ethel Albert, ‘The Classification of values: A Method and Illustration’, *American Anthropologist* 58.2 (1956).

Narrative

*National
power
dimension*



Political Value 1

Political Value 2



Directive

Character



Do

Don't



Virtue

Vice

Part I: Building Arctic Identities

A range of Arctic narratives with associated political values and behavioural directives have emerged from the Russian, Chinese, and Canadian sources analysed in this study. Narratives that are ‘identity-focused’, or describe how a country sees itself and its role within the Arctic, serve two primary purposes. From an internal perspective, building a shared identity in the Arctic ties domestic audiences to the region and forges an emotional and often romanticised connection with it. From an external perspective, these identities help shape relations with foreign actors and provide a framework for guiding policy, and setting behavioural norms. Any country wishing to secure its long-term strategic interests in the Arctic must build an identity with a clearly defined role in the region.

As China, Canada, and Russia have significant presence and overlapping interests in the Arctic, the majority of the narratives identified are focused on building a distinctive national identity in the Arctic. Efforts to construct an Arctic identity are visible in government communications at every level—from press releases and public speeches to more formalised expressions of Arctic strategy such as official policy doctrines.

However, as useful as identity building can be for managing public perceptions and securing longer-term strategic interests, China, Russia, and Canada, appear to have faced considerable challenges in constructing them. Often the values projected in their Arctic narratives are inconsistent with messages sent in other areas of foreign policy.

“*China often frames itself as a trustworthy and legitimate Arctic player, yet internationally it has acquired a less-than-favourable reputation for human rights violations and autocratic political leadership.*”

The Kremlin, too, has faced international sanctions for the annexation of Crimea, and backlash against its militarisation of the Arctic and refortification of old Soviet bases; these actions make its promotion of Arctic ‘peace’ and ‘co-operation’ hard to accept at face value. The Canadian narratives identified in this study also seem to send a mixed set of messages, showing a government determined to deter foreign infringements on its Arctic sovereignty on the one hand, yet promoting a more tolerant, more domestically-orientated image of the Arctic on the other.

RUSSIA

Russia—an Historically Arctic Nation

According to previous research conducted by the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, Russia often uses history as a tool for constructing its national identity and unifying different parts of its population.⁶ The narratives we analysed make frequent reference to Russia's historic connection to the Arctic and long history of polar exploration. Projected through these historic links to the Arctic, 'tradition' emerges as one of the most commonly expressed values in Russia's Arctic narratives. References to Russia's Arctic 'heroics' from the time of the Tsars to the Soviet era appear throughout, invoking certain nostalgia for the Stalinist era and the heavy militarisation of the Arctic. The Russian polar expeditions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries provide another example of Russia's 'Arctic heroics', and the source on which Russia's contemporary Arctic identity seems to be modelled.

Russia's Arctic speeches often take place in historically symbolic places, such as the headquarters of the Russian Geographical Society—a scientific exploration society founded in 1845. President Putin has taken pains to release statements on historically

significant days. On 'Polar Explorers Day' in May of 2017, the President paid tribute to the 'many generations of courageous, spirited people—scientists, geologists, sailors and pilots who selflessly served their fatherland, glorifying our country as a great polar nation'.⁷

“This projection of polar history is key to understanding the Russian identity in the Arctic, signalling to both foreign and domestic audiences that Russia's increasingly militarised presence in the white continent is a natural and justified continuation of history.”

The Pragmatic Arctic Leader

As important as this historical legacy may be, Russia's narratives regarding the Arctic seem to be more firmly anchored in the political dimension, rather than the historical. Across the six years of policy statements and speeches analysed for this study, the Kremlin has made numerous references to the political authority and pragmatic leadership that Russia exerts in the Arctic. One of the main narratives that emerges is that Russia

6. <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/russias-footprint-nordic-baltic-information-environment-0>, p. 27.

7. 'Greetings on Polar Explorer's Day', President of Russia, 21 May 2017, <https://bit.ly/2rEN6ug>



Members of the Russian Polar Expedition of 1900-1902

is the natural leader and principle stakeholder in Arctic affairs; a role often justified by its geography and the vast physical territory it holds in the Arctic. Like those of other countries with leadership claims in the Arctic,⁸⁾ Russian narratives seem to equate their territorial dominance in the region with a profound sense of geo-political dominance.

During his speech at the Territory of Dialogue International Forum in Arkhangelsk in March 2017, President Putin was keen to emphasise that Russia, 'which accounts for approximately a third of the Arctic zone, is aware of its special responsibility for this territory'.⁹⁾ In a visit to Franz Josef Land in 2017, the President once again justified his country's authoritative policy in the High North in purely geographical terms, explaining that 'Russia has consistently been increasing its presence in the Arctic', which is only 'natural for the largest Arctic state'.¹⁰⁾ This narrative, which encourages other Arctic players to respect Russia's natural leadership in the Far North, has appeared consistently throughout the sources analysed, but was particularly prominent between 2012–2014, before the

annexation of Crimea and the general souring of East-West relations.

On the Defensive

In the years just after Russia's invasion of Crimea, as economic sanctions mounted, narratives emphasising Russia's authoritative role in the Arctic began to fade from the discourse analysed. Whilst claims to leadership never disappear completely from their Arctic statements, a more defensive tone seeps into Russia's Arctic narratives from 2014 onwards. In a number of the sources studied, President Putin redefines Russia's presence in the Arctic as 'regional' and defensive in nature, encouraging others to shed the perception of Russia as an 'aggressor' in the region, and to accept its peaceful military posture. When asked about Russia's 'aggressive behaviour' in the Arctic during an international forum, President Putin asserted that 'what we are doing is local in nature' since the military activity 'is taking place on Russia's own territory'.¹¹⁾

8. Countries, including Canada and the United States, that have chaired the Arctic Council between 2013–2017.

9. 'The Arctic: Territory of Dialogue international forum', President of Russia, 30 March 2017, <https://bit.ly/2nA8DRu>

10. 'Meeting on Arctic region's comprehensive development', President of Russia, 29 March 2017, <https://bit.ly/2ONNDFK>

11. 'The Arctic: Territory of Dialogue international forum'.

