



# WORKING PAPER

**RUSSIA AND THE US IN THE ARCTIC**

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Over the last years relations between Russia and the US have significantly deteriorated in the majority of cooperation areas. However, Russia–US interaction in the Arctic remains largely shielded from the general climate of mistrust.

The Working Paper focuses on the US and Russia's interests, challenges and opportunities for maintaining and consolidating a cooperative relationship in the Arctic and seeks to identify particular issues that could and should be pursued in the near-term (next three years) and mid-term (next five years) taking into account the results of the US Chairmanship of the Arctic Council.

The views and opinions of the author expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of RIAC.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Shared Interests</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Common Challenges</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4. The US Chairmanship of the Arctic Council</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5. Opportunities for Improved Collaboration</b>	<b>14</b>
5.1. Avoiding Security Dilemma	14
5.2. Maritime Safety and Prevention of Marine Pollution from Ships	16
5.3. Search and Rescue, Oil Spill Prevention, Preparedness and Response	17
5.4. Fisheries	18
5.5. Scientific Cooperation	19
<b>6. Recommendations</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>About the Author</b>	<b>22</b>

# 1. Introduction

The Arctic is one of the few regions where cooperation between Russia and the United States (and the rest of the Arctic nations) remains largely shielded from consequences of the current deterioration of their relations. The Arctic agendas of the two countries are non-controversial and their interests are compatible. The US and Russia have no disputes in the region which could resonate with the current political crisis.

Over the past two years, the US and Russia have worked together and moved ahead on a number of issues, particularly international fisheries in the Arctic Ocean, maritime safety (the Polar Code) and their cooperation within the Arctic Coast Guard Forum established in 2015. Dialogue and cooperation within the Arctic Council continued in a constructive way under the US Chairmanship, not least with regard to the scientific cooperation. The evolving Arctic agenda clearly requires that member states of the Arctic Council do not reduce but extend their cooperation to a new level in bilateral, regional, and broader international frameworks.

At the same time, Russia-US collaboration in the Arctic is not entirely immune to the effects of the general deterioration of their relations, even though the causes of the latter are not related to the Arctic region. It is not only because the sanctions introduced by the US against Russia in the course of the Ukraine crisis have affected their collaboration in the region in a number of sectors, particularly security or energy. Mistrust extends into the Arctic as a whole, making progress on otherwise non-controversial issues more difficult, multiplying missed opportunities, and consolidating old fault lines inherited from the Cold War. Despite the fact that the US Chairmanship of the Arctic Council (2015–2017) is generally appreciated in Moscow,<sup>1</sup> their complicated relationship has prevented the US and Russia from using the opportunity to boost Arctic cooperation during the chairmanship.

Debates over the continued development of Russia's defense infrastructure and increased military activities challenge the vision for a low threat and stable Arctic. The danger of a securitization of the region further increases against the background of deep mutual mistrust, suspended military cooperation and lack or inadequate military-to-military communications. In the medium to long-term, the trend toward the securitization can further consolidate as a result of the anticipated deployment by the US of sea-born ballistic missile defense assets in the northern seas leading to increased levels of the US and Russia's military presence along the Atlantic periphery of the Arctic Ocean.<sup>2</sup> This vicious cycle can only be brought to an end if the two countries show political will to address related issues cooperatively.

<sup>1</sup> Zhuravel V. 'Арктический совет: председательство США (первые итоги)' ['The Arctic Council: The US Chairmanship (first results)'], *Sovremennaya Evropa*, 2016, No 2 (68), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Arbatov A., Dvorkin V., 'Военно-стратегическая деятельность' ['Strategic Military Activities'], in *Международно-политические условия развития Арктической зоны Российской Федерации* [International Political Environment for Developing the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation] / A. Zagorski, ed. Moscow, Magistr, 2015, pp. 170–171.

Nevertheless, the Arctic bears a large potential for cooperation, not least taking into account that the need for practical collaboration among coastal states is expanding fast. However, due to the different but low relative importance of the Arctic on the national agendas of the two states, cooperation in the region is unlikely to become a game changer, which would enable pushing the US and Russia to repair their broken relationship. Nonetheless, the moment when the two countries embark on the path of improving their relations, the Arctic certainly would be an area, where cooperative experiences can be accumulated and spin-off to a general relationship.

This paper focuses on the US and Russia's interests, challenges and opportunities for maintaining and consolidating a cooperative relationship in the Arctic and seeks to identify what particular issues could and should be pursued in the near- (next three years) and mid-term (next five years).

## 2. Shared Interests

Russia and the US share many common interests and challenges in the region. They may differ in the order of their priorities and in practical solutions to specific issues. However, over the past years, constructive bilateral and multilateral dialogues significantly contributed to increasing convergence of their approaches to managing the region on the basis of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and other relevant international instruments within the competent regional and wider international frameworks, such as the Arctic Council, the International Maritime Organization, and other forums.

The two countries' national strategies<sup>3</sup> reveal similar or compatible interests and priorities which include safeguarding national and homeland security, protecting environment, responsibly managing Arctic resources while advancing economic and energy development, improving community resilience, supporting scientific research, and strengthening international cooperation.

Both Russia and the US define **national security** in the Arctic in terms of protecting sovereign territory and rights, as well as natural resources, while safeguarding **peace and stability** and keeping the region free of conflict. Both define the relevance of the region for their security interests primarily through the lens of maintaining global strategic (nuclear) stability, rather than by conceptualizing it as an eventual conventional warfare theatre.

