

NARRATIVES IN THE RUSSIAN MEDIA OF CONFLICT AND COOPERATION IN THE ARCTIC

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I. Introduction

The Arctic has been narrated as both a region of cooperation and a region of conflict. In the 1990s, following the well-known speech in Murmansk in 1987 by the former Russian president, Mikhail Gorbachev, a depiction of the northern polar region as a theatre of war was replaced by ‘desecuritization’ and an emphasis on the Arctic as a ‘zone of peace’.¹ The increasingly visible impacts of climate change over the past decade, including declining Arctic sea ice, have led to the emergence of new narratives as academics, policymakers, opinion formers and the media have speculated about future conflicts in the Arctic over resources, territory and shipping lanes.² Despite the existence of Russia–NATO security rivalry on a wider scale, however, the political situation in the Arctic has remained stable since the end of the cold war. Furthermore, despite major lines of conflict over Russia’s annexation of Crimea, international cooperation in the Arctic Council has continued relatively unscathed. Nonetheless, future developments are more difficult to predict—especially given the general uncertainty in international politics. Russia’s size, together with its Arctic capacities and strong geopolitical interests in the region, make the country a key player in setting the course for the region’s future political development.³ There is therefore a need to better

¹ Desecuritization is used here with reference to a reversal of the mechanisms that were formerly employed in order to maintain the securitization of an area or situation. Åtland, K., ‘Mikhail Gorbachev, the Murmansk Initiative, and the desecuritization of interstate relations in the Arctic’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 43, no. 3 (Sep. 2008), pp. 289–311; and Heininen, L., ‘Circumpolar international relations and geopolitics’, *Arctic Human Development Report* (Stefansson Arctic Institute: Akureyri, 2004).

² See e.g. Borgerson, S. G., ‘Arctic meltdown’, *Foreign Affairs*, Mar./Apr. 2008; Gullede, J. et al., *Climate Change & International Security: The Arctic as a Bellwether* (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions: Arlington, VA, 2012); see also Pincus, R. and Ali, S. H., ‘Have you been to “The Arctic”? Frame theory and the role of media coverage in shaping Arctic discourse’, *Polar Geography*, vol. 39, no. 2 (Apr. 2016), pp. 83–97.

³ Laruelle, M., *Russia’s Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North* (Routledge: Armonk, NY, 2013); Wilson Rowe, E. (ed.), *Russia and the North* (University of Ottawa Press: Ottawa, 2009); Sergunin, A. and Konyshov, V., *Russia in the Arctic: Hard or Soft Power?* (Ibidem Press:

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SUMMARY

● The Arctic has been narrated as both a region of cooperation and a region of conflict. This paper presents an analysis of how three Russian newspapers (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Izvestiya* and *Novaya Gazeta*) reported on the Arctic region between 2007 and 2016.

The aim of the analysis is to provide a foundation for a discussion of Russian perceptions of conflict and cooperation in the Arctic in a decade when the desecuritization and peaceful cooperation that began in the late 1980s and early 1990s was challenged by a combination of changes to the physical environment and a shifting geopolitical landscape.

The paper also explores how Russia’s narratives of conflict and cooperation fit into narratives about the region that have emerged in the international media. Last, the paper discusses what Russian media narratives can tell us about the priorities and future trends of Russia’s Arctic policy.



understand how the Arctic is perceived in Russia and how such perceptions relate to Russia's official policies on the region.

The media can play a central role in shaping public perceptions of a given issue. In today's digital communications landscape, media narratives that influence political perceptions and priorities can also have geopolitical implications.⁴ The media's interest in the Arctic has increased substantially in the past decade. This has inspired a number of studies of media content on this topic, with a focus on the English-language, Russian and Norwegian media.⁵ Taken together, these illustrate how the media covers topics ranging from climate change and declining sea ice to the geopolitical race for resources and the need to develop northern regions.

The media often highlights conflict, either between countries with different interests or between environmental and economic development goals

The media often highlights lines of conflict, either between countries with different interests or between environmental and economic development goals, although the rhetoric and the emphasis of the coverage differ between countries. For example, oil discourses figure prominently in the United States and Norway, while the Canadian press also highlights sovereignty. Studies of Russian press coverage of the Arctic have noted the attention paid to hydrocarbons, economic sanctions and securitization.⁶ Barry Buzan et al. define securitization as the placement of areas of activity or subjects within frames of 'security', whereby the use of certain mechanisms and conduct can be justified for the sake of security, regardless of whether such areas and subjects genuinely pose a threat to the well-being of the state.⁷ A broad search of the web content on Russia and the Arctic highlights its dominant focus on hydrocarbon production, and on transport issues.⁸

Other themes have also been the focus of studies of Russian media outlets, such as environmental concerns in relation to security discourses, military activities and the Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation.⁹ Given the

Stuttgart, 2015); and Carlsson, M. and Granholm, N., 'Russia and the Arctic: Analysis and discussion of Russian strategies', FOI, Stockholm, 2013.

⁴ Nilsson, A. E. and Christensen, M., *Arctic Geopolitics, Media and Power* (Routledge: Basingstoke, 2019).

⁵ E.g. Berzina, I., 'Foreign and domestic discourse on the Russian Arctic', *Arctic Yearbook 2015*, eds L. Heininen, H. Exner-Pirot and J. Plouffe (Northern Research Forum: Akureyri, 2015), pp. 281–95; Bushue, A., 'Framing of military activity in the Arctic on Russia Today', Master's thesis, Uppsala University, May 2015; Christensen, M., 'Arctic climate change and the media: The news story that was', eds M. Christensen, A. E. Nilsson and N. Wormbs, *Media and the Politics of Arctic Climate Change: When the Ice Breaks* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2013), pp. 26–51; Jensen, L. C. and Hønneland, G., 'Framing the High North: Public discourses in Norway after 2000', *Acta Borealia*, vol. 28, no. 1 (June 2011), pp. 37–54; Nicol, H., 'Natural news, state discourses and the Canadian Arctic', eds L. Heininen, H. Exner-Pirot and J. Plouffe, *Arctic Yearbook 2013* (Northern Research Forum: Akureyri, 2013), pp. 211–36; Nilsson and Christensen (note 4); Steinberg, P. E., Bruun, J. M. and Medby, I. A., 'Covering Kiruna: A natural experiment in Arctic awareness', *Polar Geography*, vol. 37, no. 4 (Oct. 2014), pp. 273–97; and Wilson Rowe, E., 'A dangerous space? Unpacking state and media discourses on the Arctic', *Polar Geography*, vol. 36, no. 3 (Sep. 2013), pp. 232–44.

⁶ Gritsenko, D., 'Vodka on ice? Unveiling Russian media perceptions of the Arctic', *Energy Research & Social Science*, Arctic Energy: Views from the Social Sciences, 16 (June 2016), pp. 8–12.

⁷ Buzan, B., Wæver, O. and de Wilde, J., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Lynne Rienner Publishers: Boulder, CO, 1998).

⁸ Devyatkin, D. A., Suvorov, R. E. and Sochenkov, I. V., 'An information retrieval system for decision support: An Arctic-related mass media case study', *Scientific and Technical Information Processing*, vol. 44, no. 5 (1 Dec. 2017), pp. 329–37.

⁹ Nefidova, N., 'Environmental public debate: In the context of the Arctic in Russian and Norwegian Media', Master's thesis, University of Oslo, Sep. 2014; and Bushue (note 5).



interlinkages between mediated perceptions and geopolitical dynamics, studies of Russian media coverage offer a way to understand how narratives about the Arctic might influence Russia's role in relation to the risk of conflict and the potential for continued peaceful political cooperation. This SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security paper presents an analysis of how three Russian newspapers reported on the Arctic region between 2007 and 2016, adding breadth and depth to previous studies of Russian press coverage of the region, which have either focused on shorter time windows or had a narrower empirical base.¹⁰

The aim of the analysis is to provide a foundation for a discussion of Russian perceptions of conflict and cooperation in the Arctic in a decade when the desecuritization and peaceful cooperation that began in the late 1980s and early 1990s was challenged by a combination of changes to the physical environment and a shifting geopolitical landscape. The paper also explores how Russia's narratives of conflict and cooperation fit into narratives about the region that have emerged in the international media. Last but not least, the paper discusses what Russian media narratives can tell us about the priorities and future trends of Russia's Arctic policy.

II. Background: Russia and the Arctic

Russia's Arctic is home to almost half the population of the circumpolar north and accounts for 70 per cent of the circumpolar economy.¹¹ In many respects, the Arctic is a very important region for Russia in terms of both military security—the Northern Fleet is stationed in the Arctic—and the national economy. Russia's Arctic economy is largely based on petroleum and other extractive industries. The Arctic region of Russia contributes roughly 10 per cent of Russia's gross domestic product (GDP) and 20 per cent of Russia's exports.¹² After the break-up of the Soviet Union, however, the Arctic region was neglected by the Russian Government for over a decade. It was the high oil prices of the second half of the 2000s that revived Russia's interest in the region.

The Arctic is a very important region for Russia in terms of both military security and the national economy

Russia's official narrative on the Arctic has changed several times over the past decade and a half. In the first half of the 2000s, its Arctic policy followed the foreign policy principles of Vladimir Putin's first two terms as president, particularly the ideas of reviving Russia as a great power, restoring its military might and maintaining its status as an energy superpower.¹³ This

¹⁰ Wilson Rowe (note 5) focused on coverage in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* from 2008–11, while Gritsenko (note 6) covered six newspapers from 2011–15. Bushue (note 5) only looked at *Russia Today* and 1 year of coverage (2014). No studies have focused on the independent media, such as *Novaya Gazeta*.

¹¹ Mäenpää, I., 'Comparative analyses of Arctic economies at macro level', eds S. Glomsrød, G. Duhaime and I. Aslaksen, *The Economy of the North, 2015* (Statistics Norway: Oslo, 2015), pp. 27–35.

¹² RIA Novosti, 'Арктика остается регионом низкой политической напряженности, считают в МИД' [The Arctic remains a region of low political tension, according to the Foreign Ministry], 6 Dec. 2018.

¹³ Laruelle, M., 'Resource, state reassertion and international recognition: Locating the drivers of Russia's Arctic policy', *Polar Journal*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2014); Baev, P., 'Russia's Arctic Policy and the Northern Fleet modernization', *Russie.Nei.Visions*, no. 65 (Aug. 2012).



was reflected in Russia's first Arctic strategy in 2001.¹⁴ Since then, the Arctic has remained one of Russia's top priorities.

The region's importance to Russia's energy sector is increasing and the Arctic is seen as the major source of hydrocarbons for the next 20–50 years.¹⁵ Another priority is development of the Northern Sea Route (NSR), which is crucial for transporting Arctic resources to an expanding market, especially as climate change and the melting permafrost make it more difficult to rely on terrestrial infrastructure to transport resources to and from remote areas. For historical and geographical reasons, the Arctic and the Kola Peninsula, in particular, are home to a large proportion of Russia's sea-based nuclear deterrence forces. This makes the Arctic vital from a defence perspective.¹⁶ Moreover, it is important to Russia's national identity and its image as a great power.¹⁷ The Arctic is a region where Russia can demonstrate its military power to domestic and international audiences.

In 2008, the Russian narrative on the Arctic began to shift noticeably. While Russia did not abandon its plans for military modernization in the region, it did change the narrative and start to focus on building cooperation. Russia's 2008 Arctic policy defines the Arctic as a 'zone of peace and cooperation'.¹⁸ Russia has repeatedly underlined that there are 'no threats in the region that would require a military solution'.¹⁹ It has also engaged with the other Arctic states to develop the rules of the game in the region in order to guarantee the sovereignty of the Arctic states, determine best practice for resolving territorial disputes and ensure that all relevant rights in the Arctic are divided between the Arctic states, with only limited involvement from non-Arctic states. Russia has thus been supportive of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and was a signatory of the Ilulissat Declaration and the Nuuk Declaration.²⁰ Furthermore, in 2010 Russia signed a bilateral treaty with Norway on delimitation of the maritime border between the two countries in the Barents Sea, thereby resolving a 40-year territorial dispute.²¹ On other claims, Russia submitted a revised filing to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in 2015. The

¹⁴ Zysk, K. B., 'Russian military power and the Arctic', EU-Russia Centre, Review no. 8 (Oct. 2008).