In the narratives analysed, the Kremlin routinely portrayed its military presence in the Arctic as 'no different to any other country'; a statement quickly debunked by comparing the narratives of the other two nations included in this study.¹²⁾

The Environmentally Conscious Actor

From leadership and authority to peace and patriotism, the values that Russia projects about itself in the political and military dimensions are wide-ranging and correlate closely with events unfolding in other areas of its foreign policy. However, the official image the Kremlin promotes regarding the economic dimension has remained remarkably consistent over the last six years. One of the most frequently-invoked narratives in the policy statements and speeches made by President Putin since 2012 frames Russia as responsible and environmentally conscious actor. Despite the rapid development of ship manufacturing, and the licensing of state-controlled oil giant Rosneft in the Laptev Sea, the Kremlin's Arctic policy claims to 'pursue a balance between economic activity and preservation of the environment'.¹³⁾ In 2012, during a meeting with participants of an environmental expedition to Franz Josef

Land, President Putin delivered a speech in which he outlined the delicate 'balance between development and preservation of the natural environment' struck by Russia's Arctic policy.¹⁴⁾ And, in 2014, during a meeting on the 'Efficient and Safe Development of the Arctic', President Putin referred to the 'professional' manner in which Russia is developing the Arctic, citing many examples of 'fruitful cooperation between business and environmental organizations'.¹⁵⁾ President Putin seems to have taken every opportunity to reinforce the image of Russia as an eco-friendly, yet economically savvy Arctic actor. Expressions of Russia's environmental credentials are made in almost every public statement or policy document examined for this study. For the other two countries analysed below, environmental consciousness appears to be an inbuilt, non-negotiable feature of their Arctic identities, regardless of whether these values have any bearing on their actions in reality. Nevertheless, the fact that environmentalism plays such a pivotal role Russia's Arctic identity, at least on paper, is significant and signals a departure from the past. Some prominent Arctic researchers, such as Lincoln Edson Flake, have called President Putin's Arctic foreign policy over the last five years a more 'thoughtful approach'.¹⁶⁾

12. Ibid.

13. 'Meeting on the efficient and safe development of the Arctic', President of Russia, 5 June 2014, <https://bit.ly/2AJqvW9>

14. 'Meeting with participants in an environmental expedition to Franz Josef Land Archipelago', President of Russia, 30 July 2012, <https://bit.ly/2M8xLzf>

15. 'Meeting on the efficient and safe development of the Arctic'

16. Lincoln Edson Flake, 'Russia's Security Intentions in a Melting Arctic', *Military and Strategic Affairs* 6.1 (2014), p. 105.



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

CHINA

China—‘Testing the (Arctic) Waters’

Despite its global status as a great power, the Chinese government has faced considerable obstacles in carving out an acceptable identity and role in the Arctic. As an external actor with no geographical ties to the region, this study demonstrates just how cautiously Beijing frames its Arctic interests and ambitions.

“Unlike Russia and Canada, China has no history of polar exploration or engagement in the Arctic, and so has been forced to construct much more tenuous historical ties to the region.

China’s adherence to the 1920 Svalbard Treaty—one of the first international accords signed in the Arctic—is regularly cited in the statements and speeches we analysed, despite the fact that Chinese involvement in Arctic affairs remained virtually non-existent until the 1990s when state sponsored scientific projects slowly began to accelerate.¹⁷⁾

Inconsistencies in China’s Arctic messaging seem almost inevitable given the range of challenges and international sensitivities Beijing is navigating in the region. For a country used to challenging international frameworks and norms, finding the appropriate tone for its Arctic messaging, seems to have been particularly difficult.

The statements, speeches, and policy papers we analysed show that the Chinese government is projecting a contradictory set of political values and narratives regarding the Arctic. Some narratives are more assertive in nature, encouraging others to accept China as a legitimate and capable actor in the Arctic, whilst other narratives adopt a passive tone, reassuring their Arctic neighbours that China represents little threat to the existing balance of power in the High North.

The Near-Arctic State

Since the publication of its first Arctic Policy paper in January 2018, the debate about China’s role in the Arctic has intensified. The white paper represents the first unified presentation of Chinese Arctic policy, and has attracted a great deal of attention from both academics and the mainstream international media. The ten-page document, designed to ‘expound China’s basic position on Arctic affairs and elaborate its policy goals’, covers a diverse range of topics—from the principles of ‘lawful governance’ to the development of Arctic shipping routes.¹⁸⁾

17. ‘China’s Arctic Policy – Full Text – White Paper’, The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 26 January 2018, <https://bit.ly/2DKGMLs>, and, ‘Keynote Speech by Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming at the China Country Session of the Third Arctic Circle Assembly’, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 17 October 2015, <https://bit.ly/20i9gx3>

18. ‘China’s Arctic Policy’.



Vice Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou shows a white paper on China's Arctic policy during a press conference in Beijing, Jan 2018

However, for all the material covered in the policy paper, there is one phrase in particular that has captured the attention of the international community—China's identification as a 'Near-Arctic state'. Our analysis demonstrated that one of the central narratives emerging over the last five years portrays China as an important stakeholder in the Arctic with legitimate national interests in the region. Although this claim appears throughout the 2018 white paper, China has been cautiously referring to itself as an 'Near-Arctic state' and promoting itself as an active player in the region long before publishing its official Arctic strategy. Since 2012, the Chinese government has promoted a number of different narratives supporting its claim of being a 'Near-Arctic State' and legitimate stakeholder in the region. One of the most commonly cited statements justifying this title is the disproportionate and, therefore,

'proximate' impact that Arctic climate change is having on Chinese society. In 2012, as China's application to the Arctic Council was under way, Ambassador Lan Lijun laid out the now-familiar argument that Arctic climate change was having a 'significant impact' on 'China's climate, ecological and agricultural production', therefore China should be considered a 'Near-Arctic State'.¹⁹⁾ During a speech on Chinese-Nordic cooperation in 2014, Jia Guide of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated the 'myriad of ways' China is affected by 'the natural changes, economic developments, and social changes in the Arctic'. Climate change, therefore, provides a useful justification for China's presence in the Arctic, however it also leaves the Chinese government open to potential criticism considering the country's history as the world's largest CO₂ emitter.²⁰⁾

19. 'Statement by HE Ambassador Lan Lijun at the meeting between the Swedish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council and Observers', Arctic Council, 8 October 2012, <https://bit.ly/2MqIW3l>

20. Yuli Shan et al, 'China CO2 emission accounts 1997-2015', Scientific Data 5, (2018).

Reciprocal Respect

As questionable as this reasoning may be, China's 'Near-Arctic State' narrative plays an important role in shaping other dimensions of its Arctic identity. In many of the documents and speeches examined, the concept was used to contextualise Beijing's broader goals in the Arctic and to reinforce its position as an equal partner in the region. According to Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming, the 'direct impact' of Arctic climate change means 'China is a major stakeholder in the Arctic.'²¹⁾ Other senior government officials have also linked China's 'great interest in Arctic affairs' to the various effects that the 'natural changes in the Arctic' are having on the country.²²⁾ Branding itself a 'Near-Arctic State' is one way the Chinese government can justify its presence in the region and nudge other Arctic states into respecting their 'equal' interests in the North.