The two states are in the process of defining the extent of their sovereign rights in the Arctic through the **delineation of extended continental shelf**. While Russia has communicated its revised claim to the Commission on the Limits of Continental Shelf (CLCS) in August 2015,<sup>4</sup> the US has yet to ratify UNCLOS in order to benefit from its established procedures to maximize the legal certainty and secure international recognition of its sovereign rights.<sup>5</sup>

Both commit themselves to a **sustainable development** and responsible stewardship of the Arctic while monitoring and addressing climate change, recognizing the paramount importance of the developments in the Arctic for the transformation of global climate and biological balance. Both recognize the need to conserve Arctic biodiversity and ecosystems which find themselves under increasing stress from both climate change and growing human activity.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Стратегия развития Арктической зоны Российской Федерации и обеспечения национальной безопасности на период до 2020 года. 20 февраля 2013 г. [Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and the Provision of National Security for the Period Until 2020. 20 February 2013].  
URL: [http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons\\_doc\\_LAW\\_142561](http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_142561);  
National Strategy for the Arctic Region. Washington, The White House, 2013.  
URL: [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat\\_arctic\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_arctic_strategy.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Partial Revised Submission of the Russian Federation to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in Respect of the Continental Shelf of the Russian Federation in the Arctic Ocean. Executive Summary, 2015.  
URL: [http://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/rus01\\_rev15/2015\\_08\\_03\\_Exec\\_Summary\\_English.pdf](http://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/rus01_rev15/2015_08_03_Exec_Summary_English.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> National Strategy for the Arctic Region, 2013, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and the Provision of National Security for the Period until 2020, Paragraph 4; National Strategy for the Arctic Region, 2013. See also: 2015 Year in Review. Progress Report on the Implementation of the National Strategy for the Arctic Region. Prepared by the Arctic Executive Steering Committee, March 2016.

Addressing *environmental and human security risks* by improving maritime safety, developing capabilities for search and rescue, preventing, containing and responding to eventual hazardous material spills, developing renewable energy resources, improving communication infrastructure and Arctic domain awareness, and introducing integrated (ecosystems-based) management of Arctic maritime spaces are increasingly important parts of their policies in the region.

Both Russia and the US underline the importance of *science* for understanding the Arctic and responsible sustainable development of the region. The two states underscore, that while military threats in the Arctic remain relatively low, the increasing challenges to human and environmental security are best addressed through *cooperation*. Furthermore, countries emphasize *the Arctic Council* as a major regional forum for dialogue, cooperation and governance of the Arctic and stress the *responsibility of the Arctic states* for the region's stewardship.

The US and Russia have *no acute or potentially significant disputes* in the Arctic.

Their *maritime boundary* delimited by the 1990 Agreement extends into the Arctic Ocean "as far as permitted under international law".<sup>7</sup> The Russian Federation so far has failed to ratify the agreement but applies it provisionally. Moreover, the boundary itself is not disputed.<sup>8</sup> Not least, the Russian claim for extended continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean clearly identifies it as the line of delimitation with the US.<sup>9</sup> Although it is argued by Russian experts that there is no reason to further delay the ratification,<sup>10</sup> it is unlikely to happen in the near- or mid-term future. Nonetheless, it is clear that the ratification of the 1990 agreement will be indispensable part of the final delimitation and establishment of the outer limits of continental shelf of Russia and the US no later than after their claims have been examined by the CLCS.<sup>11</sup>

As long as an occurrence of a dispute over the maritime boundaries between Russia and the US remains highly unlikely, no conflict over the *ownership of mineral resources* on the Arctic shelf is anticipated either.

<sup>7</sup> Agreement between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Maritime Boundary, 1 June 1990, Art 2. URL: [http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/international\\_contracts/2\\_contract/-/storage-viewer/bilateral/page-1/48960?\\_storageviewer\\_WAR\\_storageviewerportlet\\_advancedSearch=false&\\_storageviewer\\_WAR\\_storageviewerportlet\\_keywords=%D0%BE+%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B8+%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F+%D0%BC%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%85+%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2&\\_storageviewer\\_WAR\\_storageviewerportlet\\_fromPage=search&\\_storageviewer\\_WAR\\_storageviewerportlet\\_andOperator=1](http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_contracts/2_contract/-/storage-viewer/bilateral/page-1/48960?_storageviewer_WAR_storageviewerportlet_advancedSearch=false&_storageviewer_WAR_storageviewerportlet_keywords=%D0%BE+%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B8+%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F+%D0%BC%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%85+%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2&_storageviewer_WAR_storageviewerportlet_fromPage=search&_storageviewer_WAR_storageviewerportlet_andOperator=1)

<sup>8</sup> The US has ratified the Agreement in 1990 and is awaiting ratification by Russia. In its response note of 18 March 2002 to the 2001 Russian submission to the CLCS it confirmed that the use of the boundary established by the 1990 Agreement "is consistent with the mutual interests of Russia and the United States". In its response to the Russian 2015 partially revised submission, the US reconfirmed that "the two governments continue to abide by the terms of the 1990 Agreement". See: United States of America: Notification regarding the Submission Made by the Russian Federation to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, 28 February 2002. URL: [http://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/rus01/CLCS\\_01\\_2001\\_LOS\\_USAtext.pdf](http://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/rus01/CLCS_01_2001_LOS_USAtext.pdf); United States Mission to the United Nations. New York. Diplomatic Note, 30 October 2015. URL: [http://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/rus01\\_rev15/2015\\_11\\_02\\_US\\_NV\\_RUS\\_001\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/rus01_rev15/2015_11_02_US_NV_RUS_001_en.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Partial Revised Submission of the Russian Federation to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in Respect of the Continental Shelf of the Russian Federation in the Arctic Ocean. Executive Summary, 2015, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Zagorski A.V. et al., The Arctic. Proposals for the International Cooperation Roadmap / I.S. Ivanov, Editor-in-Chief, RIAC. Moscow, Spetskniga, 2012, p. 8, 27.

