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RUSSIA, THE USA AND MODERN ARCTIC GEOPOLITICS

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This article focuses on the modern situation of the Russian-American confrontation in the Arctic. It examines the strategic significance of the Arctic region for Russian Federation and the United States. This aspect includes the key role of the region in the global climate agenda; the increasing interest from the countries in the Arctic mineral exploitation resulting from the fact of accelerated global warming; the promotion by Russia of an economically profitable Northern Sea Route in the future; and strategic convenience for the countries in using the region for military purposes. Furthermore, the paper analyses the current policies of the two states in the Arctic. Particular attention is paid to the interaction between the governments in the Arctic Council in 2023 and on measures currently being taken by Russia and the US to develop the Arctic direction in their foreign policy activities. The conclusion of the article presents possible perspectives for the subsequent development of the Russian-US relations in the Arctic, which in the author's opinion will continue to be based on the policy of struggle for leadership in the region, accompanied by local Arctic issues and the complexity of the development of this region due to its unique geographical features.

Ключевые слова: Russia-US confrontation in the Arctic, strategic role of the Arctic, global warming, Northern Sea Route, the Arctic Council, current policy, prospects.

The Arctic is now a more popular topic than ever before in its history, attracting the attention of a wide range of people, starting from politicians and statesmen, and finishing with businessmen and scientists. And such lively and genuine interest is noted almost in every corner of the planet, especially in those countries that have at least some grounds to claim it.

There has been much debate for decades among the world's countries over who owns the Arctic. Today, the Arctic is regarded as one of the indicators of the balance of power in the world, which motivates us to look at how develop events in this area between Russian Federation and The United States, as the world's major powers, which still retain their status as leading foreign policy opponents in contemporary international relations.

The **relevance** of this paper arises for a number of reasons. Firstly, the growing tensions in the world in general and in the Arctic in particular, which include increasing military conflicts (such as the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict), the intensification and possible expansion of military and political blocs (Sweden and

Finland's desire to join NATO) and the unresolved issue of legal ownership of the Arctic, which leads to problems in regulating the economic, military and scientific activities of the various countries on the continent. All of this leads to more activity by the Russian and American governments in the Arctic as another platform for these powers to assert their leadership position in the world.

Secondly, the worsening of global warming brings the Arctic to a completely different, higher level of importance. The Arctic region is not only affected by climate issues, but also affects the Earth's climate itself. This is particularly relevant in the midst of the Paris Agreement signed in 2015.

Thirdly, the Russian-American Arctic issue has also gained particular importance with regard to chairmanship of the Russian Federation in the Arctic Council in 2021-2023.

Fourthly, the importance of this paper is also due to the relatively recent start of the Biden presidency, which suggests the need to study the Arctic vector of the new American leader and look for changes that might affect the current US strategy in the Arctic region.

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The **aim** of this article is to reveal the current situation surrounding the US-Russian confrontation in the Arctic region.

In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to solve the following **tasks**:

1. To characterize the strategic role of the Arctic region in contemporary Russian and US policy;
2. To examine contemporary Russian-American activities in the Arctic area;
3. Provide a description of the possible perspectives on development of relations between the countries in the future.

Methodology

A wide range of sources has been used in writing this paper. Among the key works revealing the strategic role of the Arctic in the world today are reports by various research centres, committees and international departments, such as the Greenland Committee Appointed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Cooperation, the National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC), and the Geology and Geophysics Science Center.

As far as contemporary Russian and US policy in the Arctic zone is concerned, very useful is the work of analysts of the German Council on Foreign Relations «Dealing with Russia in the Arctic, between Exceptionalism and Militarization» [1], addressing the issue of the current Russian chairmanship in the Arctic Council and the policy towards it of Western powers, as well as the article of researcher N.S. Lipunov «Prospective directions of Arctic policy of J. Biden administration», covering the nuances of US policy under the new head of state [2].

The method of scientific analysis, comparative qualitative analysis, scientific synthesis and generalization, institutional and functional analysis were used in this paper.

Results and Discussion

In disclosing the strategic role of the Arctic for Russian Federation and the United States, it is worth starting with the climate issue. It is no secret that one of the leading problems of the contemporary climate is that of global warming, and it is the Arctic that is the most revealing and sensitive area in this respect. For example, according to a study by authoritative research and educational centers in the United States, the

United Kingdom, Norway and the Republic of Korea, the Arctic continent "warms up" two times faster than other regions of the planet [3]. Further evidence comes from data from the National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC), which in September 2020 recorded the lowest annual Arctic Sea ice since 2012 [4].