References to the rights and interests of non-Arctic nations such as China appear frequently throughout the sources analysed. This narrative calls for the interests of other non- or 'Near-Arctic' states to be respected in the same way China respects the sovereign rights of Arctic states. Respect is one of

the key values expressed in China's Arctic narratives, yet it is articulated in such a way as to help Beijing leverage greater influence in the region. The 2018 white paper and earlier statements often emphasise that although 'respect is the key basis for China's participation in Arctic affairs', this 'respect should be reciprocal' recognising the 'overall interests of the international community in the Arctic'.²³⁾

Playing by the Rules

Two core narratives have dominated China's Arctic statements, speeches, and policy documents over all six years studied. The first is China as a law-abiding actor that respects the sovereignty of the other Arctic states and represents little threat to the existing status quo. The second adopts the same reassuring tone, promoting China as an environmentally responsible actor whose Arctic policy always puts environmental preservation before economic gain. Since 2012, when China began promoting its presence in the Arctic, Beijing has gone to great lengths to build its reputation as a law-abiding and trustworthy actor.

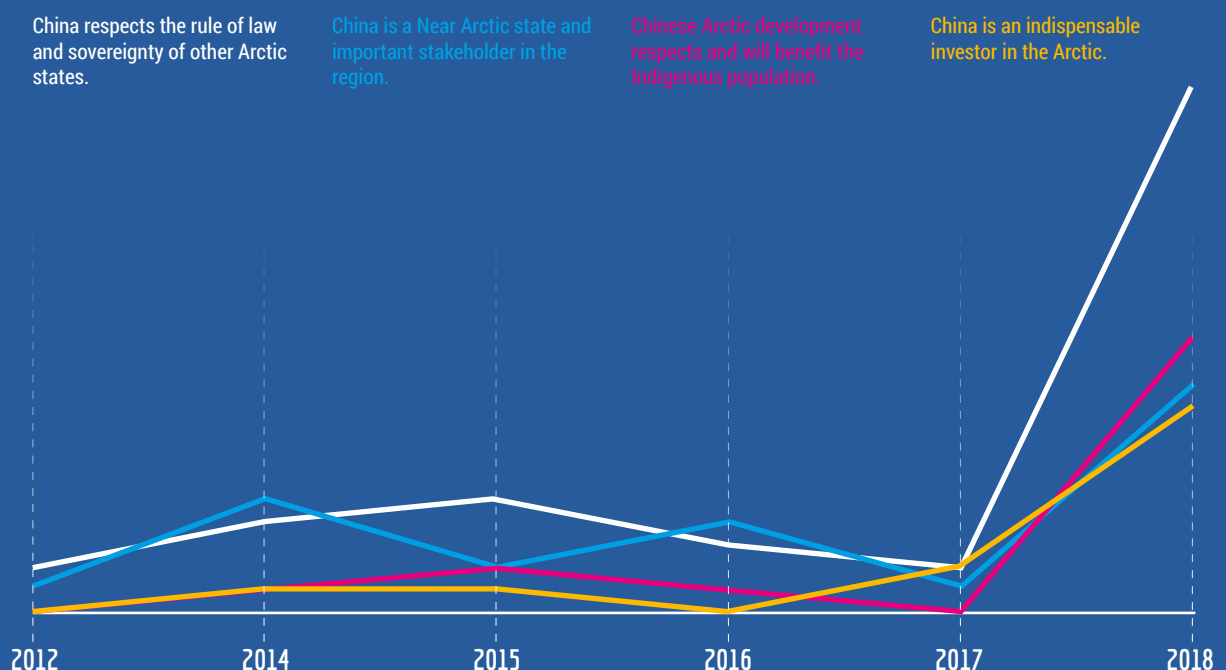
21. Keynote Speech by Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming at the China Country Session of the Third Arctic Circle Assembly, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 17 October 2015, <https://bit.ly/20i9gx3>

22. 'Jia Guide at #ArcticCircle2014, China-Nordic Arctic Cooperation', Vimeo, Arctic Circle Secretariat, 8 November 2014, <https://bit.ly/2M1H8By>

23. 'China's Arctic Policy' Ibid.

Our study found that Beijing began to demonstrate its peaceful and rule-abiding credentials more emphatically after China was admitted to the Arctic Council as an observer—a move initially opposed by Canada and Russia, the two countries most interested in protecting their Arctic sovereignty. China’s Arctic policy paper stresses the country’s endorsements of international law,

highlighting its ‘significant contribution’ to the Paris Climate Accord, and praising the UNCLOS (The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea), the work of the Arctic Council, and the Svalbard Treaty for ‘ensuring fair and reasonable order in the region’.²⁴⁾



24. Ibid.

The 'Indispensable' Investor

From an economic perspective too, Chinese activities in the Arctic, from offshore drilling to the development of new shipping routes, are almost always qualified by some sort of pledge to 'promote the sustainable development of the region.'²⁵ The rate at which this narrative appears in the Arctic policy paper and earlier statements may provoke considerable scepticism from other Arctic nations. China's record as the biggest producer of CO₂ in the world is somewhat inconsistent with the environmentally conscious image it projects in the Arctic, particularly its claims to pursue the 'rational utilisation' of Arctic resources and 'realize the harmonious co-existence of man and nature'.²⁶

According to some Arctic scholars, such statements undermine the sincerity of China's Arctic messaging and prove that the Jinping government is 'simply parroting back what the Arctic states want to hear.'²⁷ Echoing the rhetoric of other Arctic states and calming the inevitable alarm triggered by Beijing's expanding presence in the Arctic have been a consistent feature of the discourse analysed, and appeared early on, before China's admission to the Arctic Council, as well as in the January Arctic policy paper. The narratives analysed in this study highlights the fact that finding an acceptable voice and identity in the Arctic has been a challenge for the Chinese government.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Adam Lajeunesse and P Whitney Lackenbauer, 'China's Arctic Ambitions: The New Arctic Policy of a Near Arctic State', *Politics*, 2 February 2018.

This dilemma has been openly acknowledged in Chinese statements, with some officials explaining in China's intention to neither 'overstep' nor 'be absent from Arctic affairs.'²⁸⁾

From the sources analysed in this research, a number of different narratives emerge which help resolve China's 'identity crisis' in the Arctic.