<sup>11</sup> Partial Revised Submission of the Russian Federation to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in Respect of the Continental Shelf of the Russian Federation in the Arctic Ocean. Executive Summary, 2015, pp. 11–12.



The only important disagreement between Russia and the US in the Arctic persists with regard to the definition of the *legal regime of the straits*<sup>12</sup> along the Russian Arctic coastline and is linked to the freedom of navigation – a key element of US policy. However, this issue is likely to remain dormant in the longer term as long as Russia's right under UNCLOS Article 234 to maintain special rules of navigation in ice-covered waters remains undisputed and the disagreement is reduced to the freedom of passage of US warships – primarily that of US submarines as long as the US Navy has no ice-capable surface warships.<sup>13</sup> In the future, the manageability of the issue will depend on whether cooperation or competition prevails in Russia–US relations.

Russian and US interests in the Arctic are widely compatible and they converge increasingly as a result of intense dialogue and cooperation in the past two decades, in particular within the Arctic Council. However, it is also important to note the *different relative importance* of the region for the two countries, and the *differences in the prioritization of issues concerning their common interests*.

While the US Arctic territory is reduced to the State of Alaska, larger parts of the Russian Federation are located north of the Polar Circle, and around two thirds of its territory are situated in the permafrost areas. While less than 1% of the US's GDP is generated in the Arctic, the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation generates 5,6% of the country's GDP, and this share is projected to grow to 14% in the long run.<sup>14</sup> The Arctic already is an essential resource base and an export-generating region of Russia, and in that regard, its role is set to increase in the future.

About half of all Arctic inhabitants live in the Russian part of the Arctic. The Russian coastline in the Arctic seas extends to over 4,300 miles and is more than four times longer than the respective US Arctic coastline. Therefore, it is widely acknowledged that Russia's investments in the Arctic infrastructure “reflect the region's [relative] centrality to its economy”.<sup>15</sup>

It should be no surprise that, against this background, Russia prioritizes the implementation of ambitious plans for the development of its Arctic zone – both in the terrestrial, and also increasingly in the marine Arctic. On the other hand, the US puts a stronger emphasis on the conservation of the Arctic ecosystems, biodiversity and environment without pursuing any vested economic interest but, rather, introducing environmental standards that are seen as effectively

<sup>12</sup> In 1985, the then Soviet Union and Canada have drawn straight baselines connecting their mainland and islands thus including parts of former territorial or open sea into their internal waters. Ever since then, the US has contested the correctness of these lines, and has insisted that the straits along the Russian Northern Sea route should be regarded as straits used for international navigation. For more details see: Andrei Zagorski, 'Международное регулирование и потенциальные конфликты' [International governance and potential conflicts] in *Международно-политические условия развития Арктической зоны Российской Федерации / под ред. А.В. Загорского* [Andrei Zagorski (ed.), International Political Environment for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation], Moscow: Magistr, 2015, pp. 76–78.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Zagorski A. (ed.), *International Political Environment for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation*, pp. 13, 178. These figures are based on materials attached to the Program of Socio-Economic Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation. The Russian State Statistical Committee, while in the process of recalculating data for the AZRF within its recently officially defined borders, estimates the AZRF contribution to the GDP of Russia in 2014 at 5,2%. See: URL: [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/region\\_stat/calendar1.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/region_stat/calendar1.htm).

<sup>15</sup> Report to Congress on Arctic Operations and the Northwest Passage. Washington, Department of Defense, May 2011, pp. 9–10. URL: [http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/Tab\\_A\\_Arctic\\_Report\\_Public.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/Tab_A_Arctic_Report_Public.pdf)

prohibitive particularly for the extraction of mineral resources on the seabed. The US has banned commercial fishing in its exclusive economic zone in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas and seeks an international agreement preventing commercial fishing in the central basin of the Arctic Ocean. Intensive dialogue within and outside the Arctic Council was and still remains instrumental for the increasing convergence of the policies of Arctic states. It contributes to the growing recognition that the pursuit of both objectives at least needs to go hand in hand, and that the application of the best available environmentally friendly technologies through expanding international cooperation is necessary for a responsible and sustainable development of the Arctic resources.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Pelyasov A.N. (Head), Kotov A.V. The Russian Arctic: Potential for International Cooperation: Report No. 17 / 2015 / I.S. Ivanov (Editor-in-Chief); Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). Moscow: Spetskniga, 2015.