¹⁵ Russian Ministry of Energy, [Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2035], Moscow 2014; and Øverland, I., 'Russia's Arctic energy policy', *International Journal* (Autumn 2010), pp. 865–78.

¹⁶ Carlsson and Granholm (note 3).

¹⁷ Laruelle (note 3).

¹⁸ 'Основы государственной политики Российской Федерации в Арктике на период до 2020 года и дальнейшую перспективу' [Foundations of the Arctic Policy of the Russian Federation until 2020] (adopted 18 Sep. 2008).

¹⁹ RIA Novosti, 'Лавров: в Арктике нет проблем, оправдывающих появление военных блоков' [Lavrov: There are no problems in the Arctic to justify the emergence of military blocs], 15 Oct. 2009.

²⁰ United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), opened for signature 10 Dec. 1982, entered into force 16 Nov. 1994; Ilulissat Declaration, Arctic Ocean Conference, Ilulissat, Greenland, 27–29 May 2008; Arctic Council, 'Nuuk Declaration on the occasion of the Seventh Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council', Nuuk, Greenland, 12 May 2011; and Lavrov, S., 'Nuuk Declaration: A new stage of cooperation among Arctic States', *Arktika: Ekologiya i Ekonomika Magazine*, no. 3 (2011).

²¹ Treaty between the Kingdom of Norway and the Russian Federation concerning Maritime Delimitation and Cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean, signed 15 Sep. 2010, entered into force 7 July 2011.



area covered extends to the North Pole, where it overlaps with Danish and Canadian claims.²²

In 2012, at the start of Putin's third presidential term, relations between Russia and the West started to deteriorate and reached a low point as a result of the crisis in Ukraine. This deterioration was also reflected in the Arctic, where Russia reverted to more assertive rhetoric that highlighted the various emerging threats in the region.²³ Among these threats was the 'militarization of the region'.²⁴ Military documents, such as the 2015 National Security Strategy, the 2015 Maritime Strategy and the 2014 Military Doctrine, paid increased attention to the Arctic region. However, a cooperation narrative persisted alongside this increased focus on military security, whereby the Russian Foreign Policy Concept of 2016 underlined Russian support for international cooperation in the region.²⁵

Against this background of shifting focuses of and parallel discourses on military security, on the one hand, and an emphasis on international cooperation, on the other, it is difficult to predict how Russia's role in the Arctic might develop in the future. However, a closer look at how the Arctic is being debated within Russia and how these discourses have evolved over the past decade provides a basis for identifying priorities and interests that are likely to drive future developments.

The study is based on an analysis of Russian media narratives in the context of a media system that has been described as 'neo-authoritarian'.²⁶ Most media outlets are controlled by the government. Even if there is no pre-publication censorship, economic and political pressures are used and freedom of speech is thus circumscribed in practice. There are few independent voices.

III. Methodology

Constructions and perceptions play an important role in geopolitics—an insight that serves as a cornerstone of critical geopolitics, as well as a growing array of studies of Arctic geopolitics.²⁷ A meaningful methodological tool for studying different perceptions is to analyse how an issue is framed, for example, in media coverage. According to frame theory, frames provide an

²² IBRU Centre for Borders Research, Durham University, 'Arctic maps', 19 Feb. 2018.

²³ RIA Novosti, [Shoigu: Broad spectrum of potential threats to Russia's national security is now being formed in the Arctic], 25 Feb. 2015.

²⁴ President of Russia, 'Расширенное заседание коллегии Министерства обороны' [Expanded meeting of the Ministry of Defence Collegium], Kremlin, Moscow, 27 Feb. 2013.

²⁵ For more detailed analysis of Russia's official narratives on the Arctic see Klimenko, E., *Russia's Arctic Security Policy: Still Quiet in the High North?*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 45 (SIPRI: Stockholm, Feb. 2016); and Staun, J., *Russia's Strategy in the Arctic*, Royal Danish Defence College Report (Royal Danish Defence College Publishing House: Copenhagen, Mar. 2015).

²⁶ Becker, J., 'Lessons from Russia: A neo-authoritarian media system', *European Journal of Communication*, vol. 19, no. 2 (June 2004), pp. 139–63.

²⁷ For an introduction to critical geopolitics, see Dodds, K., Kuus, M. and Sharp, J. P. (eds), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics* (Ashgate: Farnham, UK & Burlington, VT, 2013). Arctic geopolitics have been the focus of several studies e.g. Knecht, S. and Keil, K., 'Arctic geopolitics revisited: Spatialising governance in the circumpolar north', *Polar Journal*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2013), pp. 178–203; Eklund, N. and van der Watt, L.-M., 'Refracting (geo)political choices in the Arctic', *Polar Journal*, vol. 7, no. 1 (Jan. 2017), pp. 86–103; Dodds, K. and Nuttall, M., *The Scramble for the Poles: The Geopolitics of the Arctic and Antarctic* (Polity Press: Cambridge, UK & Malden, MA, 2016); and Nilsson and Christensen (note 4).

**Table 1.** The frames used to analyse Russian media coverage of the Arctic

Analytical frame	Description
Social progress and human well-being	A means of improving quality of life and resolving problems; measures to reduce imminent or future risks and threats to human security; strengthening nature-culture connectivities.
Economic development and competitiveness	Economic investment or growth; market benefits or risk; a point of local, national or global competitiveness; labour market and workforce dimensions .
Morality and ethics	A matter of right or wrong; environmental and/or virtue ethics; decision making for the greater good; respect or disrespect for limits, thresholds or moral and ethical boundaries and capabilities. In this study, this includes discussion of human rights and indigenous people's rights.
Science and technology	Scientific activities and cooperation; knowledge production and scientific and technical infrastructure; a matter of expert understanding or consensus; a debate on what is known or unknown, or certainty versus uncertainty. In this study, this includes discussion of infrastructure.
Environment and environmental change	Environment-related concerns; spatial and temporal projections of near, distant or future risks.
Governing and politics	Arctic-related legislation (national and international), regulations and decision making; calls for governance through policy interventions or imposition of codes of conduct.
Conflict and strategy	A supremacy game, such as who is winning or losing; a battle or clash of groups (e.g. nation states or between communities and states); often concerning resources or military security; symbolic or actual displays of power.

Sources: Adapted from Buurman, T. and Christensen, M., 'Governance and the changing Arctic: News framings in US newspapers from 2007 to 2015', Presented at the Conference on Communication and Environment (COCE), Leicester, 28 June–3 July 2017.

overarching logic that relates new information to earlier understandings of the world while also excluding or reinterpreting information that does not fit preconceived notions.²⁸ An analytical focus on the context in which an event or issue is placed in news coverage helps to reveal the logic that situates a specific story within a given political discourse.

In the study of three Russian media outlets presented below, seven analytical frames (see table 1) are used to build on earlier studies of the media and Arctic governance: (a) social progress and human well-being; (b) economic development and competitiveness; (c) morality and ethics; (d) science and technology; (e) the environment and environmental change; (f) governing and politics; and (g) conflict and strategy.²⁹

The study focuses on the coverage of the Arctic between 2007 and 2016 in three Russian newspapers: *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Izvestiya* and *Novaya Gazeta*. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* is an official newspaper that was established by the Russian Government in 1990. It is a daily publication that also publishes state documents such as laws and presidential orders. *Izvestiya* is a daily broadsheet newspaper in Russia. It was a newspaper of record in the Soviet

²⁸ For review, see Pincus and Ali (note 2); and Christensen, M. and Wormbs, N., 'Global climate talks: From failure to cooperation and hope, Swedish news framings of COP15 and COP21', *Environmental Communication*, vol. 11, no. 5 (Sep. 2017), pp. 682–99.

²⁹ Buurman, T. and Christensen, M., 'Governance and the changing Arctic: News framings in US newspapers from 2007 to 2015', Presented at the Conference on Communication and Environment (COCE), Leicester, 28 June–3 July 2017; and Nisbet, M. C., 'Communicating climate change: Why frames matter for public engagement', *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, vol. 51, no. 2 (Mar. 2009), pp. 12–23.



Union from 1917 until its dissolution in 1991. It is currently owned by the National Media Group and is one of the most often cited newspapers in Russia. *Novaya Gazeta* is known to be the only truly independent newspaper in Russia as it is (75 per cent) owned by its staff. It was established by a group of journalists who left *Komsomolskaya Pravda* in 1993. *Novaya Gazeta* is famous for its investigative journalism, such as its coverage of the 1999 apartment bombings, the Beslan School siege and the Nord-Ost siege, as well as of the Kursk submarine accident. Since 2009 it has been published three times a week.

Articles published between 2007 and 2016 were retrieved from the Medialogia database.³⁰ The articles were identified using the search word 'Arctic' in its various forms in the Russian language (including as a noun and in its adjectival forms). In total, 822 articles in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 309 articles in *Izvestiya* and 127 articles in *Novaya Gazeta* were considered relevant. The excluded articles mentioned the Arctic but did not contain Arctic content.

Each article was coded using the set of frames described above (see table 1). The coding was implemented by the authors. Where relevant, articles were coded in more than one frame but typically not more than two.³¹ In the statistical analysis, double-coded articles were presented only once, according to the dominant frame.

IV. Results

The results are presented first as an overview of the issues covered by the newspapers in relation to the overarching frames, with an eye to differences in emphasis. After the overview, the paper provides an in-depth analysis of the results in relation to narratives of conflict and cooperation in the Arctic region. This also includes an examination of the challenges and threats to Russia's national security that are highlighted in the media coverage.

Overview of major themes

Table 2 provides an overview of the types of issues covered in the three Russian newspapers in relation to the seven overarching frames. The differences in emphasis are illustrated in figures 1, 2 and 3.

In *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (see figure 1) the best represented frames were science and technology and conflict and strategy, which each accounted for 25 per cent of the total number of articles with an Arctic focus. These frames were followed by economic development and competitiveness (21 per cent), governing and politics (12 per cent), environment and environmental change (10 per cent), social progress and human well-being (6 per cent), and morality and ethics (1 per cent).

³⁰ Medialogia database, <<http://www.mlg.ru/>>.

³¹ There are a number of double-coded articles. For example, comprehensive interviews with Russian officials often touch on a number of themes, such as the development of oil and gas on the Arctic shelf and Russia's security interests in the Arctic region. See e.g. Snegirev, V., 'Температура по Артуру' [Temperature according to Arthur], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 21 Jan. 2012; and Smolyakova, T., 'Поллюс - наш!' [The Pole is ours!], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 21 May 2015.