“For example, by framing itself as an indispensable investor and valuable source of ‘scientific wisdom’, China presents a politically palatable mechanism for raising its profile in the Far North.

Chinese banks have become an important source of investments for oil and mining projects since the EU imposed economic sanctions against Russia and the downturn in global commodities. Chinese banks invested over \$750 million in Russia's Yamal LNG oil project in 2015 alone. This, along with the range of scientific expeditions China has sponsored

since the early 1990s, has emboldened Beijing to promote China as 'problem solver' with an 'entrepreneurial' role in the Arctic. Examples of China's scientific contributions to the Arctic can be found throughout the official speeches and statements produced since 2012. In China's Arctic Policy however, expressions of the 'great value' China brings to the Arctic are particularly brazen. The opening paragraph of China's Arctic policy paper describes the Chinese government as having 'spared no efforts to contribute its wisdom to the development of the Arctic region', going on to explain the 'major role' that 'China's capital, technology, market and knowledge is expected to play in expanding the network of shipping routes and facilitating the economic and social progress of the coastal states along the routes.'²⁹⁾ Beijing seems to have understood that its chances of gaining influence and access in the Arctic are best served, not through the territorial approach of Russia and Canada, but through its own 'entrepreneurial' one.



Members of a Chinese Arctic expedition raise China's national flag at a research station on Svalbard, Norway, 2001.

28. 'Scio briefing on China's policy on the Arctic', The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 29 January 2018, <https://bit.ly/2M2kF7H>

29. 'China's Arctic Policy'

CANADA

Canada's 'Northern Soul'

Despite major differences in demographics, history, and forms of governance, the Russian and Canadian governments have been projecting a remarkably similar set of political values in their Arctic narratives over the last five years. Leadership, patriotism, and co-operation have shaped Canada's Arctic messaging and expressions of 'self' as much as they have influenced Russia's. As countries with vast Northern territories and similar concerns over resource development and protection of maritime sovereignty, perhaps this convergence of values and Arctic narratives should be no surprise. What links these two Arctic nations more closely than others, however, is the fundamental role the Arctic plays in shaping both national identities. The concept of the Arctic is an emotive subject in Canada, as one Canadian cultural scholar has explained, and, like official Russian statements that commonly refer to the Arctic as the 'High North', Canadian government narratives often blur the distinction between where the 'North of Canada' ends and the rest of the Arctic begins.³⁰⁾ The Canadian Arctic identity is often expressed through the historical dimension, frequently referencing Canada's unique Arctic heritage, its 'rich' polar culture, and the 'thousands of years

Indigenous peoples have survived and thrived in the snow'.³¹⁾ Canada's inherently 'Northern character' and deep-rooted historical ties to the Arctic comprise one of the most dominant narratives emerging from our research. In a speech marking the 20th Anniversary of the Arctic Council, former Foreign Minister Stéphane Dion, spoke of Canada's 'northern soul' and the 'northern belongings', sentiment that 'fills [the country] with pride'.³²⁾ Carolyn Bennet, Canada's Indigenous Affairs Minister, presents a similarly historicised vision of Canada's Arctic identity, citing the 'boldness and strength' of Canada's Arctic heritage, which 'is even [mentioned] in our national anthem, 'the true north, strong and free'.³³⁾

According to some of the literature, these historical narratives were invoked particularly aggressively during the Harper administration.³⁴⁾ The period 2013–2015, Canada most recent tenure as chair of the Arctic Council, is often regarded as a particularly confrontational phase in Canada's Arctic strategy, and a time when the historical narrative featured more prominently in its Arctic messaging.³⁵⁾

30. Danita Catherine Burke, *International Disputes and Cultural Ideas in the Canadian Arctic*, (Odense, 2018), p. 114.

31. 'The Arctic Council at 20 years: More necessary than ever', *Who Owns The Arctic?*, 10 March 2016, <https://bit.ly/2vIICFS>

32. Ibid.

33. 'Minister Bennett's speech to the Arctic Circle Assembly', *Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada*, 14 October 2017, <https://bit.ly/2M5Tw2K>

34. Greg Sharp, 'Trudeau and Canada's Arctic priorities: more of the same', *The Arctic Institute*, December 2016.

35. 'The Arctic Council at 20'.



The Canadian Arctic Archipelago and Northwest Passage

However, our research did not find a significant peak in this narrative during the Harper years nor any decline when Prime Minister Trudeau took office at the end of 2015. In fact, in the speeches, press statements, and policy ‘frameworks’ published since 2016, the Trudeau government has placed equal, if not greater, emphasis on Canada’s historical legacy in the North. References to Canada’s ‘northern belongings’, ‘collective heritage’, and other historically internalised assumptions about Canada’s role in the Arctic appear frequently in the liberal government’s messaging. The discovery of the Franklin wrecks, the two British Navy vessels that went missing in Canadian Arctic waters in 1846, are offered as further evidence of Canada’s deep-rooted Arctic heritage. In September 2017, the Trudeau government issued various press statements underlining the importance of ‘commemorating these sites

of history’ and the ‘people and places of the North.’³⁶⁾ Discoveries such as these provide important identity-shaping moments for the government, particularly since the ships went missing in pursuit of the ‘Northwest Passage’, the sea corridor that most powerfully symbolises Canadian Arctic sovereignty. The discourse analysed demonstrates that the Canadian government, much like the Russian government, often refers to itself as an authentic ‘Arctic’ nation, using this historic title to add weight to their Arctic narrative and to reinforce the political values of tradition and patriotism. Moreover, this narrative, which emphasises the notion that Canadian Northerners have inhabited the Arctic ‘long before the region was of interest to the rest of the world’,³⁷⁾ sends a clear message to non-Arctic nations—respect Canada’s historic Arctic authority.