### 3. Common Challenges

Assessments of challenges Russia and the US face in the Arctic reflect the differences in the relative importance of the region and their priorities. The US emphasizes that “very real challenges” to its interest arise first and foremost due to the “rapid climate-driven environmental change” in the region, as well as due to “the opening and rapid development of the Arctic” as the sea ice diminishes,<sup>17</sup> not least encouraging increasing interest and involvement in the Arctic of nations from outside the region that need to be addressed. The list of risks and threats in Russia is much more elaborate<sup>18</sup> and is closely linked to the problems it encounters in the implementation of ambitious plans for the socio-economic development in the region.

The development of the Russian Arctic zone is affected, *inter alia*, by the extremely harsh climate; economically underdeveloped (or even non-developed) territories; low density of population and increasing deficit of skilled labor force; low quality of life of indigenous population and insufficient supply of sweet water; remoteness of the region from industrial centers; high cost and long lead-time of developing mineral resources, as well as dependence on the supply from other regions; high cost of transportation of extracted resources; critical state of infrastructure, deficit of state-of-the-art technologies for exploration and development of offshore hydrocarbon deposits; underdevelopment or lack of adequate transport infrastructure; very high energy intensity and low efficiency of natural resources extraction; gaps in the hydrographic and meteorological services or mapping necessary for ensuring maritime safety; insufficient surveillance and domain awareness; inadequate communications; increasing industrial and anthropogenic impact on the environment creating a danger of an irreversible degradation of both maritime and terrestrial environment in the Russian Arctic etc.

Currently, the list of ‘instant’ challenges to the development of the Russian Arctic zone is now complemented by the restrictions that result from the Western sanctions against Russia, which were introduced in the course of the Ukraine crisis. In particular, the sanctions concern extremely limited access to capital markets and deep water drilling technologies. While the contemporary oil price makes exploration and development of Arctic offshore hydrocarbon resources economically unattractive, the lack of capital significantly delays investment projects in the terrestrial part of the Russian Arctic. Attempts to substitute partnerships with leading Western companies by fostering partnerships with East Asian, mostly Chinese businesses have had extremely limited effect, with Yamal LNG being a rare exception. Chinese companies have been unable to provide technologies and expertise relevant for the development of resources in the High North and specifically on the Arctic shelf off the shore<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> National Strategy for the Arctic Region, 2013, pp. 2, 5, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and the Provision of National Security for the Period Until 2020. Part II ‘Main Risks and Threats, the Purpose of the Strategy’.

<sup>19</sup> Wu K., ‘Chinese Perspective’ in: Oran R. Young, Jong Deog Kim, Yoon Hyung Kim, eds. The Arctic in World Affairs. A North Pacific Dialogue on the Future of the Arctic. 2013 North Pacific Arctic Conference Proceedings. Seoul; Honolulu, KMI; EWC, 2013, pp. 190–198.

The debate over Russian military activities and development of military infrastructure in the region produces the effect of a securitization and increasingly becomes an obstacle to ensuring the vital interests of both Russia and the US in safeguarding peace and stability in the Arctic and keeping it free of conflict. So far, this debate has not resulted in an arms race as long as the Arctic nations, including the US, exercise restraint in their activities and refrain from a change in their postures. Nevertheless, the situation may change in the mid- or even short-term.

## 4. The US Chairmanship of the Arctic Council

The US has assumed Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2015 until 2017.<sup>20</sup> Its priorities for this period were introduced and discussed with other AC member states in 2014 well before the US took the chair. They reflect both shared interests and challenges but also differences in priorities of US and Russian Arctic policies including three major overarching themes: maintaining Arctic Ocean safety, security, and stewardship; and addressing the impacts of climate change; improving economic and living conditions of Arctic communities.<sup>21</sup> It reflects the focus of the US policy on issues of conservation of the Arctic environment, mitigation of consequences of climate change, decisions informed by solid scientific evidence, and improved resilience of local and particularly indigenous communities.

The Chairmanship was instrumental particularly for raising the domestic awareness of the Arctic in the US. Large parts of the activities in this period of time were focused on addressing issues included on the US agenda for the AC in the American Arctic, such as improving consultation and engagement of Alaskan native communities; promoting energy efficiency specifically in remote Alaskan communities; addressing consequences of climate change, in particular coastal erosion, and facilitating resettlement of endangered communities; mapping and charting Arctic waters; monitoring biodiversity and improving domain awareness in the Arctic; developing an Arctic-specific plan to strengthen oil spill prevention; preparedness and response and many others.<sup>22</sup>

The US has also spent efforts in order to shield Arctic Council cooperation, as well as cooperation on the Arctic issues in other formats from effects of wider international tensions. In particular, it went ahead with the inauguration of the Arctic Coast Guard Forum after Canada failed to do so during its Chairmanship, and has actively promoted its work. It also lived up to the promise of conducting multilateral search and rescue exercises in 2015 and 2016 as a step toward institutionalizing such exercises within the framework of the 2011 Arctic Council states SAR agreement. Finalizing the work on the Polar Code within the International Maritime Organization is part of the efforts aimed at improving maritime safety against the projections of increased vessel traffic in the future. Finalizing the work on a new agreement of Arctic Council states seeking to enhance scientific cooperation is also largely due to a joint effort by Russia and the US.

The US has also sought to score progress on environmental issues that are high on the US agenda. One such issue is reducing black carbon emissions following the adoption of the non-binding “Framework for Action on Enhanced Black Carbon and Methane Emissions” endorsed at the 2015 Arctic Council Ministerial

<sup>20</sup> On the preliminary Russian analysis of the US Chairmanship see, inter alia: Valerii Zhuravel, ‘The Arctic Council: The US Chairmanship (first results)’, *Sovremennaya Evropa*, 2016, No 2 (68), pp. 17–21.