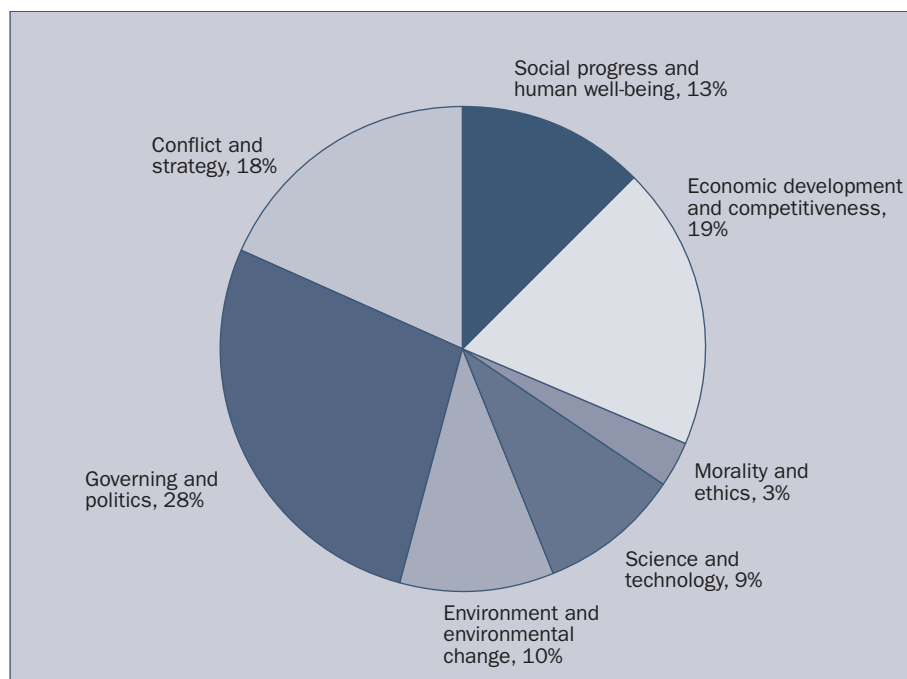


Figure 3. Coverage of frames in percentages for *Novaya Gazeta*, 2007–16

In *Izvestiya* (see figure 2) economic development and competitiveness was the most prominent frame (28 per cent of the articles) followed by conflict and strategy (24 per cent), science and technology (22 per cent), governing and politics (12 per cent), environment and environmental change (10 per cent), and social progress and human well-being (6 per cent). There were no articles on morality and ethics.

In *Novaya Gazeta* (see figure 3) the dominant frame was governing and politics (28 per cent of the selected articles), followed by economic development and competitiveness (19 per cent), social progress and human well-being (13 per cent), environment and environmental change (10 per cent), science and technology (9 per cent), and morality and ethics (3 per cent).

A closer look at specific themes

The media coverage varied throughout the period 2007–16, as illustrated in figures 4, 5 and 6. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (see figure 4) featured two high peaks for conflict and strategy in 2014 and 2015, following the conflict in Ukraine. During this period, military developments in the Russian Arctic, such as various military exercises, the construction of military bases and the delivery of new equipment to the Russian military in the Arctic, accounted for nearly 30 per cent of the Arctic coverage. In *Izvestiya* (see figure 5), coverage focused on conflict and strategy peaked in 2009 and 2016. The focus was mostly on possible conflicts in the region over resources and shipping lanes.

In 2011, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Izvestiya* both had a pronounced emphasis on economic development and competitiveness. This was linked to the dynamic development of partnerships between Russian energy companies, primarily Rosneft, and various international partners, such as BP and ExxonMobil, to work on the Arctic shelf. In 2013, coverage focused on

Table 2. The main Arctic issues, by frame, covered in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Izvestiya* and *Novaya Gazeta*

Analytical frame	Components
Social progress and human well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural events; • Socio-economic strategies of various Russian Arctic regions; • Housing problems in the Russian Arctic; • Healthcare systems in Russian Arctic regions; • Infrastructure problems in the Arctic and its influence on the well-being of the population.
Economic development and competitiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oil and gas sector developments; • Arctic resources; • Arctic shelf resources; • Arctic tourism; • Cooperation/agreements between various oil development companies; • Shipping; • Development of the Northern Sea Route; • Fisheries; • Economic sanctions.
Morality and ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous population of the Arctic; • Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON).
Science and technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Icebreakers; • Search and rescue centres; • Scientific and technological developments; • Expeditions to the North Pole; • Infrastructure projects/port infrastructure; • Development of Arctic aviation; • Construction/development of the equipment for oil/gas industry; • Scientific and research cooperation.
Environment and environmental change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Melting of Arctic sea ice; • Environmental damage/pollution; • Ecosystems; • Weather and temperature changes in the Arctic; • Climate change; • Global warming; • ‘Spring cleaning’ of the Arctic area/Russian Arctic islands; • Permafrost melting; • Nature resorts in the Arctic.
Governing and politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation in the Arctic • Council, ministerial meetings • Barents Euro-Arctic Council and other institutions, meetings of various levels • United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and territorial claims (when no potential for conflict is mentioned) • Bilateral visits and bilateral cooperation initiatives • Various state strategies and laws to regulate the Arctic (the Law on the Russian Arctic Zone) • Legal disputes • <i>Arctic Sunrise</i>
Conflict and strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for conflict in the Arctic region • Territorial claims (when possible conflict is mentioned) • Military developments in the Arctic region, including exercises and the presence of military forces/fleet • Development of the border guard facilities in the Russian Arctic

Source: Authors' own table.



governing and politics in *Novaya Gazeta* (see figure 6) and *Izvestiya*, related to their detailed coverage of the *Arctic Sunrise* case.

Social progress and human well-being was one of the least common frames in the Russian newspaper coverage. Arctic residents' social issues, such as the northern premium (weighted salaries for residents of the High North) or service delivery problems with housing and healthcare were rarely mentioned in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Izvestiya*. A number of articles raised social issues in interviews with the regional governors and discussed regional strategies.³² After an outbreak of anthrax on the Yamal Peninsula in 2016, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Novaya Gazeta* began to look more closely at local problems linked to the epidemics, which explains the greater coverage in 2016.

Economic development and competitiveness was a prominent frame in all the newspapers. Most of these articles focused on the exploitation of oil and gas resources or the NSR. Coverage of oil and gas in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Izvestiya* focused specifically on the potential for extracting resources from the Arctic shelf and on the view that Arctic resources would guarantee high levels of oil production in the future, after traditional areas of resource extraction have been depleted. The Arctic was regularly referred to as a 'resource base for the 21st century', quoting a speech by the then Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev, at the Russian Federation Security Council in December 2008.³³ A number of problems related to oil and gas extraction were also discussed throughout the period 2007–2008.

Economic development and competitiveness was a prominent frame in all the newspapers

For instance, the press coverage emphasized that Russia was lagging behind other Arctic states when it came to geological prospecting of the shelf, geological exploration of land resources, and the technology and know-how for extracting Arctic shelf resources.³⁴ Experts were quoted as saying that the level of difficulty of developing Arctic shelf resources was similar to that of space exploration, and that Russia therefore needed foreign partners to develop the Arctic: 'In terms of the complexity of developing the Arctic shelf, Academician Kontorovich compared it to the exploration of space. Apparently, Russia cannot do without foreign experience, because domestic industry had no such goals in the past. In any case, both the Russian Government and Russian business are open to anyone who can offer the appropriate technology.'³⁵

Between 2010 and 2013 the focus was on how to achieve the goal of turning the Arctic, and the Arctic continental shelf specifically, into a major source of hydrocarbons. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Izvestiya* paid substantial attention to the problems of geological prospecting, the lack of technological solutions for developing offshore deposits, the need to incentivize national companies, including through tax breaks and other favourable regimes, and the need

³² *Izvestiya*, 'Влияние нефтяных компаний на власть свелось к нулю' [The influence of oil companies on authorities has been reduced to zero], 26 Mar. 2014.

³³ Пуйн, А., 'Arktike opredelyat granitsy' [Arctic borders will be determined], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 18 Sep. 2008; and Latyshev, A., 'Северное слияние' [Northern merge], *Izvestiya*, 18 Sep. 2008

³⁴ Abrosimov, P., 'Земля надежд' [The land of hope], *Izvestiya*, 3 Apr. 2009; and Kontorovich, A., 'С кем пойти в разведку' [Who to go on a scouting mission with?], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 20 Jan. 2009.

³⁵ Smolyakova, T., 'Планета Арктика' [Planet Arctic], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 3 Sep. 2009.

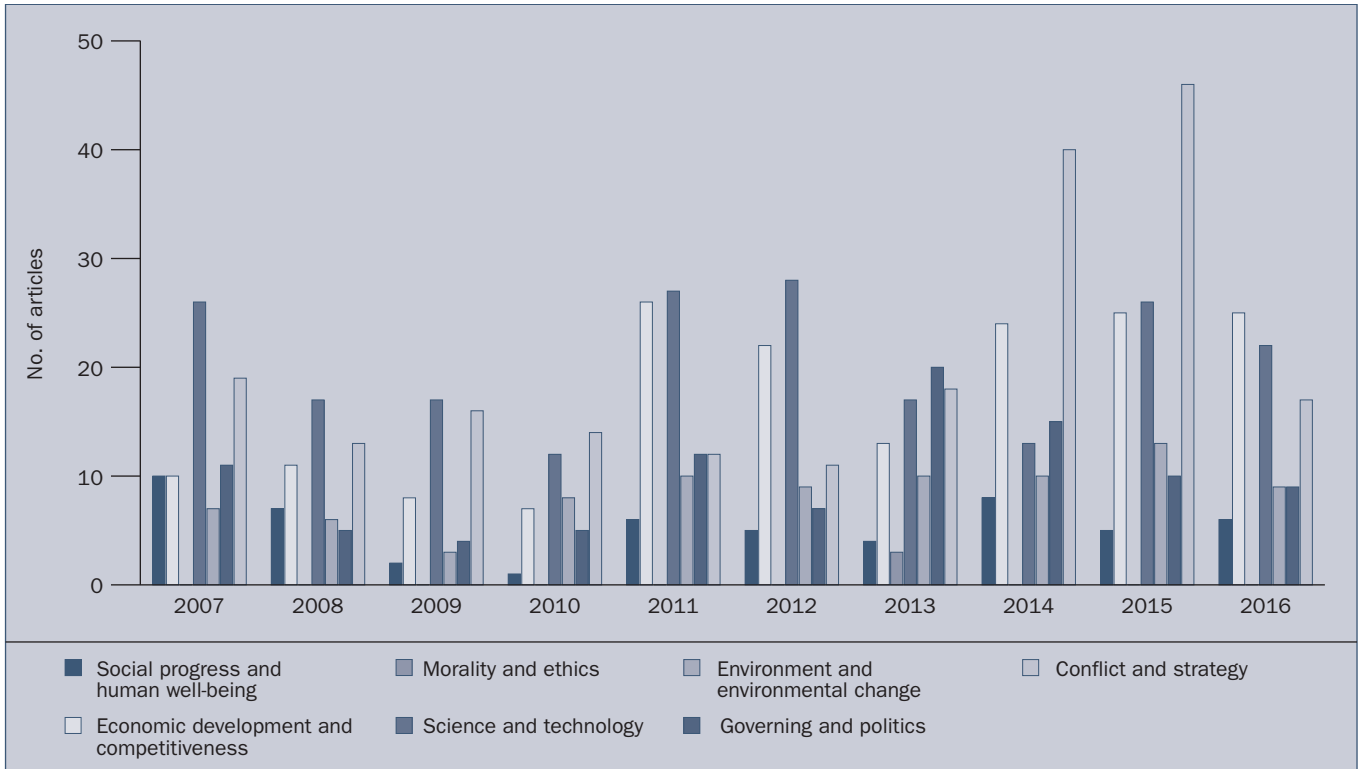


Figure 4. Total number of articles in each frame per year for *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 2007–16

