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Russia’s Strategies in the Arctic at the Beginning of
the 21st century

PHD THESIS SUMMARY

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Russia's strategies in the Arctic at the beginning of the 21st century

Keywords: Russia, Arctic, climate change, power politics, regional security complex, exploration, assimilation, development, governance, demarcation, exploitation, military infrastructure, transport infrastructure, energy infrastructure

The issue of Russia's strategies and actions at the level of the Arctic was chosen as the research topic of this paper because it is relevant in the context of the latest developments on the international scene, considering the unpredictability and aggressiveness of the Russian state that it manifests externally. For this reason, it is necessary to understand the sources from which it consolidates its power, the Arctic territories occupying a central place in the planning of strategic actions of the Russian government. Another reason why this topic was chosen is to understand how important the Arctic is to Russia, by investigating how it demarcated, assimilated, developed and exploited the territories in the region. This topic was also approached with the aim of understanding how the Russian state acts internally and externally to fulfill its national interests of transforming the Arctic into the country's strategic resource base as a vital element in power consolidation. By researching the Arctic's development directions and actions, it is possible to discover the reasons why it is a strategic priority, respectively the elements that contribute to the consolidation of the power of the Russian state. This topic was also chosen to understand how a contemporary process like global warming was turned into a strategic advantage by the Russian state and how it was used in its favor to consolidate its power in order to challenge the current international order. By approaching this topic, a better understanding of the impact of some dynamics taking place in the Arctic on a state like Russia and the current international system is achieved.

In conclusion, the research objectives of this paper are to identify how Russia has transformed the Arctic into a strategic priority from which it is currently consolidating its power. More precisely how it formulated its strategies by combining the use of elements such as diplomacy, military, economy and industry to generate the desired results defined in terms of national interest. Another research objective is to present how a state adapts to the historical context in which it finds itself, that is, how it transforms a dynamic such as climate change into an advantage with which it consolidates its power. Finally, the objective of this research is to

verify whether Russia through Arctic projects is diversifying its economy or deepening its dependence on the export of natural resources.

The research question of this paper is: What are Russia's priorities regarding the Arctic and how has it turned it into one of the vital elements needed to consolidate power at the national and international level?

The first part of the research problem leads to the following question: Are Russia's actions in the Arctic hegemonic actions or only to ensure sovereignty over its own polar territories to serve its national interests?

The second part of the research problem leads to the following questions: What are Russia's interests in the Arctic? What are Russian interests in the Arctic good for? How does the Russian state act in the Arctic to achieve its national interests? What are the directions of action of the Russian state to achieve the goals in relation to the Arctic territories? What are the results of Russia's strategies and policies in the Arctic? Is the Arctic a source of power for Russia? Can regional stability in the Arctic be affected by conflicts in other regions? How and why do Russia's actions in the Arctic impact the current international order? Are Russia's actions in the Arctic leading to the formation of a new regional security complex or even a new conflict zone?

In order to understand and analyze the research problem related to Russia's activity in the Arctic, it is necessary that it be integrated into a theoretical framework in the field of International Relations, respectively the role that the state currently occupies and how it acts to strengthen its power. Considering the evolution of the international system and the way in which Russia relates to the interaction with other international actors (constantly pursuing a power policy), the subject of this paper will be evaluated from the perspective of the realist school of thought (in which the state occupies a central role in International Relations, has a selfish nature for the rational pursuit of its own interest that uses power as a means to influence other actors). Through this approach, the following aspects will be evaluated: the role the state occupies as a central actor in International Relations, which are the means that help it consolidate its power, how it adapts its behavior to achieve national interests and how a region is transformed into a strategic and geopolitical advantage. This approach is adopted because the specialized literature identifies the Arctic as a region of peace that has a legal framework based on which regional disputes are resolved peacefully (the Ilulissat Declaration). However, looking at the situation from a realistic perspective, the Russian state acts at the regional level in such a way as to

maximize its interests and achieve the priorities of a geopolitical nature, military positioning (for strategic deterrence), protection and development of the Northern Sea Route corridor and assimilation resources, each detail being an element that contributes to the consolidation of power. Considering the evolution of the behavior of the Russian state in the last two decades, the deterioration of the relationship with the West, and applying the presented realistic perspective, there are high chances that regional stability at the level of the Arctic will be affected and turn into a new regional security complex. Therefore, this work involves the application of the principles of one of the most common currents in the field of International Relations (realist school of thought) to the interpretation and analysis of Russia's strategies and actions in the Arctic.