<sup>21</sup> About the United States Chairmanship, 2015–2017 Program Highlights. US State Department. URL: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/241186.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> For an overview of US activities see: 2015 Year in Review. Progress Report on the Implementation of the National Strategy for the Arctic Region. Prepared by the Arctic Executive Steering Committee, March 2016. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/documents/Progress%20Report%20on%20the%20Implementation%20of%20the%20National%20Strategy%20for%20the%20Arctic%20Region.pdf>

Meeting. With due respect of primarily economic difficulties Russia faces in reducing emissions, the US largely concentrated on engaging the Environmental Protection Agency in implementing specific projects in Russia (Murmansk region and Karelia) that demonstrated the feasibility and benefits of reducing black carbon emissions.<sup>23</sup>

However, affected by international tensions, the US Chairmanship was also marked by lost opportunities to boost regional and particularly Russia–US cooperation in the Arctic. Apart from many specific issues, the international environment left no chance for organizing an Arctic summit meeting that was initially anticipated for 2016 in the US plans.

<sup>23</sup> 2015 Year in Review. Progress Report on the Implementation of the National Strategy for the Arctic Region, p. 28.

## 5. Opportunities for Improved Collaboration

The agenda for Arctic cooperation is expanding rapidly. It calls on the countries of the region to responsibly handle challenges generated by climate change and prospective growth in economic activities, such as increasing vessel traffic, potential opening of new fishing grounds, offshore exploration, extraction and shipping of mineral resources, as well as challenges posed by eventual transnational illegal non-state-actors' activities. Taking into account the current strained political relations between the US and Russia, the *relevant issues may be easier to tackle in appropriate multilateral frameworks rather than bilaterally by the US and Russia.*

The issues on the agenda offering opportunities for improved cooperation in the near- and mid-term include, inter alia: enhancing maritime safety and preventing marine pollution from ships as the vessel traffic in different parts of the Arctic is set to grow; working together on the implementation of the Polar Code entering into force in 2017; improving bilateral and multilateral (regional) cooperation and interoperability in search and rescue, preventing and responding to eventual oil spills; precluding unregulated (illegal) fisheries in the Arctic Ocean; and improving scientific cooperation.

While most of the issues on the agenda are not controversial among the US and Russia, as well as other Arctic states, the benefits of enhanced cooperation can hardly be fully enjoyed unless the re-emergence of the security dilemma in the region is prevented from overshadowing their relations.

### 5.1. Avoiding Security Dilemma

While both the US and Russia, as well as other countries, proceed on the basis that no Arctic coastal state is likely to risk a military conflict in the region, "there remains a possibility that tensions could increase due to misperceptions and rhetoric".<sup>24</sup> "Gradually escalating mutual fears"<sup>25</sup> or over-dramatization of developments in the defense area are identified as one of the rare potential military risks in the Arctic.

The most important means to avoid the trap of a security dilemma against the background of national military capabilities and activities set to grow as a response to environmental and human security challenges, or for reasons not related to the region (Russian and US strategic assets) is to *exercise restraint* in defense build-up and activities, *provide greater mutual transparency*, build trust and *cooperation in areas of civil-military relations, surveillance and domain awareness* and conduct *joint exercises*.<sup>26</sup> Developing an appropriate regional

<sup>24</sup> The United States Navy Arctic Roadmap for 2014 to 2030, February 2014. Chief of Naval Operations, 2014, pp. 14–15. URL: <https://info.publicintellgence.net/USNavy-ArcticRoadmap.pdf>  
See also: the Statement by Nikolay Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, on 20 August 2016. URL: <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/news/1125.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Gallaudet T., Capt. U.S. Navy Arctic Engagement: Challenges and Opportunities. Navy Task Force Climate Change, Office of the Oceanographer of the Navy, November 2010, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Depledge D. 'Hard Security Developments' in J. Jokela (ed.), Arctic Security Matters. EU ISS Report No 24. Paris, 2015, pp. 64, 66; A. Zagorski (ed.), International Political Environment for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation, p. 122.

security architecture would enable Arctic nations to cooperatively address their concerns, so that “should military security issues arise, they will be addressed with the appropriate stakeholders through the network of relevant bilateral and multilateral relationships”.<sup>27</sup>

However, developing cooperation and “networks of relevant bilateral and multilateral relationships” is a difficult task in the current political climate. The rudimentary Arctic security architecture that has started to take shape earlier in this decade, first and foremost in form of conducting annual meetings of Defense Chiefs of Arctic Council member states, Arctic Security Forces Roundtable, or joint naval exercises with the participation of Russia, has proven to be the most vulnerable construct after almost all defense-relevant formats for dialogue, communication and cooperation have been suspended in the course of the general deterioration of Russia–West relations over the Ukraine crisis.<sup>28</sup>

As Duncan Depledge argues, the suspension of military–to–military cooperation with Russia “may be further prolonged, and could possibly become ‘the new normal’ in the Arctic. Thus, the general deterioration of Russia–Western relations after the Ukraine crisis may negatively affect the security situation in the Arctic and possibly lead to a heightened level of tension at the interstate level. In a situation marked by a mutual lack of trust and transparency, the ‘security dilemma’ dynamics in the Arctic may become more prominent. This issue is unlikely to be resolved unless further efforts are made to reduce Russia’s sense of isolation when it comes to developing the security architecture of the Arctic”.<sup>29</sup>