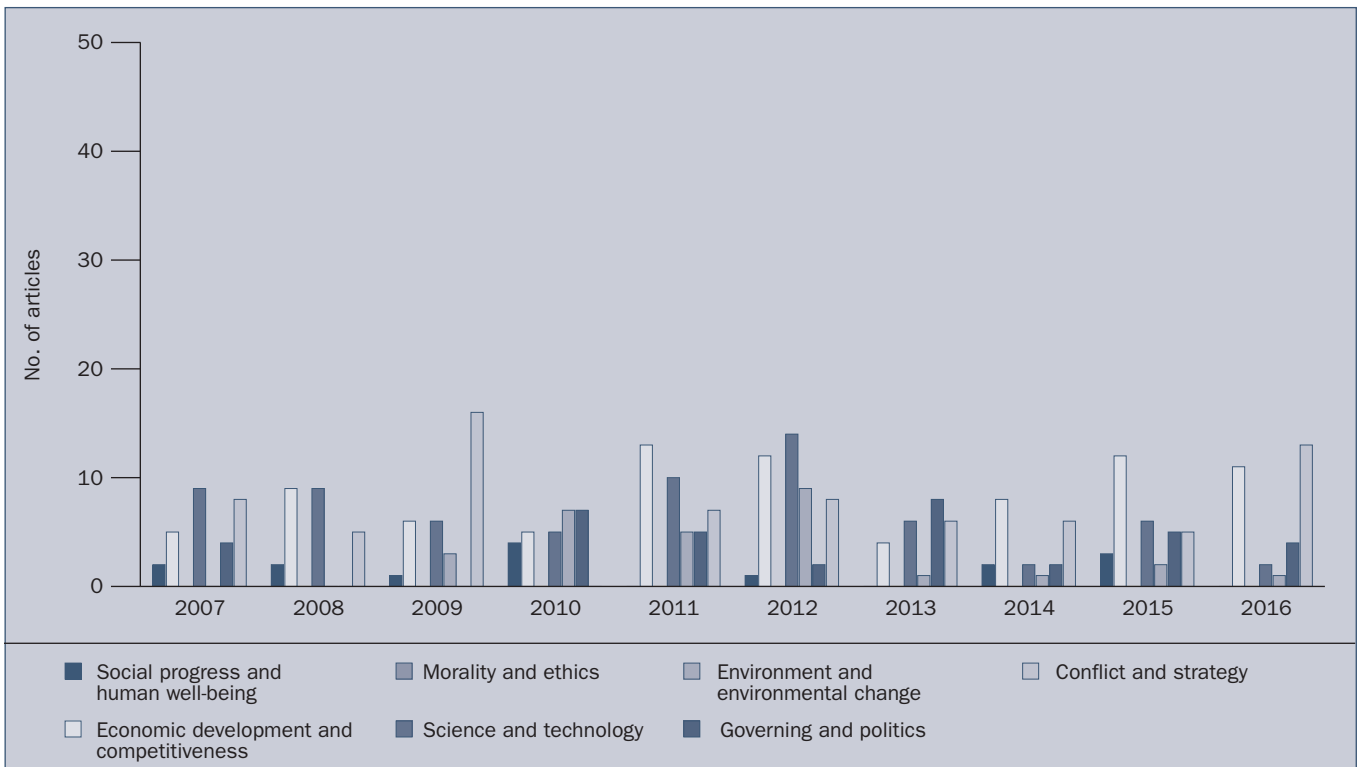


Figure 5. Total number of articles in each frame per year for *Izvestiya*, 2007–16

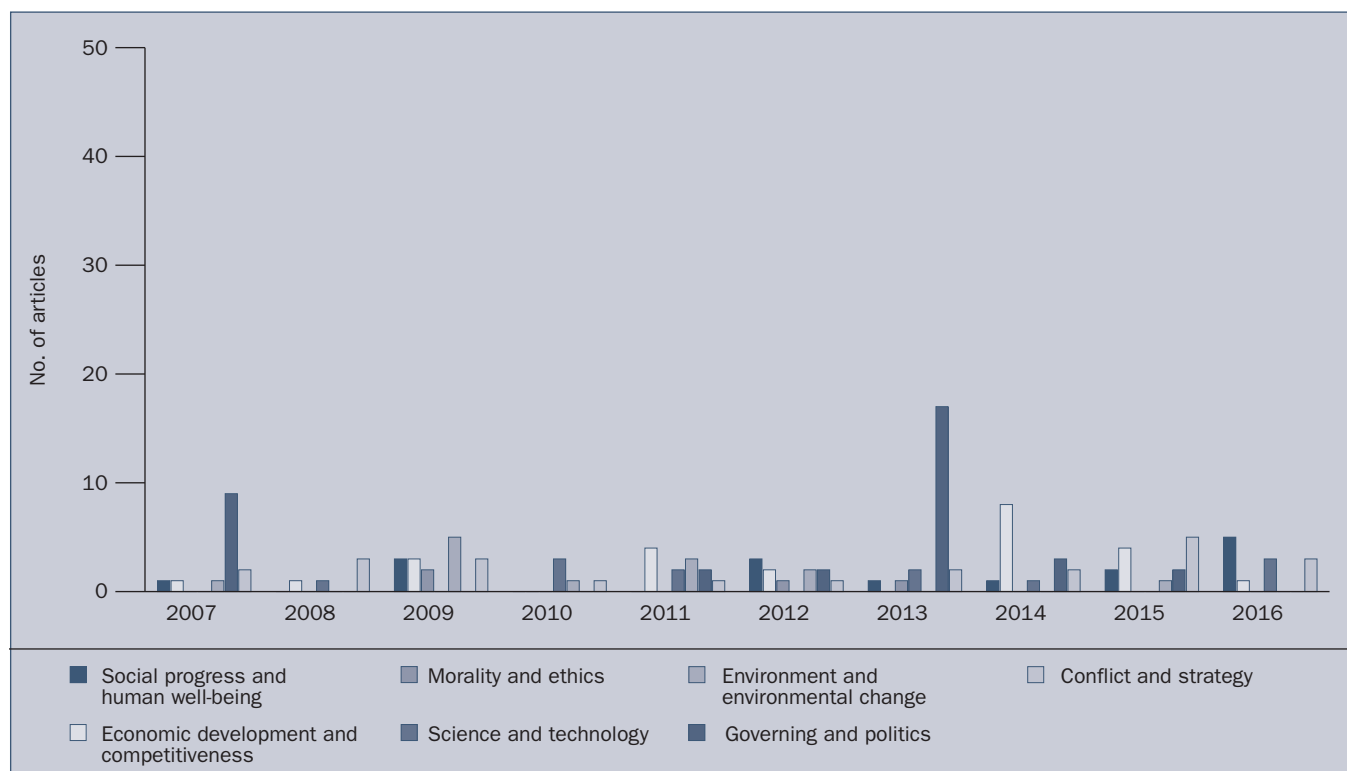


Figure 6. Total number of articles in each frame per year for *Novaya Gazeta*, 2007–16

to attract foreign partners.³⁶ A specific focus in this period was on giving private companies access to the Arctic shelf and various partnerships between Rosneft, Gazprom and international companies.³⁷

In 2014–17, following the conflict in Ukraine and the introduction of international sanctions against Russian Arctic projects, the discussion shifted to exploring the consequences of sanctions for partnerships with international companies on the Arctic shelf.³⁸ Later, the consequences were also discussed of such partnerships falling apart. *Izvestiya*, for instance, again raised questions about providing access for private companies to the Arctic shelf to boost its development.³⁹ At the beginning of 2015, an opinion piece appeared in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* that questioned the need to develop

³⁶ See e.g. Latukhina, K., ‘Золото Арктики’ [The Arctic’s gold], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 17 Jan. 2011; Abdullaev, T., ‘Бурить или не бурить’ [To drill or not to drill], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 31 May 2011; Itar-Tass, ‘“Космический” альянс’ [Space’ alliance], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 28 Apr. 2012; Kezik, I., ‘“Роснефть” добила налоговых льгот для “Лукойла”’ [Rosneft has achieved tax breaks for Lukoil], *Izvestiya*, 4 Oct. 2012; Jebit, M. and Parfenova, M., ‘Шельф получит финансовый стимул’ [Shelf will receive financial incentive], *Izvestiya*, 13 Apr. 2012; and Smolyakova, T., ‘Вкус охоты’ [Taste of the hunt], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 14 Oct. 2013.

³⁷ See e.g. Kezik, I., ‘Разведку 59% российского шельфа могут отдать частным компаниям’ [Exploration of 59% of the Russian shelf can be given to private companies], *Izvestiya*, 27 Sep. 2012; *Izvestiya*, ‘Роснефть’ получила 30% проекта ExxonMobil’ [Rosneft received 30% of ExxonMobil’s project], 2013; Stankevich, Y., ‘Баррель в холодном расчете’ [Barrel by cold calculation], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 10 Apr. 2012; and Schmal, G., ‘“Торосы” на шельфе’ [‘Ice-drifts’ on the shelf], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 14 Jan. 2013.

³⁸ Fomchenkov, T., ‘Не наступить на грабли’ [Do not step on a rake], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 31 Mar. 2014.

³⁹ Pogosyan, A., ‘“Лукойл” вышел из проекта с американской компанией’ [‘Lukoil’ is out of the project with the American company], *Izvestiya*, 14 May 2015; Pogosyan, A., ‘Норвежская North Energy заинтересовалась нашим шельфом’ [Norwegian North Energy is interested in our shelf],



Arctic resources and regions at a difficult economic and political time, and suggested that projects to develop the Arctic should be paused: ‘Should we, under such conditions, force the development of the shelf of the Arctic Ocean? Despite the importance of this region to Russia, why not take a pause in the development of Arctic oil and gas fields?’⁴⁰

Later in 2015–16, however, rather than postponing or halting the development, the discourse on Arctic hydrocarbon resources was refocused on to ways to develop the Arctic in the light of sanctions, and the absence of technology and of foreign partners.

A completely different perspective on Arctic economic development and competitiveness was provided by the independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, which repeatedly questioned the future exploitation of Arctic resources. For instance, it called for less optimism from the government with regard to the melting of the Arctic ice.⁴¹ *Novaya Gazeta* also raised questions about the ecological risks related to the Pirazlomnaya rig in the Pechora Sea.⁴² It highlighted the lack of competitiveness of resource projects on the Arctic shelf, and set out a more general critique of the Russian Government’s approach to Arctic development as being highly inefficient and displaying scant regard for the environment in the region.⁴³

Development of the NSR was an issue covered throughout the study period. It was highlighted by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Izvestiya* as a gateway to China and Asia.⁴⁴ Discussions on this issue revolved around the transit capacity of

the NSR, the benefits of the NSR to Russia and the Russian economy, and different regulations regarding passage through the NSR.⁴⁵ There was also reporting on various experimental voyages.⁴⁶ Further, certain problems linked to the NSR as an alternative shipping route were covered: ‘The absence of a comprehensive communications and navigation system and problems with the accessibility of ports prevents

the NSR from becoming a fully fledged transport highway. However, the most important thing is the ice-free water, which can be used for commercial shipping.’⁴⁷

The morality and ethics frame—linked to issues concerning indigenous peoples—was the least covered area in all three newspapers. *Izvestiya* did not publish a single article on such questions. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* briefly reported on some events that involved indigenous populations, such as a meeting

The morality and ethics frame—linked to issues concerning indigenous peoples—was the least covered area in all three newspapers

Izvestiya, 27 Aug. 2015; and Nenasheva, I., ‘Идея министра прямо заточена под “Лукойл”’ [The minister’s idea is aimed directly at Lukoil], *Izvestiya*, 23 Apr. 2015.

⁴⁰ Primakov, Y., ‘Не просто работать, а знать во имя чего’ [Not just to work, but to know for what purpose], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 15 Jan. 2015.

⁴¹ Zakharov, M., ‘O polze prognozov’ [On the usefulness of forecasts], *Novaya Gazeta*, 18 May 2009.

⁴² *Novaya Gazeta*, ‘Shatkaya platforma’ [Shaky rig], 10 Aug. 2011.

⁴³ Dokuchaev, D., ‘Карачун на шельфе’ [Karachun on the shelf], *Novaya Gazeta*, 5 Sep. 2012.

⁴⁴ Ponomarev, V., ‘Морские ворота в Азию’ [Sea gate to Asia], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 23 July 2013; Krivoshapko, J., ‘Лед тронулся’ [The ice has broken], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 22 Nov 2013; and Kulikov, S., ‘Лед тает - к дороге’ [The ice is melting: Before the road], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 27 Apr. 2016.

⁴⁵ Shadrina, T., ‘Заявка на проход’ [Application for passage], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 19 Apr. 2013.

⁴⁶ Ponomareva, A., ‘Северный морской путь. Тепло и выгодно’ [Northern Sea route. Warm and profitable], *Izvestiya*, 9 Oct. 2009; and Tsygankova, S., ‘“Балтика” испытывает Севморпуть’ [*Baltika* will test the Northern Sea Route], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 19 Aug. 2010.