All the climatic changes cannot but affect the interest of the world powers in the Arctic region, which is primarily due to the economic benefits behind the gradually melting permafrost. Today, mineral extraction is the main reason why the world's powers are becoming increasingly involved in the Arctic race. According to research by the United States Geological Survey, 30% of the world's undiscovered gas reserves and 13% of the world's unexplored oil reserves are hidden under less than 500 meters of water in the Arctic region [5]. A softening climate, coupled with the shrinking ice cover in the Arctic, has simplified mineral exploration and extraction processes, with a direct impact on reducing costs and increasing the profitability of extraction activities.

Russia and the U.S. have already begun work in this area. A prime example on the Russian side is the construction of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant on the Yamal peninsula, where gas reserves are estimated at billions of dollars [6], and on the US side the creation of «Qilak LNG», which uses the latest developments in Arctic LNG technology to enable the direct export of natural gas from Alaska's North Slope [7].

For Russia and the US, such trends offer potentially very beneficial opportunities to develop their own economies. For example, it is strategically important for Russia to promote its Northern Sea Route, which runs along the border of the country. According to many scientists, the Northern Sea Route will gradually become ice-free over the coming decades, opening it to ships from other countries. It has long been proven that the NSR takes much shorter distance and time than its counterparts, the transit arteries through the Suez and Panama canals. At the same time, the US does not benefit from the Northern Sea Route becoming a popular transport route in the future, as it would increase Russia's influence in the world.

Another important advantage of developing the Arctic for Russia and the U.S. is the military. Ensuring security and protecting sovereignty is one of the most basic national interests for any state, which can also be defended

in the Arctic area by placing military infrastructure and defense industries there. Moreover, freeing the waters of the Arctic Ocean from ice and turning it into a working world transport artery opens the possibility of navigating more and more vessels in the Arctic zone, which greatly increases the military-intelligence potential of the two countries. Incidentally, the US is currently increasing its military presence in the Barents Sea with destroyers and building a modern polar fleet, while Russia is actively building military bases in the Arctic, including bases on the Franz Josef Land archipelago and in the Novosibirsk islands [8].

Based on the considered geopolitical benefits that the Arctic holds, the current policy pursued by Russia and the US in this region should be disclosed. First of all, today's Arctic agenda refers to an important aspect such as Russia's chairmanship of the Arctic Council, which started in May 2021. Among the priorities highlighted by Russian side were working to improve the well-being, health and quality of life of Arctic inhabitants (including indigenous peoples), tackling climate change and protecting the environment, increasing the level of socio-economic regional development and enhancing the role of the Arctic Council. At first, foreign experts assumed that cooperation with Russia on less geopolitical issues would help restore trust.

However, after the events in Ukraine, cardinal changes occurred in the Arctic Council: on March 3, 2022 all member states of the Arctic Council refused to participate in meetings chaired by Russia, and on June 8, they made a statement about resuming the work of the international organization, but without Russia's participation. Many Russian analysts saw this behavior of the Arctic Council member countries as a so-called "American trace". According to Dmitry Zhuravlev, General Director of the Institute of Regional Problems: «About five years ago, I read a meeting of the U.S. Congressional Special Committee on Arctic Development, which explicitly stated that the race between Russia and the United States in the Arctic is a race in space, it is just as significant and large-scale. Whoever can take the Arctic seriously will win the race for world leadership» [9].

The United States, for its part, is also not shy about making accusations against Moscow.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, for example, has repeatedly spoken about the threat emanating by Russia's militarization of the Arctic and "illegal" territorial claims to international waters along the Northern Sea Route. However, he has been silent on the absolutely mirror policy of his own state. For example, it is known that the US has stepped up the redeployment of dozens of F-35 fighter jets to Alaska [10].

This strong White House desire to prevent Russia from establishing itself firmly in the Arctic zone can be explained by the wealth of resources that the unique Arctic environment possesses, as well as by the undeniable economic benefits. In any case, the Western powers are now actively applying anti-Russian economic sanctions under the pretext of the Ukrainian conflict, which, according to Oleg Barabanov, programme director of the Valdai Club, will "block everything where there is Russian involvement" on the Arctic agenda. In addition, the researcher expressed doubt that Russia now has enough resources to actively develop the Arctic and suggested that Russia's Arctic projects will fade away in the near future due to Western sanctions [11].

However, in assessing contemporary Russian and US policy in the Arctic, both states have contributed significantly to the development of the region and continue to develop a large amount of projects

In the US, with Joe Biden in the Oval Office, there has been revived the Arctic Executive Steering Committee (AESC), which works to establish a Climate Resilience Zone in the Northern Bering Sea, and to strengthen partnerships with Alaska indigenous communities [12]. There have been also notable staff changes at the US Arctic Research Commission, where six highly qualified and diverse staff have been appointed to meet the Biden administration's environmental objectives, and there has been a strong push to combat climate change in the Arctic.