The channels of communications between Russian and the US Coast Guards are kept open for emergencies of various sorts.<sup>30</sup> However, they cannot be considered sufficient, taking into consideration fairly different chains of command and inter-agency frameworks. The Coast Guards in the two countries are not part of the defense sector. While de–securitization of the Arctic would imply the **resumption of meetings of Defense Chiefs** “as soon as conditions permit”,<sup>31</sup> it is unlikely to happen in the near future. For this reason, other avenues for cooperatively addressing relevant military security issues need to be explored. One of the ways to address the issue is to **improve security-related military-to-military communications**, for example, by developing a standardized procedure for communicating the movement of military assets in the Arctic, *i.e.* to deal with natural disasters or other non–military security developments in order to prevent misunderstandings that can arise from rapid deployment of assets during the emergencies.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Report to Congress on Arctic Operations and the Northwest Passage. Washington, Department of Defense, May 2011, p. 10. URL: [http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/Tab\\_A\\_Arctic\\_Report\\_Public.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/Tab_A_Arctic_Report_Public.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Depledge D. ‘Hard Security Developments’, p. 65; Klimenko E. Russia’s Arctic Security Policy. Still quiet in the High North? SIPRI Policy Paper 45, February 2016, p. 30; Zagorski A. ‘Russia’s Arctic Governance Policies’, in L. Jacobson, N. Melvin (eds), *The New Arctic Governance*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 99–101.

<sup>29</sup> Duncan Depledge, ‘Hard Security Developments’, p. 65.

<sup>30</sup> Eckstein M., *Zukunft: Arctic Coast Guard Forum Supports Positive Relationship with Russian Counterpart*. U.S. Naval Institute, 13 June 2016. URL: <https://news.usni.org/2016/06/13/zukunft-arctic-coast-guard-forum-created-positive-relationship-russian-counterpart>

<sup>31</sup> Collins J.F., Sfraga M., Virginia R.A., and Yalowitz K.S. *Arctic Council Initiatives to Sustain Arctic Cooperation. Conference Report and Recommendations from 23 February 2015*. University of the Arctic Institute for Arctic Policy and Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, 2015, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Collins J.F., Sfraga M., Virginia R.A., and Yalowitz K.S. *Arctic Council Initiatives to Sustain Arctic Cooperation*, p. 2.



The gap in communications that has opened with the suspension of military-to-military cooperation can also be partially filled by establishing appropriate second track dialogue – some sort of an **Arctic Security Roundtable or Conference** attended by both, the experts and government officials at appropriate level for off the record conversations and exchange.

## 5.2. Maritime Safety and Prevention of Marine Pollution from Ships

Addressing challenges that arise from observed and anticipated intensification of vessel traffic in various parts of the Arctic Ocean and ensuring **appropriate implementation of the Polar Code** provisions entering into force early in 2017 would require enhanced cooperation of interested parties in both bilateral and multilateral formats already in the short run.

Apart from the need to harmonize obligations of all Arctic states under relevant protocols and annexes to the SOLAS and MARPOL conventions through which provisions of the Polar Code are made mandatory (not all Arctic states are parties to all relevant instruments under the two Conventions), the US and Russia share a common interest to ensure that all vessels covered by those instruments comply with mandatory rules for shipping in ice-covered Arctic waters established by the Polar Code.

With due respect to the primary responsibility of flag states for the implementation of Polar Code provisions, the Arctic coastal states can contribute to its implementation through **enhanced cooperation in surveillance and exchange of relevant information** in order to improve **collective domain awareness**. First steps made in this direction within the Arctic Coast Guard Forum are important but they have not fulfilled the task yet. Institutionalizing this cooperation by **establishing a joint center that would serve as a clearing house for an exchange of information and coordination**, could be a mid-term objective leading in the longer term towards **developing an integrated system of surveillance and domain awareness in the marine Arctic** linking all relevant agencies of the Arctic states.

In order to ensure all flags' compliance with the mandatory provisions of the Polar Code it might be appropriate to integrate its provisions into the port state controls exercised by non-Arctic states, where eligible ships make their last call on their voyage to the Arctic. This task is more complex and thus more demanding than existing port state controls because it will require examination of not only whether a particular vessel is fit for an Arctic voyage but also whether its certified ice class matches anticipated weather and ice conditions in a specific part of the Arctic Ocean during a specific period of time.

Addressing this challenge would require enhanced cooperation, exchange of information and communications between the coastal and the relevant non-Arctic states. Having all interested states as its members and almost all, if not all relevant non-Arctic states as observers, the Arctic Council might be a platform for considering appropriate formats for addressing this challenge, *inter alia*, through establishing a specific task force. It may lead to the development of an **Arctic Port State Control Memorandum** that would involve all interested parties and spell out protocols for communication and cooperation among them.

In the bilateral context, *introducing voluntary vessel traffic rules in the Bering Strait* which, at a later stage, could be submitted to the International Maritime Organization for making them mandatory, is part of the agenda for enhanced maritime safety and protection of the biologically very productive marine area, particularly as the strait gradually becomes a bottleneck for vessel traffic between North Pacific and the Arctic.