⁴⁷ Fomchenkov, T., ‘На чистую воду’ [To clear waters], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 23 Sep. 2011.



of the representatives of the indigenous peoples. The infamous case of the Russian Government suspending the activities of the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of North in 2013 was covered only in *Novaya Gazeta*.

The science and technology frame in the Russian media involved coverage of scientific research, the construction of icebreakers, polar aviation, and the modernization and development of civil shipbuilding and sea port infrastructure, as well as the construction of search and rescue centres. These themes were covered in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Izvestiya* throughout the 10-year period. For instance, the nuclear icebreaker fleet was often mentioned as an important element of Russia's superpower status in the Arctic, as indicated in coverage of the construction of new nuclear icebreakers: 'the whole world has once again received confirmation that our country still remains the largest Arctic power'.⁴⁸ The nuclear icebreaker fleet was also described as an important element in boosting the development of the NSR.⁴⁹

Various scientific and adventure expeditions to the Arctic or the North Pole were also a recurring theme in both *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Izvestiya*, including regular updates on the drifting station 'North Pole' and youth expeditions such as 'On skis to the North Pole'.⁵⁰ Scientific research and the presence of Russian scientists were often presented as an important element in demonstrating Russia's presence in the region as well as key to the economic development of the Arctic.⁵¹ *Novaya Gazeta* placed its coverage of Russian icebreaking capacity and scientific expeditions in a similar narrative, with an emphasis on important achievements and elements of pride for Russia and the people involved.⁵²

The category environment and environmental change pertains to the coverage of climate change, which has both similarities to and differences from coverage in the English-language press. The similarities include the attention paid to negative consequences such as increasing sea levels, threats to ecosystems and the melting permafrost.⁵³ However, the Russian newspapers also focused on the benefits of climate change for the development of the oil and gas resources and the NSR.⁵⁴ This narrative can be seen in both *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Izvestiya*, for example: 'Global warming could bring Russia billions of dollars. Some are afraid of global warming, some struggle with it at the highest levels and spend tremendous

⁴⁸ Sokolov, A., 'Подтверждая статус ледокольной державы' [Confirming the status of an icebreaking power], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 14 Aug. 2007.

⁴⁹ Emelyanenko, A., 'У "России" - твердый курс' [Russia has a firm course], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 7 Oct. 2011.

⁵⁰ Alexandrov, B., 'А мы пойдем на север...' [And we will go north...], *Izvestiya*, 22 Apr. 2009.

⁵¹ Smolyakova, T., 'На работу во льды' [To work on the ice], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 20 Apr. 2015.

⁵² Racheva, E., 'Экспедиция в никуда' [Expedition to nowhere], *Novaya Gazeta*, 4 May 2011; Muratov, D., 'Ночной ледокол' [Night icebreaker], *Novaya Gazeta*, 3 Dec. 2013; and Petlyanova, N., 'Таких кораблей никто не строит' [Nobody builds such ships], *Novaya Gazeta*, 20 June 2016.

⁵³ Simonov, A., 'Климат достанет каждого' [Climate will get everyone], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 31 Jan. 2007; Bogdanov, V., 'Климат берет за горло' [Climate grabs by the throat], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 16 July 2008; Ukhov, S., 'Аляска под нефтяным колпаком' [Alaska under the oil cap], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 3 Oct. 2008; Smolyakova, T., 'Тепло, еще теплее' [Warm, even warmer], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 11 Jan. 2010; and Obraztsov, P., 'Россия сжимается от тепла' [Russia shrinks from heat], *Izvestiya*, 20 Apr. 2011.

⁵⁴ Polyukhovich, A., 'Льды тают: прибыль растет' [The ice is melting: The profits are rising], *Izvestiya*, 7 Oct. 2011.



amounts of money on this struggle. But what if you imagine the benefits the melting ice could generate?⁵⁵

The Russian coverage of the Arctic also included claims that climate change was not induced by human activity and that a decrease in emissions would not affect the current trend for increasing temperatures: ‘However, many scientists believe that current climate change has nothing to do with human activity, that pictures of future climate cataclysms are nothing more than a trick for those who want to make good money on this “thriller”.’⁵⁶

Izvestiya and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* discussed possible environmental damage to the Arctic, but to a lesser extent. The focus was on the absence of strategies and the technology required to clear up oil spills and the lack of proper legislation to ensure ecological security, as well as threats to biodiversity and ecosystems.⁵⁷ It was also emphasized that Russia should have the capacity to respond to environmental risks: ‘A huge sea power has no environmental protection vessel that could even reach an oil platform.’⁵⁸

Beginning in late 2010, the theme of Arctic spring cleaning, which referred to the removal of military and industrial debris from Russia’s Arctic islands, was covered regularly in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and occasionally in *Izvestiya* to demonstrate progress and the results of the programme as well as the financial costs.⁵⁹ The spring cleaning was discussed not only as a way of ensuring environmental safety, but also as a means of displaying Russia’s presence in the Arctic: ‘[Spring cleaning] confirms our growing activity in the Arctic, Putin said.—We will build infrastructure there, build ports, roads, bridges, strengthen the military component.’⁶⁰

UNCLOS and its role in Arctic governance was one of the most common reoccurring issues throughout the 10-year period in the governing and politics frame

Issues related to governing and politics were widely discussed in all three newspapers. UNCLOS and its role in Arctic governance was one of the most common reoccurring issues throughout the 10-year period, presented as the main legal framework for resolving competing territorial claims in the Arctic. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* also covered questions of collaboration with various institutions such as the Arctic Council, which was referred to as the main multilateral institution for Arctic cooperation, and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council.⁶¹ In contrast to *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Novaya Gazeta* and *Izvestiya* rarely touched on questions of Arctic institutions. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and,

⁵⁵ Ponomareva, A., ‘Северный морской путь: Тепло и выгодно’ [Northern Sea Route: Warm and profitable], *Izvestiya*, 9 Oct. 2009.

⁵⁶ Demenko, S., ‘Арктика таяла много раз’ [The Arctic has melted many times], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 5 Oct. 2011; Orlova, M., ‘Папанины дети’ [Papanin’s children], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 21 Sep. 2011; and Medvedev, Y., ‘Климатический триллер’ [Climate thriller], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 4 Aug. 2009.

⁵⁷ Shestoperova, Y., ‘Бурите на здоровье’ [You are welcome to drill], *Izvestiya*, 14 Oct. 2010; and Kiseleva, M., ‘Экология обойдется в 800 млн рублей’ [Ecology will cost 800 million rubles], *Izvestiya*, 1 June 2012.

⁵⁸ Ovchinnikova, A., ‘Пятна на шельфе’ [Spots on the shelf], *Izvestiya*, 31 May 2010.

⁵⁹ Shkel, T., ‘Погода в Думе’ [Weather in Duma], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 18 Nov. 2010; Sumerkin, N., ‘Генеральная уборка Арктики’ [Arctic spring cleaning], *Izvestiya*, 1 Aug. 2011; and Kazantseva, M., ‘Минприроды приступает к генеральной уборке Арктики’ [The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment starts Arctic spring cleaning], *Izvestiya*, 23 Apr. 2012.

⁶⁰ Jebit, M., ‘Путин поручил отремонтировать подлодки’ [Putin ordered to repair submarines], *Izvestiya*, 31 July 2012.

⁶¹ See e.g. Gasyuk, A., ‘Доверие растопит мерзлоту’ [Trust will melt the permafrost], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 15 May 2013.



to a lesser extent, *Izvestiya*, also discussed how Russia should govern its vast Arctic territories and coordinate policies between government entities, as well as which government institutions should be in charge of Arctic policy.⁶²

The most common themes in the conflict and strategy frame were the development of military activities in the region, including facilities for border guards; the military strategies of Russia and other Arctic states; and the possibility of conflict in the Arctic. All three newspapers had coverage of military activities in the Arctic but the angle they took differed significantly. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Izvestiya* often framed these developments as Russian achievements, as a success for the Russian military and as necessary for defending Russian interests. *Novaya Gazeta*, by contrast, often raised highly controversial issues such as corruption in the military, the notion that the Arctic military build-up was yet another way of draining the federal budget, and the environmental dangers linked to the submarine fleet and other military projects.

Narratives of conflict and cooperation in the Arctic

The empirical material in this study covers a turbulent decade in Arctic politics in which both Arctic discourses and global geopolitics underwent major shifts. It is therefore useful to look specifically at how Russian media coverage of the Arctic changed over time. This section is based on a selection of over 350 articles. Of these, 147 refer to conflicts in the region as the major topic or mention conflicts in passing (88 in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 47 in *Izvestiya*, 12 in *Novaya Gazeta*) while 108 refer to various forms of cooperation in the region (78 in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 24 in *Izvestiya*, 6 in *Novaya Gazeta*). In addition, many articles report on various military developments in the region.

At the start of 2007 there were only a few examples of the conflict narrative in the three newspapers. However, there were some mentions of unresolved territorial conflict, such as that between Russia and Norway over the border in the Barents Sea. Furthermore, other countries' aspirations for a reconsideration of the sectoral division of the Arctic and the growing international interest in the region were also highlighted: 'There is a desire in a number of states, in particular Canada and Denmark, for a reconsideration of the sectoral division of the Arctic territories established by the Paris Treaty of 1920. Countries that have no access to the Arctic Ocean are even seeking to internationalize its waters, by analogy with the other three oceans.'⁶³

The most common themes in the conflict and strategy frame were the development of military activities, the military strategies of Arctic states; and the possibility of conflict

⁶² See e.g. Smolyakova, T., 'Где наша дальняя земля?' [Where is our distant land?], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 8 Nov. 2011; Latukhina, K., Kuzmin, V. and Politov, Y., 'Минрегион: развитие' [Minregion (Ministry of Regional Development) development], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 9 Sep. 2014; Karaganov, S., 'Поворот на восток: итоги и задачи' [Turn to the East: Results and objectives], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 6 Feb. 2015; Emelyanenko, A., 'Полюс досягаемости' [Reaching the Pole], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 15 Apr. 2015; Bashlykova, N., 'Совет Федерации подготовил концепцию закона по развитию Арктики' [Konstantin Dorofeyev, Federation Council prepared the concept of a Law on the development of the Arctic], *Izvestiya*, 26 June 2015; and Sozaev-Guryev, E., 'Президент предложил создать новый госорган для Арктики' [President proposes to create a new state agency for the Arctic], *Izvestiya*, 23 Apr. 2014.

⁶³ Sharov, D., 'Арктическая тишина это видимость' [Arctic silence is just an appearance], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 15 Feb. 2007.



The main conflict discourse started to develop following the Arktika 2007 expedition to the North Pole, during which a Russian flag was planted on the seabed of the Arctic Ocean

The main conflict discourse started to develop following the *Arktika 2007* expedition to the North Pole, during which a Russian flag was planted on the seabed of the Arctic Ocean. The event was given prominent media coverage in the English-language press, spurring political commentary about Russian aggression in the Arctic.⁶⁴ Following this event, the Arctic region was repeatedly labelled the hot spot of the coming oil conflicts. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, for instance, identified all the other Arctic states as potential rivals to Russia in the coming fight for the ‘riches of the Arctic’.⁶⁵ The division of the Arctic was described as the beginning of the ‘redivision of the world’.⁶⁶ *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* highlighted the reactions of other Arctic states to the Russian expedition, showing how they strengthened their position in the Arctic in various ways. Scientific expeditions were seen as cover for their underlying aim of increasing their presence in the region.⁶⁷ The coverage in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* mainly revolved around US and Canadian reaction.⁶⁸ The failure of the USA to ratify UNCLOS was described as an intention not to follow international law. At the same time, it was stated that Russia intended to resolve the overlapping territorial claims by legal means.⁶⁹

The coverage in *Izvestiya* was very similar, raising questions of the USA and its interests in the Arctic and specifically highlighting the US submarine presence in the region as a direct threat to Russia. The other Arctic states were described as ‘entering the fight for resources’ too: ‘America is tired of watching other countries divide the Arctic, and it will submit its own application for ownership of the coastal zone of the Alaska region; Denmark, Norway, Canada, Iceland, Sweden and Finland are ready to fight together against Russia.’⁷⁰

Throughout 2008, the Arctic coverage in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* was still significantly influenced by the *Arktika 2007* expedition, its consequences and the reactions it received from Arctic states.⁷¹ Statements such as ‘ice fights for the Arctic’ and its resources occurred in many articles, even those that did not specifically employ the conflict or strategy frames. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* also highlighted the growing military presence in the region and how other countries were increasingly patrolling Arctic waters.⁷² *Izvestiya* added an extra dimension to the ‘cold war for Arctic territories’ by looking more closely at the Russian presence in Svalbard and raising questions about

⁶⁴ As described in Steinberg, P. E., Tasch, J. and Gerhardt, H., *Contesting the Arctic: Rethinking Politics in the Circumpolar North* (I. B. Tauris & Co.: London, 2015), pp. 18–42.