By approaching this research topic, the aim is to demonstrate that the nature of some of the contemporary states has remained selfish, still acting on the basis of an agenda based on the national interest of consolidating power against collective international interests of mutual gain. The purpose of this paper is to present how Russia uses the Arctic and acts on it to achieve its interests and objectives of power consolidation, respectively to understand how the contemporary Russian state acts and is constructed. Through this approach and perspective on Russia's actions in the region, the paper can contribute to covering some gaps in the literature. One of the main contributions of this paper lies in the detailed documentation of how the Russian state has assimilated and developed the Arctic territories through the use of primary sources of government and state organizations (websites and official documents), beyond the simple presentation of primary documents and of some perspectives from literature, presenting in this way a much broader perspective in relation to this subject. This paper seeks to demonstrate that the Arctic for Russia is a source from which it strengthens its power at the national and international level, at the same time there is the possibility that the regional security environment in the Arctic will be affected by events involving the Russian state in other regions such as Eastern Europe. Identifying Russia's main directions of action regarding the Arctic will demonstrate that the Russian state is acting selfishly in terms of consolidating power and not maintaining regional stability.

This research is carried out with the aim of evaluating and analyzing how Russia through its policies, strategies and actions has turned the Arctic into a strategic advantage, in order to be able to formulate a series of explanations as to why and how it consolidate its power in the 21st

century. This approach seeks to identify the intentions behind Russia's policies and strategies for the Arctic in order to determine the priority directions towards which the actions of the Russian state have been directed. Following the identification of the main directions of action, the state's external and internal actions will be presented and evaluated, respectively the way in which it met the objectives established in the strategic planning documents. By assessing the directions of action, we can understand how Russia influences the international system and the Arctic. The identified research objectives are aligned with the formulated analysis framework that takes into account the specialized literature and the theoretical part regarding the way in which the state as the main actor acts at the level of the international system. Taking into account the theoretical framework, the means and methods to strengthen its power used by the Russian state through policies and strategies for the Arctic necessary to act at the international level and challenge the current international order will be identified. Following the identification of the directions of action, it is possible to determine which are the elements with the help of which the Russian state seeks to consolidate its power, respectively the reasons behind the actions it undertakes in the Arctic. By identifying these elements, one can understand how Russia came to influence the Arctic and the current international system, more precisely the means that influence regional and global policies, as well as who establishes the mechanism of their operation. Qualitative and quantitative research methodologies will be used to answer these research objectives. The qualitative methodology consists in the review of literature taken from secondary sources and the analysis of the primary documents after which the Russian state formulated its actions at the level of the Arctic. The quantitative methodology involves the corroboration and analysis of some figures and data taken from primary and secondary sources through which the research hypotheses will be confirmed or denied. Following the use of both types of methodology, conclusions and answers to the research problem and research questions will be formulated.

The paper consists of an introduction, four chapters and conclusions. The introduction and first chapter identify the subject of this work, Russia's strategies in the Arctic and how its assimilation has become one of the sources of power of the contemporary Russian state. This section presents the evolution of contemporary Russia and the way it consolidates its power is linked to the Arctic, a detail that can be interpreted through the lens of the realist school of thought in which regarding the systemic evolution of International Relations, the power politics

carried out by states is still relevant at the level international, and finally the primary documents through which the Russian state asserts its interest and intentions regarding the Arctic territories are addressed. Also, this chapter includes the theory section that details the theoretical framework of realism through which Russia's actions are interpreted and the methodology section used in the interpretation of data collected from primary sources (documents, strategies and information collected directly from official websites of the Russian government and organizations operating in the region) and secondary (papers and articles written about Russia's activity in the Arctic), applying quantitative and qualitative methods.