In 2011, the Presidents of Russia and the US declared “an intention to deepen cooperation” between the two countries “in the cross-boundary Bering Strait region”.<sup>33</sup> Ever since that, a number of practical proposals on possible measures regulating vessel traffic in the strait have been elaborated.<sup>34</sup> However, Russia and the US have not moved much beyond the 2011 general statement.

Near-term prospects for unlocking discussions on the Bering Strait vessel traffic regulation do not appear promising. On the one hand, fostering official discussions is blocked by sanctions, which suspended senior level meetings – in this case between the US Coast Guard and the Russian Ministry for Transport. On the other hand, Moscow authorities appear hesitant to engage in any discussions on the issue, even informal ones, as long as the sanctions remain in force. Still, it might be an opportunity to enhance cooperation on the Arctic issues in the mid-term provided that the political climate in Russia–US relations begins improving.

### **5.3. Search and Rescue, Oil Spill Prevention, Preparedness and Response**

Working on practical aspects of SAR and oil spill preparedness and response in the Arctic, both bilaterally and multilaterally, is an important approach for accumulating cooperative experiences on the basis of agreements reached under the auspices of the Arctic Council concerning cooperation on aeronautical and maritime search and rescue (2011), marine oil pollution preparedness and response (2013), as well as the Framework Plan for Cooperation on Prevention of Oil Pollution from Petroleum and Maritime Activities in the Marine Areas of the Arctic (2015).

Institutionalization and consolidation of cooperative mechanisms among Arctic nations to exercise relevant provisions of those instruments remain an open task, particularly as recent (2015 and 2016) US-hosted SAR exercises have revealed important gaps in organizing practical cooperation of relevant national agencies.<sup>35</sup> This is not a spectacular task attracting public attention but an important method for spreading cooperative culture among the participating states even during the times of strained political relations.

Advancement in that direction in the following years will require synergy between the Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR) working group

<sup>33</sup> Joint Statement of the Presidents of the United States of America and the President of the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Bering Strait Region, 26 May 2011. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/938>

<sup>34</sup> See, inter alia: Rufe R., Huntington H., ‘Bering Strait Shipping: Towards a Bilateral Approach’, in *The Arctic Herald. Information & Analytical Journal*, 2016, No 1 (16), pp. 28–35; McKenzie J., Klarich S., Ardrey C., Lagor K., *The Bering Strait: Reducing Risk Through International Cooperation and Capability Improvements*. Brown University Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs; United States Coast Guard Academy Center for Arctic Study and Policy; World Wildlife Fund Arctic Program, 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Merten A.A. *Circumpolar Collaboration Search and Rescue (SAR)*. Presentation. Senior Arctic Officials Fairbanks Meeting, 16 March 2016, p. 5.

of the Arctic Council, the Arctic Coast Guard Forum and AC individual member states hosting relevant exercises. It is in the interest of both Russia and the US to contribute to the progress of practical cooperation in these areas.

It is also important that **Russia takes more active part in multilateral exercises**,<sup>36</sup> not least taking into consideration that Russia is a key SAR provider in the region from the viewpoint of its relevant capabilities.

Russia and the US may also consider to develop bilateral SAR, disaster prevention and preparedness **cooperation in the Chukchi Sea**, building upon close cooperation between the Russian border guards and the US Coast Guard's District 17 in the Bering Sea.

#### 5.4. Fisheries

Russia-US Talks about a new bilateral fisheries agreement covering the Northern part of the Bering Sea turned out protracted despite the fact that ongoing cooperation based on the 1988 fisheries agreement as well as on the 1994 multilateral Convention on the conservation and management of Pollock resources in the central Bering Sea has proven to be extremely positive and productive, not least with regard to joint research of biological resources and developing a common data base. This experience encouraged experts to suggest that Russia and the US extend their cooperation into the Chukchi Sea.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, taking into account the protracted nature of the ongoing negotiations and the current political climate in bilateral relations a breakthrough in the controversial issues is unlikely in the nearest future.

At the same time, the discussion of **preventing unregulated fishing and developing scientific collaboration in the central part of the Arctic Ocean** beyond national fisheries jurisdictions of coastal states showed remarkable progress in the last two years. Despite the repeated delays in implementing the road map, which was agreed upon early in 2014 short before the outbreak of Ukraine crisis, in summer 2015, the five coastal states issued a declaration laying out their approach to addressing the problem<sup>38</sup> and paving the way for opening the discussion to non-Arctic stakeholders (EU, Iceland, China, Japan and Republic of Korea) in December 2015.<sup>39</sup>

Taking into account the history of discussing the issue among the five coastal states, and the need for the newcomers to make their own choices, it is difficult

<sup>36</sup> Russia stayed away from the October 2015 Arctic Zephyr international Search and Rescue table-top exercise at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, but observed, as did other Arctic Council member states, the US-led Arctic Chinoook SAR exercise in August 2016. See: U.S. Coast Guard and federal partners lead Arctic Search-and-Rescue Exercise. U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters News Release, 28 October 2015. URL: <http://www.uscgnews.com/go/doc/4007/2618330/U-S-Coast-Guard-and-federal-partners-lead-Arctic-search-and-rescue-exercise>; Россия проследит за арктическими учениями США [Russia will Observe US Arctic Exercises]. Arctic-Info, 25 August 2016. URL: <http://www.arctic-info.ru/news/23-08-2016/rossiya-prosledit-za-arkticheskimi-ucheniymi-ssha>