As for the Russian Federation, its presence in the Arctic is represented by the mining industry, namely «The Prirazlomnaya» oil platform, which is the only platform producing oil on the Russian Arctic shelf. In addition, the country is actively initiating programs and projects for Arctic development. For example, since 1 February 2022, a program has been in operation to provide

Russian citizens with 1 hectare of land in the Arctic regions free of charge, as well as subsidies and soft loans for small businesses [13].

Thus, contemporary Russian and US policy in the Arctic implies a high level of confrontation and competition. Each country seeks to gain the most in the region, focusing mainly on increasing the level of military presence and developing mining infrastructure. In addition, there is an increasing amount of disagreement on the fields of international organizations, above all the Arctic Council, which only complicates the process of finding and reaching agreements.

As for possible prospects for relations between Russian and American governments, it is worth saying that in the future the countries will continue to pursue a common political course towards securing as much of the Arctic region territory as possible. Within international organizations, representatives of the two countries will demonstrate their influence in the Arctic, and in their national documents they will fix the borders of their "piece" of the Arctic.

However, the countries' enthusiasm will not go much further than populist rhetoric in nearest years. This is primarily because creating a solid presence in the Arctic area for any country in the world means spending enormous resources on building modern and plentiful infrastructure there. Today the amount of infrastructure available is insufficient, both in the Russian area of the Arctic and in the American part. There are trivial problems in the region, such as a lack of permanent and sufficient energy sources, poor transportation networks and communication lines. Looking at the issue from the perspective of the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the global crisis, it is obvious that both Russia and the US have different priorities today and therefore the state budget is likely to be spent on the Arctic as a last resort.

Moreover, speaking of the Arctic as a source of natural resources, the countries will also face some pretty tangible obstacles here. Despite the fact that the ice in the region is melting faster and faster, the countries have almost no technology to carry out mining activities in the permafrost. This suggests that the development of the Arctic zone will require not only financial resources, but also the development of technological industries. And oil and gas production here will also be hindered by the global climate

agenda, according to which countries around the world will have to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions in the coming years. This means that the role of fossil fuels in the future can diminish. Here the question is immediately worth asking: how will Russia and the USA maintain their leading position in the Arctic under these conditions?

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is worth saying that the Arctic's current place in the global political arena is still evolving. However, there is already a clear trend towards an increasing role for the Arctic factor in the foreign policy strategies of the countries and their aspirations to take a leading position in the region. Both Russia and the United States have for years endeavored to gradually expand their influence in the Arctic and maintain a sufficiently competitive presence in the region. Today, the degree of Russian-American conflict in the Arctic is only increasing, which raises questions about the further development of these countries' relations in the region.

According to the author of this study, the effectiveness of Russian and US policy in the Arctic, as well as the issue of establishing their relations in the region, will depend on a range of different factors. A successful and positive outcome is most likely only if both sides take a more integrated approach to the advancement of the Arctic region, work more comprehensively on inter- and intra-state legislation on the delimitation of borders between the countries, and find common ground in various areas of cooperation. In any case, one thing is clear at the moment: both countries are interested in taking the lead in the Arctic zone, but both do not yet have the available resources to do so.

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РОССИЯ, США И СОВРЕМЕННАЯ АРКТИЧЕСКАЯ ГЕОПОЛИТИКА

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Данная работа посвящена современному положению российско-американского противоборства в Арктике. В ходе исследования рассматривается стратегическая роль Арктического региона для России и США. К данному аспекту относится и ключевое значение региона в мировой климатической повестке, и вытекающий из факта ускорения процесса глобального потепления повышенный интерес стран к добыче полезных ископаемых в Арктике, и продвижение Россией в перспективе экономически выгодного Северного морского пути, и стратегическое удобство стран в использовании региона в военных целях. Помимо того, в статье анализируется современная политика двух государств в Арктике. В особенности, делается упор на взаимодействии стран в рамках Арктического совета в 2023 году, а также на мерах, предпринимаемых сегодня Россией и США по развитию Арктического направления в их внешнеполитической деятельности. В заключении работы представлены возможные перспективы дальнейшего развития российско-американских отношений в Арктике, которые, по мнению автора, будут продолжать основываться на политике борьбы за лидерство в регионе, сопровождаемой локальными проблемами Арктики и сложностью развития данного региона в виду его уникальных географических особенностей.

Ключевые слова: противостояние России и США в Арктике; стратегическая роль Арктики; глобальное потепление; Северный морской путь; Арктический совет; современная политика; перспективы.

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