⁶⁵ Sorokina, N., ‘Битва за Арктику’ [Battle for the Arctic], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 1 Aug. 2007.

⁶⁶ Sorokina, N., ‘Схватка за Арктику’ [Fight for the Arctic], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 3 Aug. 2007.

⁶⁷ Yurieva, D., ‘Ледяной магнит’ [Ice magnet], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 7 Aug. 2007.

⁶⁸ Sorokina, N., ‘Операция “Суверенитет”’ [Operation ‘Sovereignty’], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 3 Aug. 2007.

⁶⁹ Vorobyov, V., ‘К полюсу подвели доказательства’ [Proof has been brought to the Pole], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 24 Aug. 2007.

⁷⁰ Shishkunova, E., ‘Америка поспорит с Россией за сокровища Арктики’ [America will compete with Russia for the treasures of the Arctic], *Izvestiya*, 1 Aug. 2007.

⁷¹ Gavrilov, Y., ‘Шлейф вокруг шельфа’ [Train around the shelf], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 19 Apr. 2008; and Sorokina, N., ‘По скользкому льду’ [On slippery ice], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 29 Aug. 2008.

⁷² Makarychev, M., ‘Ледовый бой “номер два”’ [Ice battle ‘number two’], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 20 May 2008.



the Svalbard Treaty.⁷³ Even though the signing of the Ilulissat Declaration brought the question of cooperation in the Arctic into the debate, the idea of possible conflict persisted.⁷⁴

Novaya Gazeta provided an alternative view on the Arctic expedition as well as on potential conflict in the region. For example, it heavily criticized *Arktika 2007* for its unscientific character and excessive theatrics, and claimed that it had considerably damaged relations among Arctic states.⁷⁵ *Novaya Gazeta* also noted that the expedition had nothing to do with proving that the continental shelf was an extension of the Russian landmass, and claimed instead that the purpose was to demonstrate to both Arctic neighbours and domestic audiences that Russia was back in the Arctic: ‘The goal of Chilingarov’s expedition is to stake out, not to prove.’⁷⁶

In 2009, the focus on conflict and strategy was imbued with a new dimension as *Izvestiya* and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* turned their attention to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) interests in the region.⁷⁷ *Izvestiya* noted NATO’s increasing presence and the actions of NATO member states. It also emphasized that China was trying to increase its presence in the Arctic: ‘and the ghost of the cold war looms in the Arctic Circle. The political and military activity of the circumpolar states—the USA, Canada, Norway and Denmark—literally in the ‘land of polar bears’ is growing; China has acquired the ice-breaker Snow Dragon, which regularly sails to the Arctic Ocean. Clearly, not to study the northern lights’.⁷⁸

There were rare references to the Arctic Council and the increasing cooperation within it, but these consisted mainly of background information in the context of the increasing tensions.⁷⁹ It was still being emphasized that Russia intended to resolve its disputes with its Arctic neighbours in a diplomatic manner, but also that, currently, Russia was having to stand up to militarization by other countries and defend its national interests in the region.⁸⁰

The conflict narrative remained strong in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* in 2010. One argument in the coverage was that other countries were trying to undermine Russia’s influence in the region through their scientific and economic activities: ‘Subpolar countries, first and foremost the USA and its allies, are actively expanding their research, economic and military presence in the Arctic zone to control the Arctic waters. And they are making efforts to limit Russia’s access to the development of Arctic deposits.’⁸¹

The media coverage in 2010 also indicated that shifts in the discourse were in the making. For example, the agreement between Russia and Norway on delimitation of the maritime border in the Barents Sea led to a shift in focus

⁷³ Obraztsov, P., ‘Ученые вступают в арктическую “холодную войну”’ [Scientists enter the Arctic ‘cold war’], *Izvestiya*, 24 Dec. 2008.

⁷⁴ Shestakov, E., ‘Холодный расчет’ [Cold calculation], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 30 May 2008.

⁷⁵ Glikman, E., ‘Создатель миров’ [Creator of the worlds], *Novaya Gazeta*, 27 Aug. 2007.

⁷⁶ Glikman, E., ‘Туроперация’ [Tour operation], *Novaya Gazeta*, 6 Aug. 2007.

⁷⁷ Shestakov, E., ‘Холодное НАТО’ [Cold NATO], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 16 Jan. 2009.

⁷⁸ Inozemtsev, P., ‘НАТО рвется к белым мишкам’ [NATO is rushing to white bears], *Izvestiya*, 2 Feb. 2009.

⁷⁹ Shestakov, E., ‘Министров позвали на кухню погоды’ [Ministers were invited to the weather kitchen], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 30 Apr. 2009.

⁸⁰ Borisov, T., ‘Война и мир во льдах’ [War and peace in the ice], *Izvestiya*, 21 Apr. 2009.

⁸¹ Kozlova, N., ‘Страшней всего - погода в доме’ [The most terrible thing is the weather in the house], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 19 Mar. 2010.



towards conflict avoidance and highlighted cooperation despite competition over territories and resources as well as the increasing interest of NATO in the region.⁸² Meetings of the Arctic Five (Canada, Denmark, Norway, the USA and Russia) were described as an alternative form of cooperation in the Arctic. In the light of the Barents delimitation agreement, *Izvestiya* dropped its conflict narrative completely in 2010 and instead noted that Russia was going to cooperate with its Arctic neighbours rather than fight with them: ‘in addition to us, the USA, Canada, Denmark and Norway also claim the Arctic shelf. But we will not ‘fight’ with them, rather cooperate’.⁸³

At the same time, more coverage in *Izvestiya* and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* discussed UNCLOS and its role in regulating disputes in the Arctic, and particularly its role in the peaceful resolution of potentially contested territorial claims by Arctic littoral states.⁸⁴ Among the issues discussed were the increasing role of and facilities for the border guard service, which were referred to as a response to the receding ice cover and increased activity in the region rather than a response to specific threats from other countries.

In 2011, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* made no reference to conflict in the Arctic, even though its coverage of the region still focused on improving military capacity, such as the composition of possible Arctic brigades and their potential location.⁸⁵ *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* paid significant attention to the development of border guard facilities but placed it in the context of growing

non-military security challenges, such as increasing cases of poaching, illegal border crossing and sailing the NSR without a permit.⁸⁶ The shift in focus away from military conflict was also apparent in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*’s coverage of Russia’s gathering of scientific evidence to support its claims to the Arctic shelf. The articles reported that Russia

intended to continue the legal process within UN institutions to resolve these claims. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* also referred more often to the activities of the Arctic Council and bilateral cooperation, including bilateral state visits that touched on the potential for cooperation in the Arctic.⁸⁷

Around the time that the Barents Treaty between Russia and Norway entered into force, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* emphasized that delimitation of the border was a noteworthy diplomatic achievement. *Izvestiya*, however, raised a number of still controversial issues that the agreement had not resolved, such as those related to fisheries and Svalbard.⁸⁸ *Izvestiya* made only a few references to the potential for conflict, and the newspaper noted that

Starting in 2010, the discourse has been gradually shifting to include coverage of cooperation in the Arctic

⁸² Kuzmin, V., ‘Сорок лет водораздела’ [Forty years of the watershed], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 17 Sep. 2010.

⁸³ Savinykh, A., ‘Разморозить Арктику’ [Thawing the Arctic], *Izvestiya*, 24 Sep. 2010.

⁸⁴ *Izvestiya*, ‘Принадлежность хребта Ломоносова определяют ученые’ [Scientists will determine ownership of the Lomonosov Ridge], 17 Sep. 2010.

⁸⁵ Gavrilov, Y., ‘Генерал мороз и его рядовые’ [General Frost and his privates], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 18 May 2011; and Egorov, I., ‘Арктику утеплили’ [The Arctic has warmed up], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 2 Aug. 2011.

⁸⁶ Kulikov, V., ‘ФСБ готовит холодный прием’ [FSB is preparing a cold reception], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 2 May 2011; and Borisov, T., ‘Сторожевики идут в Арктику’ [Watchmen are going to the Arctic], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 27 May 2011.

⁸⁷ Smolyakova, T., ‘Арктика меняет климат’ [The Arctic is changing the climate], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 28 Oct. 2011.

⁸⁸ Krivoshapko, J., ‘Водные процедуры’ [Water procedures], *Izvestiya*, 25 Mar. 2011; and Jebit, M., ‘Осло снова делит воды’ [Oslo is dividing the waters again], *Izvestiya*, 10 Oct. 2011.



these would be resolved in a legal framework: ‘this confrontation is legal in nature’.⁸⁹ Some mentions of conflict also appeared in comments from experts interviewed by *Izvestiya*, such as ‘a threat to Russia’s economic interests in the Arctic from NATO’.⁹⁰

In 2012, coverage in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* mainly focused on bilateral cooperation in the Arctic. For example, a Finnish state visit to Russia and related discussions on cooperation, and discussions on US–Russian cooperation that mentioned the Arctic as one area where these countries could and would be willing to cooperate.⁹¹ Russian support for the activities of the Arctic Council was also underlined.⁹² At the same time, the newspaper published various reports on the progress of the Russian military in the Arctic, mainly focused on the bare facts without specifying the scenarios that were driving Russia’s military development in the region.

Izvestiya emphasized the development of Federal Security Service (FSB) facilities in the region as well as facilities for the border guard service and other developments related to the military. Like *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, there were no references to potential conflict. The only article that included text reminiscent of the conflict theme was devoted to China’s increasing interests in Iceland, which pointed out that ‘Beijing is seeking to “stake out” its presence in the Arctic’.⁹³ Among other themes on cooperation in the Arctic was an article on the need to cooperate over fisheries.⁹⁴

Novaya Gazeta provided an alternative view of Arctic military developments between 2007 and 2012, implying that Russia’s only rivals in the region were ‘evil Canadians’ and mythical creatures: ‘Now the enemy cannot pass because we are militarizing the Arctic. There, of course, one can only fight seals, but the Americans will see how we deal with them—by clubbing them on the head—and immediately forget about conquering us from the north!’⁹⁵

Instead, Arctic policy and the construction of any type of military object in the region were described as a perfect source for corruption and the private use of the Arctic’s resources: ‘Strengthening the border presence in the Arctic opens up unlimited opportunities for exclusive hunting and fishing, and the writing off of equipment.’⁹⁶

In 2013 the tone of the coverage on the Arctic started to shift again, this time to a renewed focus on conflict, although the cooperation narrative was still present. For example, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* discussed cooperation on

⁸⁹ Telmanov, D., ‘Армия готовится воевать при минус 60’ [Army prepares to fight at minus 60], *Izvestiya*, 22 July 2011.

⁹⁰ Sumerkin, N., ‘Судно “Академик Федоров” идет в Арктику за новыми акваториями’ [The ship *Akademik Fedorov* goes to the Arctic for new waters], *Izvestiya*, 8 July 2011.

⁹¹ Toporkov, S., ‘Зона общих интересов’ [Zone of common interests], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 18 Jan. 2012; and Karaganov, S., ‘Об-ама!’ [Ob-Ama!], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 8 Nov. 2012.