<sup>37</sup> Discussion at the 2013 Russian International Affairs Council International Conference "The Arctic: Region of Cooperation and Development", Moscow, 2-3 December 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Declaration Concerning the Prevention of Unregulated High Seas Fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean. Oslo, 16 July 2015. URL: <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/folkerett/declaration-on-arctic-fisheries-16-july-2015.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> See, inter alia: Shuvalova T.V., Glubokov A.I., 'Освоение водных биологических ресурсов Арктической зоны: проблемы и перспективы' ['Aquatic Bioresources Development in the Arctic Zone: Problems and Prospects'], in *Rybnoe Khozjajstvo*, 2015, No 4, pp. 11-13;

to anticipate a finalization of the negotiation of an instrument concerning the international fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean in the near term. With strong Russian—US leadership it could probably be concluded in the mid-term. However, this would, again, require a favorable political climate in their relations.

### **5.5. Scientific Cooperation**

In 2016, the Arctic Council Task Force for Enhancing Scientific Cooperation in the Arctic (SCTF) co-chaired by Russia and the US made an important step forward by reaching *ad referendum* agreement on a new Agreement on Enhancing Arctic Scientific Cooperation<sup>40</sup> – a third legally binding instrument negotiated under the auspices of the Arctic Council. Although based around a mutually acceptable compromise, the agreement raises expectations to improve the scientists’ access throughout the Arctic by removing or easing at least some of existing barriers to international scientific research. The agreement has yet to pass through relevant domestic inter-agency procedures in order to be submitted for approval to the 2017 Arctic Council Ministerial meeting.

<sup>40</sup> Task Force on Scientific Cooperation Meets in Ottawa. Arctic Council, 12 July 2016.  
URL: <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/our-work/2/8-news-and-events/408-sctf-ottawa-july-2016>

## 6. Recommendations

Given the current strained relationship, it is realistic to expect that particularly in the short term Russia—US cooperation on Arctic issues is easier to improve, and thus more likely to be expected within multilateral frameworks, such as the Arctic Council, International Maritime Organization, or ad hoc forums, rather than through bilateral formats. Based on the above review of issues on the Russia—US Arctic agenda, the following steps can be recommended to be taken in the near- and mid-term, bearing in mind that progress in the mid-term is likely to largely depend on progress in normalizing Russia—US relations in general.

### *In the near term:*

- a) ***Preventing (re-)emergence of security dilemma in the Arctic***, maintaining it a region of peace and stability rather than of conflict and arms race ***is a matter of urgency***.

For this purpose, all Arctic states should exercise restraint in developing their Arctic defense postures, provide greater transparency of their military activities in the region, build trust and cooperation in areas of civil–military relations, surveillance and domain awareness over military activities, conduct joint exercises.

Appropriate military–to–military communications should be restored in order to minimize, or remove the risk of misinterpretation of military activities in the region particularly during emergencies.

As long as the security architecture in the region finds itself in paralysis, intensive second track dialogue should be initiated, for instance, in form of an ***Arctic Security Roundtable or Conference***, which would be attended by both experts and government officials at appropriate level for off the record conversations and exchange.

- b) Approaching the entry into force early in 2017 of the Polar Code, Russia and the US together with other Arctic states, should ***consider appropriate measures to ensure compliance by all states with the mandatory provisions of the Polar Code***.

For this purpose, building upon the first initiatives of the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, Russia, the US and other Arctic nations should engage in developing cooperation and information sharing in order to advance collective domain awareness in the Arctic. It shall begin with making use of the mechanisms available through the Forum.

The Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council in 2017 may decide to establish a Task Force to consider appropriate mechanisms for cooperation between member and observer states enabling their port state control systems to include the requirements established by the Polar Code for ships on the voyage into Arctic ice-covered waters.

Designing a new – Arctic – Memorandum on port state controls including all member and observer states could be one option under consideration.

- c) Russia and the US, having co-chaired Arctic Council Task Force for Enhancing Scientific Cooperation in the Arctic should work together toward ***finalizing the***

***work on the Agreement on Enhancing Arctic Scientific Cooperation*** adopted *ad referendum* in summer 2016 in order for the Agreement to be ready for signature at the 2017 Ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council.

***In the mid-term:***

- a) Annual meetings of the Chiefs of Defense should be resumed as early as possible.
- b) In order to enhance maritime safety in the area of the Bering Strait, Russia and the US need to jointly consider the introduction of voluntary vessel traffic rules in the Bering Strait with the view to submit them to the IMO at a later stage.
- c) The US and Russia should promote the establishment of a regional joint center for exchange of information relevant for improving collective domain awareness in the Arctic Ocean.
- d) Russia and the US may also consider initiating a more systematic bilateral cooperation on search and rescue, as well as on disaster prevention, preparedness and response in the Chukchi Sea.
- e) They should aim at finalizing protracted bilateral negotiations to a new fisheries agreement covering the northern part of the Bering Sea, and consider the possibility to extend well-functioning cooperation in the Bering Sea into the Chukchi Sea as well.
- f) Russia and the US can jointly lead multilateral negotiations on a new instrument preventing unregulated fishing and developing scientific cooperation in the central part of the Arctic Ocean beyond national fisheries jurisdictions of coastal states, and work toward the finalization of this negotiation within a reasonable time frame.

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