The second chapter, presents how over time Russia in its various forms has explored, assimilated and developed the Arctic territories with the aim of understanding how interests have evolved over time and whether the Arctic represented a source of power as it is today. In the third chapter, the issue of how Russia manages its sovereignty in the Arctic is addressed, presenting how the polar territories are governed and how the Russian state claimed and demarcated its Arctic territories. And the last chapter is about how Russia has developed the Arctic territories to transform them into a source from which it draws its power, namely by strengthening the military presence, developing the transport network and the infrastructure for extracting natural resources.

Finally, the conclusions will be formulated by interpreting the data from each chapter to answer the research questions, more specifically whether the Arctic is one of the sources of power of the Russian state and if Russia's activity in the region leads to the emergence of a new regional security complex.

Considering the research problem proposed for this research, the priorities of the Russian state regarding the Arctic are its transformation into a resource base of strategic importance, maintaining regional stability with the help of international cooperation, transforming the Northern Sea Route into a functional national transport network and capitalization of energy resources on a large scale. In this way, the transformation of the Arctic into an important component of the Russian economy has become one of the main means by which the Russian state consolidates its power in the 21st century.

Regarding the first part of the research problem, Russia's actions in the Arctic are to assimilate and transform it into a means of consolidating power, respectively to exercise control over the territories that belong to it to serve its national interests. Taking into account this

perspective, the Russian state seeks to cooperate with the other states in the region and to delimit its borders in a peaceful way, in order to maintain the regional stability necessary to create conditions conducive to the development of these territories. These details reveal that Russia's actions in the Arctic are to exercise control over its territories in the region to develop them as a means of consolidating its power.

Regarding the second part of the research problem, Russia's interests in the Arctic are to turn it into a resource base (by applying the identified plan) that it uses to strengthen its economy and power. At the level of the Arctic, the Russian state acts in a peaceful manner, seeking to delimit its borders and solve its problems with the states from region through diplomatic means using international norms and cooperating with other actors at the bilateral and multilateral level within regional forums such as the Arctic Council. The directions of action to achieve the objectives in relation to the Arctic territories in the region are divided into external and internal actions. Externally, it seeks to maintain regional stability in order to create favorable conditions for the development of domestic activities that include three major directions of action. These directions of action are military to protect the means in the Arctic territories of the country, logistical to create the maritime capacity necessary for large-scale operation in the region to be able to industrially exploit the resources of the region and industrial to be able to assimilate and exploit on an industrial scale the deposits of arctic resources.

The results of the implementation of the Russian state's strategies for the Arctic externally are that they have facilitated the delimitation of borders with neighboring states in the region and the peaceful assimilation of a large part of the Arctic continental shelf. Internally, from a military point of view, the presence of the army in the region was strengthened by building and modernizing some outposts in the arctic territories of the region, at the level of which combat equipment adapted to polar conditions was positioned, which confers the ability of stratified bastion-type defense over strategic and economic means in the arctic territories of the country. Logistically, the infrastructure, means of support and a transportation capacity in the Arctic waters of the country large enough to undertake large-scale maritime activities have been developed to facilitate the industrial exploitation of the resource deposits in the region. And from an economic point of view, a part of the resource base in the region was assimilated in the Arctic territories of the country through large-scale industrial projects. Therefore, the results of the policies and strategies carried out by the Russian state in the Arctic, consist in the

delimitation of the territories and the zone of economic exclusivity, the strengthening of the military presence in the region, the development of the maritime capacity necessary for large-scale operation in the region and the exploitation of the resources in the region on an industrial scale. As a result of these developments, the activity in the region constitutes an important part of the country's economy. And following the development of the identified elements, the Arctic was transformed into a source from which the Russian state strengthens its economy and power today.