⁹² Krivoshapko, J., ‘А мы пойдём на Север’ [And we will go to the North], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 5 Apr. 2012; and Krivoshapko, J., ‘Лед тронулся’ [The ice has moved], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 24 Oct. 2012.

⁹³ Antonov, I. and Volkov, K., ‘Китайцы осваиваются в Арктике и Антарктике’ [The Chinese are getting comfortable in the Arctic and Antarctic], *Izvestiya*, 11 Mar. 2012.

⁹⁴ *Izvestiya*, ‘Америку беспокоит “дырка арктического бублика”’ [America is worried about the Arctic ‘doughnut hole’], 7 Sep. 2012.

⁹⁵ Felgengauer, P., ‘А служить вновь придется два-три года’ [And one will have to serve two or three years again], *Novaya Gazeta*, 1 Mar. 2010; and *Novaya Gazeta*, ‘Враги снесли родную крышу’ [Enemies demolished the roof], 13 Jan. 2012.

⁹⁶ Felgengauer, P., ‘Шишки на Севере’ [Cones in the North], *Novaya Gazeta*, 30 Mar. 2009.

the fisheries agreement, where actors external to the Arctic were seen as a factor that could unite the USA and Russia in cooperation in the region.⁹⁷ Significant attention was paid to a ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council and cooperation more generally within the Arctic Council.⁹⁸ However, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* also pointed out that there was growing competition in the Arctic.⁹⁹ The risks of militarization were mentioned along with other threats from the West, such as the extension of Europe's missile defence.¹⁰⁰ The military presence in the Arctic was presented as important because other countries liked to demonstrate their power in the region: 'to defend their interests there, some states are ready to "flex their muscles"'.¹⁰¹ Conflict in the Arctic was mentioned as one of five possible scenarios for conflict that could threaten the stability of Russia. According to experts quoted by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 'The active development of the Arctic shelf will inevitably lead to a conflict of interest between the countries making claims to Arctic resources. It is possible that the opposition will go beyond the diplomatic'.¹⁰²

Izvestiya had two opinion pieces devoted to discussion of the Arctic conflict. Both of these alluded to the idea that the 'fight for the Arctic' would be tough and harsh.¹⁰³ The authors referred to the growing stand-off in the Arctic between the Arctic states and advised Russia to increase its military presence in the region in response.¹⁰⁴ *Izvestiya* stated that Canada's claim to have rights over the North Pole was fuelling tensions around the Arctic, while Russia made efforts to reduce these tensions: 'Russia calls for a cooling of the passions around the North Pole. The application filed recently by Canada with the UN Commission on the delimitation of the continental shelf has added fuel to the fire of the dispute over the bottom of the Arctic seas'.¹⁰⁵

In 2013 the tone of the coverage on the Arctic started to shift again to a renewed focus on conflict, although the cooperation narrative was still present

A specific incident in 2013 fed into this shifting discourse, when Greenpeace attempted to scale the Prirazlomnaya drilling platform and the crew of its vessel, the Arctic Sunrise, was arrested. The incident spurred debate in all three newspapers but from very different angles. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* presented the case from the point of view of the Russian Government. It described the actions of Greenpeace as a danger to the platform. The paper also commented that there was huge 'political bias' in the actions of Greenpeace in that its criticisms were mainly directed against Russian rather

⁹⁷ Zilanov, V., 'Минтая съели: Кто следующий?' [Pollock has been eaten: Who's next?], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 1 Feb. 2013.

⁹⁸ See e.g. Yegorov, I., 'Открыли Арктику' [The Arctic has been opened], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 12 Apr. 2013; Gasyuk, A., 'Доверие растопит мерзлоту' [Trust will melt the permafrost], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 15 May 2013; and Vorobyov, V., 'Заполярный круг интересов' [High North circle of interests], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 16 May 2013.

⁹⁹ Egorov, I., 'Вызов принят' [Challenge accepted], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 27 Dec. 2013.

¹⁰⁰ Latukhina, K., 'Без команды "кругом"' [Without an order 'About turn'], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 28 Feb. 2013.

¹⁰¹ Gavrilov, Y., 'Адмиралы повернули на север' [Admirals turned north], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 17 Sep. 2013.

¹⁰² *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 'Пять сценариев войны' [Five scenarios of war], 3 July 2013.

¹⁰³ Туурин, У., 'Жребий Арктического Севера' [The lot of the Arctic North], *Izvestiya*, 27 Dec. 2013.

¹⁰⁴ Benedictov, С., 'Великая ледяная доска' [The great ice board], *Izvestiya*, 20 Dec. 2013.

¹⁰⁵ Volkov, K., 'Канадский МИД надеется на хребет Ломоносова' [Canadian Foreign Ministry hopes for Lomonosov Ridge], *Izvestiya*, 13 Dec. 2013.



than Norwegian activities. The coverage also emphasized that Greenpeace activists had been arrested in many countries before, but that only the arrests in Russia had provoked any significant international reaction. In 2014 the focus on political bias and provocation evolved further when *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* equated the actions of the Arctic Sunrise and Greenpeace to other covert actions aimed at undermining Russia's position in the Arctic, and drew parallels with the West's actions in Syria and Ukraine.¹⁰⁶

Novaya Gazeta was the only newspaper of the three that reported comments from Greenpeace or the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) for their views on the situation and the reasons behind their actions. *Novaya Gazeta* quoted the WWF as stating that this form of protest was the result of the shutting down by Gazprom of the proper channels for dialogue about the dangers that Prirazlomnaya presents to the Arctic environment.¹⁰⁷

In its coverage of the *Arctic Sunrise* case, *Izvestiya* quoted Alexander Pelyasov of Moscow State University, a long-time consultant for the Russian Government on Arctic issues, who called for a toning down of the tension apparent in Russia's response to the actions of Greenpeace.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, *Izvestiya* sought to demonstrate that the Russian population supported the actions of the border guard service.¹⁰⁹

Compared with 2013, there was no notable change in the media narrative on conflict and cooperation in 2014. However, the unfolding conflict in Ukraine in the second half of 2014 led to discussion of the increasing tensions with the West. Nonetheless, there were no direct references to a potential conflict in the Arctic region or to potential spillover of the conflict in Ukraine into the Arctic. On the contrary, the coverage noted how despite conflict elsewhere, the Arctic region remained stable and there was still potential for cooperation, including with the USA.¹¹⁰ This was especially the case as the Arctic region requires joint ventures.¹¹¹

Although *Izvestiya* had very few articles on conflict and strategy, it chose to quote a number of experts with very strong views on Western countries' interests in the Arctic and their readiness to defend these 'with the help of military force'.¹¹² A number of countries were described as Russia's rivals in the region—'the direct adversary in the Arctic is the NATO bloc countries: the USA, Canada, Norway, the United Kingdom'.¹¹³ As in previous years, the USA was singled out as the main adversary: 'US interests in the region are not just determined by resources. It is useful to Washington to deploy a

¹⁰⁶ Latukhina, K., 'В ответе за Арктику' [Responsible for the Arctic], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 24 Apr. 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Sokolov, M., 'Политика чистой воды' [Clean water policy], *Novaya Gazeta*, 27 Sep. 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Zlotin, L., 'Невеселый Роджер' [Uncheerful Roger], *Izvestiya*, 26 Sep. 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Podosenov, S., 'Россияне поддерживают арест активистов Greenpeace' [Russian citizens support the arrest of Greenpeace activists], *Izvestiya*, 11 Nov. 2013.

¹¹⁰ Lukyanov, F., 'Зачем нам Америка?' [Why do we need America?], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 26 May 2014.

¹¹¹ Ivanov, I., 'Возрождение фантомов и фобий' [Revival of phantoms and phobias], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 25 June 2014.

¹¹² Krivoruchek, A., 'Системы ПВО и аэродромы в Арктике восстановят' [Air defence systems and airfields will be restored in the Arctic], *Izvestiya*, 2 July 2014.

¹¹³ Sozaev-Guryev, Y., 'Россия будет прирастать Арктикой' [Russia will grow from the Arctic], *Izvestiya*, 30 Oct. 2014.

missile defence system in the Arctic and it is important to demonstrate the presence of its armed forces there.¹¹⁴

In 2015 *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* had the highest number of reports on military developments in the Arctic among all three newspapers in the entire period. Defending Russia's national interests in the Arctic, including its economic interests, was presented as the main aim of the military build-up in the region: 'the task is not to militarize this region, but to realize Russia's economic interests there'.¹¹⁵ However, the newspaper also underlined the fact that it was important to maintain cooperation in the Arctic in spite of the Ukraine crisis.¹¹⁶

Izvestiya reported on the consequences of the crisis in Ukraine spilling over into the Arctic during Canada's Arctic Council chairmanship.¹¹⁷ Some of the articles returned to the classic rhetoric on the battle for the Arctic, including concern about internationalization of the NSR: 'The experience and professionalism of our military should cool those "hotheads" in the West who still dream of giving the Northern Sea Route a mythical "international status"'.¹¹⁸

It also referred to Russia's neighbours in the Arctic as aggressive rivals: 'The USA, Norway and Canada have long claimed ownership of the Arctic. Russia is constantly faced with aggressive rhetoric from its neighbours in the Arctic Ocean.'¹¹⁹

There were very few articles on conflict or cooperation in the Arctic in *Novaya Gazeta* in 2014–2015. In the few cases where the increasing military presence in the region was described, the focus was different from that of the other newspapers: 'No one ever landed troops in the polar hummocks, obviously, because there are no military targets in the icy desert. Russian paratroopers landed at the North Pole; President Vladimir Putin has indicated we must prepare for a battle for the Arctic, which by 2016 will become the "leading strategic resource base of the Russian Federation"'.¹²⁰

In 2016 the number of conflict- and strategy-related articles in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* fell significantly. Only one article referred to a meeting in the Federation Council, Russia's second chamber, in which its chair, Valentina Matviyenko, stated that 'Western countries are trying to politicize multilateral cooperation in this territory'.¹²¹ By the end of 2016, the narrative had shifted back to underlining the need for cooperation in the Arctic and the generally positive political climate in the region: 'We need stability in

¹¹⁴ Krivoruchek, A., 'Дирижабли-беспилотники будут патрулировать Арктику' [UAV airships will patrol the Arctic], *Izvestiya*, 12 Mar. 2014.

¹¹⁵ Emelyanenko, A., 'Полюс досягаемости' [Pole of reach], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 15 Apr. 2015.

¹¹⁶ Zabrodina, E., 'Не допустить похолодания' [Preventing the cooling down], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 15 Oct. 2015.

¹¹⁷ Baikova, T., 'Канада срывает встречу глав МИД стран Арктического совета' [Canada disrupts meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Arctic Council], *Izvestiya*, 24 Mar. 2015.

¹¹⁸ Zhuravlev, A., 'Не проиграть битву за Арктику' [Don't lose the battle for the Arctic], *Izvestiya*, 15 Oct. 2015.

¹¹⁹ Bashlykova, N. and Dorefeyev, K., 'Совет Федерации подготовил концепцию закона по развитию Арктики' [The Federation Council has prepared the concept of a law for the development of the Arctic], *Izvestiya*, 26 June 2015.

¹²⁰ Felgenhauer, P., 'Операция "Кафе Барнео"' [Operation 'Cafe Barneo'], *Novaya Gazeta*, 11 Apr. 2014.

¹²¹ Petrov, V., 'Угроза для всех' [Threat to everyone], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 24 Mar. 2016.



this region, the absence of even a hint of confrontation between Arctic states. This is important for stimulating the positive development of the Arctic.¹²²

Izvestiya, however, continued to stress the strained relations between the Arctic states and to highlight the possibility of conflict in the Arctic region: ‘the Arctic Ocean is a storehouse of untold wealth . . . the Northern Sea Route is the shortest and most cost-effective route for the delivery of goods from Asia to Europe . . . US nuclear submarines with strategic and cruise missiles on board can and do pass under the ice of the North Pole . . . Will the Arctic become a new field of brutal confrontation between Russia, the USA and NATO?’¹²³

Thus, some focus on conflict remained in the media reporting towards the end of the study period despite the general shift to an emphasis on cooperation. Furthermore, the dialectical relationship between the two discourses is likely to continue to change in response to geopolitical developments.