36. ‘The Government of Canada Recognise the National Historic Importance of the Wrecks of HMS Erebus and HMS Terror’, Government of Canada, 2 September 2017, <https://bit.ly/2hnCThG>

37. ‘Address by Minister Aglukkaq to the Eighth Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council on Canada’s Arctic Council Chairmanship (2013–15)’, Government of Canada, 15 May 2013, <https://bit.ly/2KBbiWO>

The Steward of the North

In many of the statements and speeches analysed in this study, Canada portrays itself as a global leader in Arctic affairs, positioning itself as a 'responsible steward' of Arctic governance and the guardian of its fragile eco-system. Canada's Arctic narratives commonly emphasise the country's robust Arctic leadership—its role in the creation of the Arctic Council, an organisation which was 'largely a product of [Canada's] diplomacy and leadership', Canada's 'global leadership in conservation efforts', and Canada's 'promotion and development of new knowledge' in Arctic research.³⁸⁾ Implicit in many of these statements, particularly in documents issued by the Trudeau government, is the suggestion that Canada is taking a leading role in tackling Arctic climate change and thus fulfils 'the unique ecological stewardship needs of the North.'³⁹⁾ During a speech in Ottawa 2016, former Foreign Minister Stéphane Dion reiterated this point, arguing that 'now more than ever, the world is counting on Canada as the responsible steward of this great barometer of our planet'.⁴⁰⁾ The Trudeau government has adopted the term 'stewardship' to describe the

nature of Canadian leadership in the Arctic. To some commentators, including leading Arctic scholars Joel Plouffe and Heather Exner-Pirot, 'stewardship' represents a more 'progressive term' and one which 'better describes the rightful role of government in addressing the challenge in the region'.⁴¹⁾

“Whether ‘stewardship’ represents a genuinely new expression of Canadian identity or just another articulation of ‘leadership’, the narratives promoted by the Trudeau government indicate a willingness to play a more active and less isolationist role in Arctic affairs compared to its conservative predecessor.

The justifications the Canadian sources give for taking a more dominant role in Arctic affairs and regulatory systems are strikingly similar those identified in the Russian sources. As the two largest Arctic states, with sizeable Indigenous populations, Canada and Russia promote a similar narrative of having the highest stakes in the Arctic and the most to lose from irresponsible exploitation of resources.



Canada's former foreign minister delivering a speech on the 20th anniversary of the Arctic Council,

Sept 2016

38. 'Canada's Arctic Policy Framework: Discussion guide, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada', 28 November 2017, <https://bit.ly/2vqZp0r>

39. 'Canada's North: Overcoming the challenges to Leverage the Opportunities', Government of Canada, 1 January 2010, <https://bit.ly/20fjy12>

40. 'The Arctic Council at 20'.

41. Joel Plouffe and Heather Exner-Pirot, 'In search of a concrete Arctic policy', Arctic Deeply, October 2016.

Part II: Framing the Region

Although Russia, China, and Canada have all constructed their own distinct identities in the Arctic, with some surprising overlaps in political values and strategic narratives, the way in which these governments frame the region as a whole offers another interesting point of comparison. The divergence between how geographically 'Arctic' nations such as Canada and Russia, and non-Arctic states such as China, frame the region as a whole is particularly notable. Our research identified the use of two distinct approaches, or ways of conceptualising the Arctic. The first is a globalist or 'deterritorialised' perspective of the Arctic, favoured by non-Arctic nations such as China. This approach depicts the Arctic as an international space or 'global commons' where the development of the region has consequences for the entirety of mankind, not just for the immediate Arctic states. The second is a more territorial and sovereign-centric perspective, favoured by the two the traditionally Arctic nations—Canada and Russia.

China's Global Arctic

Of all the sources analysed, China's Arctic policy paper is the most obvious example of where China has promoted this globalist perspective. It makes multiple references to the 'common interests of all', and the many issues that 'affect the interests of non-Arctic states including China'⁴². Although this narrative is invoked frequently throughout the white paper, there are other, earlier examples of where the Chinese government have promoted 'international' values in the Arctic, such as globalisation and multilateralism. Re-branding Arctic climate change as a 'trans-regional' rather than specifically 'Arctic issue' is one such instance. As early as 2012, in a meeting between the 'Swedish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council and Observers', Ambassador Lan Lijun describes climate change and international shipping as 'the trans-regional issues' that both 'Arctic states and non-Arctic states share common interests in addressing'.⁴³ One possible aim, or 'directive', of applying a globalist lens to the region is to justify Chinese involvement in the Arctic and to encourage other Arctic states to respect their 'legitimate' rights in the region. Fostering closer cooperation between Arctic and non-Arctic states can also be interpreted as an underlying behavioural directive.

42. 'China's Arctic Policy'.

43. 'Statement by HE Ambassador Lan Lijun at the meeting between the Swedish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council and Observers', Arctic Council, 8 October 2012, <https://bit.ly/2MqIW3l>

The Arctic as a Sovereign Space

As geographically Arctic nations, Canada and Russia face an entirely different set of challenges in branding the Arctic and shaping perceptions of the region.

“Where China attempts to erode the current territorial shape of the Arctic, Canadian and Russian narratives seek to reinforce it.

Sovereignty emerges as the preferred political value and interpretative filter for Canadian and Russian Arctic communications. Exercising national sovereignty and emphasising the regional rather than international nature of the ‘North’ has always been considered the cornerstone of Canadian Arctic policy, particularly during the Harper years.

Although the Trudeau government have yet to publish their official Arctic Strategy, some experts from the Arctic Institute have interpreted this relative ‘silence’ as a departure from the ‘bellicose rhetoric’ and ‘militaristic patriotism’ that characterised the Canadian Conservatives’ policy in the region.⁴⁴⁾ However, our study found that, despite softening other aspects of their Arctic messaging, the Trudeau government has placed a similar emphasis on protecting the Northwest Passage and defending Canadian Arctic Sovereignty.⁴⁵⁾ For example, the 2017 Canadian Defence Policy acknowledged the ‘rising international interest in the Arctic’, as well as ‘Russia’s ability to project force from

its Arctic territory into the North Atlantic’. In order to ‘exercise the full extent of sovereignty’ in the Arctic, the Defence Policy therefore promises an enhanced military presence in the North and modernization of its surveillance techniques.⁴⁶⁾ In contrast to the globalist vision of the Arctic presented in Chinese communications, ‘territorial integrity’ and ‘the rule of law’ are the main political values articulated in Canada’s Arctic communications.

Like Canada, Russia tends to emphasise the regional rather than global nature of the Arctic, promoting similar political values of sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Arctic is presented as a region that has always been part of Russia’s sphere of influence, and a ‘territory of special interest’ for the Kremlin.⁴⁷⁾

“Expressions of ownership frequently appear in Moscow’s official Arctic messaging, often using terms such as ‘restore’ and ‘re-establish’ to describe Russian actions in the region and to invoke nostalgia for the glory days of the Russian Arctic ‘empire’.

In contrast to the Chinese perspective, Russia’s statements tend to frame the North as a region where *national* rather than global interests prevail. This contrasts markedly from the vision of the Arctic as a ‘global commons’ promoted by Beijing, and instead goes to great lengths to reinforce a physical, territorial sense of the High North.