Given Russia's foreign policy actions in recent years, it began to act unpredictably, ending up no longer respecting international norms and becoming an aggressor state when it failed to impose its agenda of foreign policy on other states that it considers to be part of its sphere of influence, resorting to military actions against them. Proof of this behavior is the conflict started against Ukraine in 2022 that continues to this day. This action was not ignored by the Western states and implicitly by the Arctic states (given that the other states in the Arctic are partners or allies of the United States), which before undertook a series of economic sanctions and supported Ukraine economically and militarily, a detail that strongly affected the relationship with Russia. The rupture between Russia and the Arctic states began to affect the stability of the Arctic in the conditions that the Russian state held the presidency in 2022 at the level of the Arctic Council, as shortly after in sign of protest against its aggression against Ukraine, the Arctic states suspended their activity in within the regional forum until the expiration of the Russian mandate. Also, the Arctic states have intensified their military activity in the region by strengthening the defense of Arctic energy facilities by deploying troops and equipment, as well as organizing more frequent military exercises with the aim of deterring potential aggression from Russia.

Therefore, the recent events in which Russia was involved in other regions have affected the regional stability in the Arctic and have an impact on the international order in the conditions in which it triggered an energy crisis in Europe, which has not yet been resolved and is characterized by uncertainty due to a part of the European states being still dependent on the import of important volumes of energy resources such as gas from the Russian Arctic territories.

Considering the way in which Russia has consolidated its presence in the Arctic and acts externally, which has led to the deterioration of relations with the states in the region, we are witnessing the configuration of a new regional security complex in the form of a security regime

that consists of two parties, the Russian state and the other seven Arctic states that are currently perceived as potential enemies, but have concluded a series of agreements to reduce the security dilemma (in the present situation the Ilulissat Declaration of 2008). Taking into account these details, currently the Arctic can be perceived as a regional security complex, where, beyond financial and technological limitations, Russia is a power that can affect stability in the region.

Considering the perspective gained from this research, namely against the backdrop of climate change, the Arctic becomes a new geopolitical pivot that Russia turns into a strategic advantage by developing a series of elements at its level with the help of which it strengthens its power and ensures its survival by acting in the classical terms of political realism, in which the state acts selfishly to consolidate its power. Relating this perspective to the way in which this subject is treated in specialized literature, it can be seen that to a certain extent it falls within the perspectives of the other authors who have addressed this subject. Indeed, climate change has turned the Arctic into a geopolitical pivot, and it is a means by which the Russian state consolidates its power, developing a series of elements of power at its level. But, beyond this common perspective, following this research it was found that Russia's actions in the region will not transform it into a geopolitical superpower, but into an energy power that will seek to influence the international environment with the help of important reserves of energy resources acquired based on the exploitation of deposits in the Arctic. With regard to the regional security environment, unlike the perspective in the specialized literature that presents a future conflict zone, this is a new regional security complex that has a security regime in which Russia and the other seven Arctic states perceive themselves as potential enemies, however, have concluded a series of agreements to reduce the security dilemma and prevent the escalation of the situation in the region. Taking into account the perspectives addressed, the perspective formulated as a result of this research is much more comprehensive and clearer in relation to what the Arctic represents for Russia and the international system.

Beyond the approach and analysis of the main elements using the embedded combined research method, in which the conclusions and arguments acquired following the review and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, the paper presents a series of limitations given precisely by the vastness of the subject addressed. First of all, the literature in the field is far too vast, including in many situations domains that are not related to International Relations, which is why only a part of it was reviewed, respectively only the related specialized literature about

Russia's strategies and activity in the Arctic and related areas was selected. Another limitation of the research is related to the documentation of Russia's activity in the Arctic territories from primary sources, in which data and information is incomplete, access is limited to information (especially after the start of the Ukraine War) and some information during the research have been modified or even deleted. Also, the research presents a series of limitations given the vastness of the subject addressed, because Russia's strategies for the Arctic are formulated on several directions of action that have been eliminated or integrated into the main four directions of action addressed in the research. Another limit is given by the technical nature of the language in the literature addressed (in English or Russian), which in some situations may not have been fully understood and was adapted to the context addressed, especially regarding the maritime industry.