44. Greg Sharp, ‘Trudeau and Canada’s Arctic priorities: more of the same’, The Arctic Institute, December 2016.

45. The key item being Canada’s official claim that the waters within the archipelago are internal, versus international as maintained by the US and other nations.

46. ‘Strong, Secure, Engaged, Canada’s Defence Policy’, Government of Canada, June 2017, <https://bit.ly/2rMzmhx>

47. ‘Meeting of the Security Council on state policy in the Arctic’, President of Russia, 22 April 2014, <https://bit.ly/2AJNFFC>

Canada's Arctic Values

leadership
patriotism
cooperation
environmentalism rule of law
territorial integrity
social obligation stewardship
inclusivity
respect

Seizing an Historic (Business) Opportunity

And yet, despite differing goals and diverging narratives, there are also some notable similarities between the Chinese and Russian Arctic communication strategies. Climate change plays an important role in shaping perceptions of the Arctic for both governments, and offers a useful justification for accelerating their rate of activity in the region. Both China and Russia seem to be more willing to leverage climate change and exploit it as a narrative tool than Canada, their democratic counterpart. The 2018 white paper demonstrates Beijing's emphatic attempts to present Arctic climate change not only as a challenge to overcome, but also as an 'historic opportunity' that must be exploited.⁴⁸⁾ As the ice continues to recede and lucrative shipping channels open up, the Jinping government portrays the Arctic both as in a state of emergency and as a uniquely profitable opportunity.

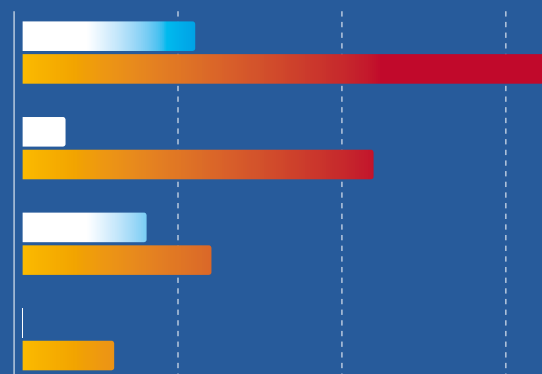
Canada's Arctic policy will be co-developed by the Indigenous community.

Canada is the responsible steward of the North.

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

Russian aggression in Ukraine should not compromise cooperation in the Arctic.

President Putin has also made repeated references to the commercial opportunities of climate change, promoting similar values of wealth and prosperity. Justifying their continued exploitation of oil and gas resources is one of the central narratives emerging from the Russian sources. Whilst Russian statements never deny the existence or severity of Arctic climate change, they often present it as a *fait accompli* in which commercial opportunities should not be passed up. Another approach is to present the Arctic as an essentially 'unknown' territory that possesses a vast range of untapped resources. Speaking at a Ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council in Fairbanks in 2017, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov argued that 'although the Arctic is no longer a *terra incognita*, the region is still one of the least-studied places on the planet'.⁴⁹⁾ For the Kremlin, the 'un-explored' status of the Arctic offers a useful pretext for further exploration and for the exploitation of its natural resources.



2013-2015 2016-2018

48. 'China's Arctic Policy'.

49. 'Statement by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council, Fairbanks, USA', The Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 11 May 2017, <https://bit.ly/2pFlbaY>

Part III: Framing Relations— Allies and Adversaries

Perhaps the one theme linking all three countries, referenced consistently throughout their respective communications, is their relationship to the Indigenous communities of the North. Despite the controversy and serious backlash President Putin faced in 2012, after suspending the activity of RAIPON (Russian Association of Indigenous People of the North, Siberia, and Far East), the documents analysed in this research highlight the great lengths to which Russia has gone to portray a harmonious relationship between Russia and the Indigenous communities of the North. Even in the immediate aftermath of the RAIPON suspension, the Kremlin continued to claim that its activities in the Arctic were focused on ‘preserving the unique life-style’ and ensuring the ‘stable development [...] of the northern indigenous peoples’.⁵⁰⁾

Accommodating the interests of Northern populations is a recurring feature of Beijing’s Arctic messaging strategy as well.

The Jinping government has made repeated promises to deliver a ‘win-win’ scenario for the region, bringing tangible benefits to Indigenous Arctic communities. China’s emphasis on the Northern stakeholders is particularly pronounced in their 2018 white paper, which repeatedly refers to China’s respect for ‘the social culture and historical traditions of the indigenous peoples’.⁵¹⁾ Unlike Canada and Russia, China is attempting to appeal to Indigenous Arctic communities over which it has no national jurisdiction. In terms of relationship building, this lack of cultural contact means that the Chinese government have been forced to construct much more tenuous contractions to the Indigenous communities. During a press briefing for China’s new Arctic policy paper, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs Kong Xuanyou referred to the ‘World Reindeer Herder Congress’ his country hosted in 2013, citing it as just one example of China’s ‘close cooperation with indigenous Arctic-based organisations’.⁵²⁾

50. ‘Meeting of the Security Council on state policy in the Arctic’, President of Russia, 22 April 2014, <https://bit.ly/2AJNfFC>

51. ‘China’s Arctic Policy’

52. ‘Scio briefing on China’s policy on the Arctic’, The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, 29 January 2018, <https://bit.ly/2M2kF7H>

For the Canadian government, improving its relations with the Indigenous communities of the North has been *the* dominant focus of its Arctic communications over the last five years.⁵³⁾ The Trudeau government has yet to publish a new Arctic framework, but has already gone to great lengths to demonstrate the inclusive and respectful nature of the development process in its Arctic narratives. In a statement released in late 2017, the government in Ottawa declared their new policy framework would be ‘co-developed’ by their ‘Northern partners’, reflecting ‘the priorities of Northerners and the Inuit, First Nation and Metis groups that have always called the North their home’.⁵⁴⁾ The term ‘co-development’ appears consistently throughout the Trudeau government’s speeches and statements, which often refer to Indigenous communities as ‘the primary players in Northern governance and decision making’—issues from which they have been historically excluded.⁵⁵⁾ Social obligation, altruism, and co-operation, are, therefore, the key political values articulated in Canada’s Arctic messaging vis-à-vis the Indigenous peoples.

Our study also found that the Harper government placed similar emphasis on improving relations with the Indigenous communities of the North.

In 2013, on the eve of Canada’s chairmanship of the Arctic Council, Minister Aglukkaq stated: ‘very simply, we will put the interests of the people who live in the Arctic first’. Addressing the socio-economic needs of Indigenous communities, diversifying the Northern economy, and closing the infrastructure gap are promises that appear in communications from both the Trudeau and Harper governments. Although both groups have promoted similar values of social obligation and co-operation when framing their relations with the Indigenous communities of the North, Trudeau’s particular emphasis on inclusivity and ‘co-development’ feeds the general perception that his Arctic strategy for Canada is focused inwards on domestic issues.

A Russian Rapprochement?

Outside the Arctic, relations between Canada and Russia have been tumultuous for over a decade, deteriorating significantly after the 2008 invasion of Georgia and the 2014 annexation of Crimea. Although both administrations implemented sanctions against Russia after 2014, this study found that these external political developments were not reflected in the Harper governments’ Arctic narratives.

53. The Canadian government’s relations with the Indigenous populations of the North have been historically strained, with Indigenous leaders being routinely excluded from Arctic policy-making and having little say over how their land and resources are managed. The Harper and Trudeau governments have made greater efforts protect Indigenous rights to establish trust between the Crown and the various Indigenous communities of the North.

54. ‘Joint Ministerial Statement: Toward a New Arctic Policy Framework’, Government of Canada, 15 November 2017, <https://bit.ly/2A8G3li>

55. ‘Canada’s North: Overcoming the challenges to Leverage the Opportunities’, Government of Canada, 1 January 2010, <https://bit.ly/2Ofjy12>



Former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Russian President Vladimir Putin at the G20 Summit in St Petersburg, 2013.

The Trudeau government also maintained cooperation with Russia in the Arctic despite the souring of East-West relations following 2014. However, unlike the Harper administration, the Liberal government's Arctic narratives made direct reference to their tactic of 'compartmentalisation' in this regard. Indeed, during a speech to the parliament in 2016, former Foreign Minister Stéphane Dion emphasised the government's intention to 'compartmentalise' the Kremlin's foreign policy and 'continue on the importance of [Arctic] co-operation'.

During this speech, Russia was framed as the other principle stakeholder in the Arctic, and one it would be 'irrational' to marginalise for the sake of national interest. This co-operation was justified by the status of Canada and Russia as the two largest Arctic states. Foreign Minister Dion explained: 'between us we control 75% of the North. To sever the links with Russia, our neighbour, serves the

interests of no one'. For Russia, this apparent shift in Canadian rhetoric strengthens its own Arctic messaging and helps legitimise its 'exceptionalist' perspective on Northern relations. This study also found that after 2014, when tensions with the Weak peaked, Russia invoked this 'exceptionalist' narrative more frequently in its Arctic communications. During a magazine interview in 2016, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spoke of the 'fruitful interaction' developing in the Arctic 'despite the international complexities'.⁵⁶⁾ Russian statements often emphasise the importance of 'depoliticised co-operation' and maintaining 'good neighbourly relations' with other members of the Arctic Council. Lavrov's insistence that 'such artificial factors as EU sanctions' should and will not influence their relations with other Arctic nations, feeds into the broader meta-narrative Russian communications are projecting in the Arctic, framing the region as a place of peace and above all 'exceptional' co-operation.⁵⁷⁾

56. 'Article by the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov "International Cooperation for Arctic Prosperity" published in Shared Voices Magazine', The Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 25 January 2016, <https://bit.ly/2vpotFs>

57. 'Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's statement and answers to media questions at join news conference following talks with Finnish Foreign Minister Timo Soini, Oulu', The Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 14 October 2015, <https://bit.ly/2vJ0roo>

The Many Faces of Arctic ‘Co-operation’

Despite significant differences in the way Russia, China, and Canada frame their Arctic relations, the narratives identified in this study all place ‘co-operation’ at the centre of their messaging strategies. What this research has highlighted however, is that the two traditionally Arctic nations—Russia and Canada—promote an entirely different conception of ‘co-operation’ compared to that of China, their ‘Near-Arctic’ neighbour. The Canadian and Russian governments both express the need to limit and monitor the influence of non-Arctic states. On issues such as climate research, engineering, and investment projects, Russian and Canadian statements project the idea that they are willing to co-operate with China and other non-Arctic states. On questions of governance

and resource management however, both governments claim ‘the Arctic states bear primary responsibility’.⁵⁸⁾ The inclusion of non-regional states in the Arctic Council is officially welcomed, however, as Canada’s former Minister of Foreign Affairs explained, only if this ‘does not diminish the central role of permanent participants’.⁵⁹⁾ Strengthening the authority of Arctic states and bolstering the legitimacy of structures such as the Arctic Council is a central narrative that runs through both Canadian and Russian communications. The Council is often framed as the ‘preeminent forum for collaboration in the North’, and the only legitimate structure of Arctic governance.⁶⁰⁾ According to Russian and Canadian sources, co-operation should be nurtured through trusted institutions such as the Arctic Council.



President Putin at the 2017 Arctic Forum in Arkhangelsk

58. Ibid.

59. ‘Video: Welcome to the Iqaluit 2015 Ministerial Meeting’, Arctic Council, 23 April 2015, <https://bit.ly/2LW5D2Z>

60. Ibid.

China's Inclusive Take on Arctic Co-operation

For Beijing on the other hand, 'co-operation' in the Arctic is framed as something quite different. In the communications analysed in this research, China implies that truly fruitful Arctic co-operation requires a 'broad perceptive' and 'the participation and contribution of various stakeholders'.⁶¹⁾

“China encourages Arctic states to increase their interaction and partnerships with the non-Arctic community, framing this type of multinationalism as the most effective vehicle for co-operation in the Far North.

Beijing's narratives regarding the Arctic Council have evolved slowly over the last six years. In earlier communications, the Chinese government went to great lengths to reassure the international community that 'the participation of observers does not prejudice the dominant role of Arctic states in

the Council'.⁶²⁾ In the following years however, Beijing began to promote narratives that subtly undercut the authority of the Arctic Council, calling for the need to diversify the structures of Arctic governance and to build a more inclusive 'multi-tiered' framework of cooperation. During a speech at the Arctic Circle in October 2016, Climate Secretary Gao Feng claimed that only through 'diversified co-operation [could] a better institutional system be put in place for the sustainable development of the Arctic',⁶³⁾ although efforts to reassure their Arctic neighbours never disappear entirely from Chinese narratives. The messages China sends about its role in the Arctic are therefore not particularly consistent, sometimes appealing the established corridors of Arctic power, whilst simultaneously calling for the creation of alternative structures that would actively undermine them.⁶⁴⁾

61. 'News Office Holds Press Conference on China's Arctic Policy White paper and Arctic Policy', The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 26 January 2018, <https://bit.ly/2MqCl8V>

62. 'Statement by HE Ambassador Lan Lijun at the meeting between the Swedish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council and Observers', Arctic Council, 8 October 2012, <https://bit.ly/2MqIW3l>

63. 'Gao Feng, Special Representative for Climate Change Negotiations of the Foreign Ministry of China, Arctic Circle 2016', Vimeo, Arctic Circle Secretariat, 30 October 2016, <https://bit.ly/2Oj4E9U>

64. Examples of some of the emerging institutions which are directly with traditional bodies for influence in the Arctic, include the AIIB, the Chinese led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the RCEP, The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

rule of law
integrity
environmentalism
cooperation globalization
social obligation and
multilateralism
progress
cultural collectivism

Conclusion and Recommendations

Validation of Methodology

This narrative-driven study offers a fresh perspective on the Arctic and its evolving political discourse. Our study has demonstrated that in order to analyse a diverse range of sources and narratives, it is first necessary to ‘zoom out’, organising the narratives into broad frames and then identifying the main political values being expressed.

This research found that over the last six years, despite their geographical and political differences, Russia, China, and Canada have promoted similar political values in the Arctic—co-operation, leadership, and stability being some key examples. Yet this methodology also involved a more granular analysis of these political values, identifying the behavioural ‘directives’ and moral ‘character’ they express. Breaking down Arctic narratives in this way to interpret their behavioural and moral prescriptions, allows for a more nuanced picture of Russian, Canadian, and Chinese messaging to emerge.

” *This research therefore demonstrates that although political values can overlap, the way in which the values are articulated and the behaviours and morality they promote can vary considerably.*

Co-operation, for example, is a value expressed consistently throughout the Arctic narratives of all three countries. The Canadian and Russian narratives suggest that co-operation should be led by traditionally Arctic states and fostered through official structures of Arctic governance—the Arctic Council. ‘Co-operation’, as conceived by Russia and Canada, should advance the interests of traditionally *Arctic* nations whilst limiting the influence of *non-Arctic* ones. China, on the other hand, frames ‘co-operation’ as a more inclusive, multinational process, achieved through *increasing* rather than limiting the participation of non-Arctic nations. Presented in this way, ‘co-operation’, becomes a useful tool for helping China gain influence in a region to which it is neither historically nor legally entitled.

” *Applying a broad-brush analysis to Arctic narratives and taking any convergence in political values at face value risks overlooking the important nuances that differentiate Russian, Chinese, and Canadian Arctic messaging.*

Identifying the broad similarities in the values projected by these three Arctic nations is certainly interesting, but it would be a mistake to generalise these findings. The values-based methodology of this study allows institutions such as NATO to examine these narratives on a more granular level, interpreting the nuanced, and at times opposing, directives behind Russian, Chinese, and Canadian Arctic narratives.

None of the countries included in this study have expressed openly hostile narratives in their Arctic communications. But this doesn't mean they don't acknowledge tensions or promote different ideas of what 'peace' in the Arctic would actually look like. For multinational organisations such as NATO, understanding these points of contention and where they could potentially materialise into physical behaviour is extremely important. Given the amount of discourse published by these different countries, applying some sort of interpretive filter to Arctic narratives is a necessity. The method adopted for this study consolidated a broad range of sources, allowing Chinese, Russian, and Canadian Arctic narratives to be analysed in a truly comparative way.

Lessons for StratCom

Methodological merits aside, there are several additional practical lessons that can be drawn from our research. First of all, the sources analysed in this research revealed a clear division between the vision promoted by Arctic states such as Canada and Russia, and the goals of non-Arctic nations such as China. Chinese narratives tend to project a more global-looking and future-orientated vision of the Arctic, whilst Canadian and Russian narratives are generally aimed at maintaining the status quo of Arctic governance and promoting more traditional, domestically focused values.

For those wishing to challenge their adversaries' narratives and change the structures of Arctic governance, understanding and identifying their core political values is extremely important. For example, attempts to counter Canadian narratives in the Arctic would likely be aimed at undermining the value of traditionalism and sovereignty whilst promoting the idea of globalism and the emergence of a trans-regional Arctic culture.

This study also found that all three nations tend to isolate their activities in the Arctic from developments in other parts of the world, compartmentalising certain aspects of foreign policy in order to maintain smooth international co-operation in the region.

This approach is nothing new in international relations. As a strategy, compartmentalisation reflects the trade-off between a state's interests and its ideals, and has long been pursued by countries, alliances, and international organisations alike—particularly in strategically significant regions such as the Arctic. From a strategic communications perspective this strategy provides both significant benefits and considerable drawbacks. First and foremost, compartmentalising foreign policy in this way ensures that co-operation is maintained no matter how strained relations become in other parts of the world. This opens channels for continued dialogue and helps avoid escalatory behaviour. On the other hand, should a government pursue compartmentalisation as a foreign relations strategy, their reputation as a trustworthy communicator might be called into question. For example, if a government promotes the values compliance with international law in their narratives, but continues 'doing business as usual' with those who violate such principles, then a dangerous inconsistency between their words and deeds emerges. Such 'say-do-gaps' can be exploited to undermine an opponent's narrative.

Above all, adopting an isolationist or 'exceptionalist' framework to Arctic relations may prove unsustainable in the long term. This study demonstrates that events unfolding outside the Arctic clearly *do* impact the Arctic narratives of all three countries considered, and this is evident in the language and tone used in communications.

Recommendations for Future Research

Whilst this study reveals some inconsistencies in how Arctic nations frame their role in the Arctic and portray the values guiding their Arctic activities, it would be of even greater value to discover if the narratives have any bearing on their actions in real life—is what they *say* actually reflected in what they *do*? Transparency and accountability have become guiding political principles. Most governments now understand that narratives can only be successful if the words, images, and deeds used are synchronised into a single coherent and credible message. Neither China nor Russia are part of the NATO alliance, and their governments aren't subject to the same scrutiny and accountability of taxpayers and a free press. It would be interesting to see how closely, if at all, their words are co-ordinated with their actions. Determining this would enable a more complete picture of the Arctic to emerge, which would help organisations such as NATO to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of different Arctic governments, and enable the identification of potentially hostile narratives and evaluation of those which are likely to transpire into hostile *activity*.

ARCTIC NARRATIVES AND POLITICAL VALUES

RUSSIA, CHINA AND CANADA IN THE HIGH NORTH