V. Discussion and conclusions

Official and media narratives in Russia

The extensive coverage of Arctic issues in the official newspaper, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, is testimony to the importance of the Arctic region to the Russian Government and the political elite. However, the fact that the more independent newspapers do not follow Arctic questions as closely indicates that the Arctic may not yet be seen by their editors as of interest to the general public in Russia.

The issues covered in both *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Izvestiya* mirror the priorities identified by the Russian Government, most notably the exploitation of oil and gas resources, development of the NSR and military posturing in the region. In addition, they reported on the modernization of the nuclear icebreaker fleet, scientific expeditions and clean-up operations, while more controversial issues such as climate change, environmental damage, socio-economic issues and indigenous rights were often raised only by the fully independent *Novaya Gazeta*.

On the potential for conflict in the Arctic and military developments, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* is clearly a channel for the official Russian narrative on the Arctic. At the peak of the tensions in the Arctic over the *Arktika 2007* expedition, coverage included bold statements from Russian officials.¹²⁴ This type of reporting continued until the official rhetoric was toned down considerably in 2011. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* then gave more room to questions linked to economic considerations and resource development, progress on the NSR, and science and technology. Following the return of harsher official language in 2013, however, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* followed suit. *Izvestiya* followed a similar pattern up until 2014. After the crisis in Ukraine, however, it no longer

The extensive coverage of Arctic issues in the official newspaper is testimony to the importance of the Arctic region to the Russian Government

¹²² Egorov, I., ‘Арктика без опасности’ [Arctic without danger], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 2 Sep. 2016.

¹²³ Litovkin, V., ‘Подо льдами ходят лодки’ [Boats go under the ice], *Izvestiya*, 1 Aug. 2016.

¹²⁴ See e.g. Chilingarov, A., ‘Мы доказали — Арктика наша!’ [We proved the Arctic is ours!], *Moskovskij Komsomolets*, 7 Aug. 2007.

supported the official narrative that there was no conflict in the Arctic but instead continued with boisterous language, including quotes from experts with strong views on Russia's Arctic neighbours and the threats posed by their activities.

Rossiyskaya Gazeta's Arctic coverage indicates that the Russian Government wishes to demonstrate that the region is important to Russia's economy and security, and will guarantee Russia's future prosperity. It also demonstrates the extent of the pride that the Russian Government takes in its Arctic activities and how these add to Russia's national identity as a northern country with a long history of Arctic exploration. Furthermore, the coverage of military exercises portrays Russia as a strong country ready to defend its interests through a significant and increasing military presence. While the coverage in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* also underlines Russia's intention to resolve any disputes peacefully, with a particular emphasis on its adherence to UNCLOS, potential security concerns, such as US submarine activities, are used to justify Russia's military presence.

The *Novaya Gazeta* narrative on the Arctic differs considerably from the official position and in fact presents a very different picture of the region. Examples linked to Russia's military policy include reports on decaying military equipment that poses a danger to Russia, unnecessary Russian provocation of its Arctic neighbours and corruption in the military. *Novaya Gazeta's* coverage of industrial development in the region highlights the waste of resources used on Arctic projects, a lack of regard for environmental safety and poor management.

Narratives of conflict in the international and Russian media

Some of the same themes appear when the conflict and cooperation narrative in Russian newspapers is compared with Western academic and popular media narratives on the Arctic. One example from 2007–2009 is the attention paid to a 'scramble for territory and resources', focused around the claims to the Arctic shelf beyond the 200 mile exclusive economic zone limit.¹²⁵ Another example is the emphasis on the potential for shipping, which in the Russian media has led to specific attention focused on the NSR and control of these waters.¹²⁶ There is an expectation in the press coverage that this role will be contested by other Arctic states, especially the USA, due to its position on the freedom of navigation.

The Western media has also highlighted the possibility of a military conflict between the Arctic states, which would be instigated primarily by Russia's increasing military presence in the region.¹²⁷ A related scenario is that conflicts originating far from the Arctic might spill over into the region.¹²⁸ In the Russian newspapers this narrative comes from a different angle, whereby reporting in 2007–2010 followed the military build-up of

¹²⁵ The prevalence of the theme is apparent from analyses of various media sources e.g. Nicol (note 5); Wilson Rowe (note 5); and Pincus and Ali (note 2).

¹²⁶ Flake, L. E., 'Forecasting conflict in the Arctic: The historical context of Russia's security intentions', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2015), pp. 72–98.

¹²⁷ Wilson Rowe (note 5); Pincus and Ali (note 2); and see also Parker, C. B., 'Russia's Arctic military build-up explained', 30 Jan. 2017.

¹²⁸ Rahbek-Clemmensen, J., 'The Ukraine crisis moves north. Is Arctic conflict spill-over driven by material interests?', *Polar Record*, vol. 53, no. 1 (2017), pp. 1–15.



Russia's Arctic neighbours and described it as a potential threat to Russia. The increasing tensions between Russia and the other Arctic states also received more attention after 2014 following the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, as well as other questions on the international agenda.

In the Western media, environmental issues, especially those related to climate change, are a recurring theme.¹²⁹ This includes coverage of activist-staged events. Various analyses of the Western media illustrate that the Western press favours conflict frames over those of cooperation and peace. By contrast, Russian newspapers do not report as much on the conflict between environmental interests and those of the extractive industries. There is a hint of such conflicts in the coverage of the *Arctic Sunrise* case, but the story quickly transformed into one of geopolitical tensions. For example, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* called the actions of Greenpeace a political provocation rather than reporting on the organization as representing the interests of environmental groups.

A common narrative about the Arctic in Western policy discourses, but less prominent in the media, is that of 'Arctic exceptionalism' or the Arctic as a 'zone of peace' with a high level of mutual interest in various forms of cooperation, including environmental cooperation and cooperation within the Arctic institutions.¹³⁰ This theme is also apparent in the Russian media. For example, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* has repeatedly underlined the role of institutions such as the Arctic Council in maintaining cooperation and stability in the region.

The media narrative from 2015–16 do not point to potential conflict in the Arctic but it does indicate increasingly assertive official rhetoric

Russia's future Arctic policy: What can we expect?

Can any future developments in Russian policy be gleaned from the present study of the Russia media? The results from 2015–16 do not point to potential conflict in the Arctic but they do indicate increasingly assertive official rhetoric, which includes the showcasing of intensified military activity. This trend is continuing and the official rhetoric is becoming increasingly focused on how other countries, primarily the USA, are responding to activities on Russia's borders, and on NATO's military posture regarding the world's oceans.

Russia's 2015 and 2016 strategic military documents were updated in the light of its perception of increased activity in the Atlantic Ocean and the Arctic.¹³¹ Statements were made by President Putin in 2017 and the Russian Defence Minister, Sergey Shoigu, in 2018.¹³² Such statements continue to serve as justification for the Russian military build-up in the Arctic. This

¹²⁹ Christensen (note 5); Nicol (note 5); and Nilsson and Christensen (note 4).

¹³⁰ See e.g. Schaller, B., 'The Arctic security community: Proving ground or sub-plot of a tensed European security environment?', eds L. Heininen, H. Exner-Pirot and J. Plouffe, *Arctic Yearbook, 2015* (Northern Research Forum: Akureyri, 2015); Brosnan, I. G., Leschine, T. M. and Miles, E. L., 'Cooperation or conflict in a changing Arctic?', *Ocean Development & International Law*, vol. 42 (2011), pp. 1–2, 173–210; Nilsson, A. E., 'Creating a safe operating space for business: The changing role of Arctic governance', ed. N. Wormbs, *Competing Arctic Futures: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Palgrave MacMillan: London, 2018).

¹³¹ RIA Novosti, 'Рогозин: арктическое направление особо выделено в Морской доктрине' [Rogozin: Arctic direction is highlighted in the Maritime Doctrine], 26 July 2015.

¹³² President of Russia, 'Direct Line with Vladimir Putin', Kremlin, 15 June 2017, Kremlin; and Staalesen, A., 'Defense Minister Shoigu sums up a year of Arctic buildup', Barents Observer,

indicates that Russia's current military build-up is not only linked to its energy interests in the region or to ensuring the safety of the NSR, but it is also a significant part of Russia's relations with the West. The plenary speech by Sergey Kislyak, a Senator in the Russian Federation Council and former Russian ambassador to the USA, at the Arctic Circle's annual gathering in Reykjavik in October 2018 confirmed this approach on the part of Russia. The other speakers at the opening plenary were delegates from Iceland, the USA, China, Japan and the EU—the latter two being first-time attendees at the high-level global forum. Unlike the others, Kislyak's speech distinctly and strongly emphasized security issues, which prompted questions from other delegates. Kislyak underlined Russia's 'rightful' military presence in the Arctic, due to the importance of the region to the country economically and strategically; how vital it is to adhere to the rule of law, particularly UNCLOS; and the significance of relations with NATO. His prognosis was that while Russia intends to remain 'peaceful and cooperative', future conflict might occur, in particular due to the refusal of the USA to ratify UNCLOS. There might also be other possible disputes in the future over the continental shelf and the NSR, which is clearly regarded as an economic jackpot by all interested players. Such self-framing positions Russia's military activities and political stance as 'defensive' rather than 'offensive', which is in sharp contrast to Western media framings. Hence, Russia's military posturing in the Arctic should be analysed with regard not only to Russia's relations with its Arctic neighbours, but also to Russia's relations with NATO and the threats it perceives to the NSR and from the US position on UNCLOS. Furthermore, given the prominence of China's Arctic ambitions, and its declared intention in 2014 to become a 'polar superpower', such tensions could easily escalate.

Does the souring of relations between Russia and the West or the entrance of new players such as China signal an end to Arctic exceptionalism or the end of Arctic cooperation as we know it? Probably not. While Russia's military activities in the Arctic have changed significantly, the assertiveness of Russia's rhetoric should not be exaggerated. There are no indications that Russia is changing its policy of complying with UNCLOS norms regarding the continental shelf. Moscow also continues to support the Arctic Council and looks positively on its activities and achievements.¹³³ Cooperation in the Arctic Council continued even at the lowest ebb of Russia's relations with the West. Furthermore, Russia was a strong supporter of the Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation, which was signed in 2017. Russia is interested in continued economic cooperation and in investment projects on the Arctic shelf, should sanctions be lifted. At the same time, the recent speech by the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, ahead of the Arctic Council Ministerial meeting, which focused on the USA's concerns regarding Russia's and China's aggressive posturing in the Arctic, indicates that the geopolitical tensions between the great players in the

3 Jan. 2018; and *Russia Today*, 'International competition in Arctic could lead to military conflict – Russian DM', 31 Aug. 2018.

¹³³ Tass, 'Lavrov says that cooperation in the Arctic does not require a military dimension', 16 Feb. 2019.



Arctic, particularly Russia, China and the USA, may become an obstacle to enhancing the cooperation in the Arctic.¹³⁴

In sum, with regard to mediation of the Arctic, despite the disconnects between the framings of the Arctic in Russian and Western media and policymaking, the global public's understanding of the region is still in flux and subject to the consequences that geopolitical, economic, environmental and technological changes might bring. As per media logic, while some narratives and framings find an overwhelming presence at certain junctures, others might be sidelined until certain ruptures of an environmental or a political nature place them centre stage. The heavy coverage of Arctic climate change in the Western media in 'scientific certainty' frames (as opposed to the earlier scientific uncertainty frames) following the then record loss of Arctic sea ice in 2007 is just one example. As the number of smaller Western media outlets reporting from the Arctic increases, frequently in cooperation with other small but local Arctic information sources, the often reductionist frames that originate from large Western media entities and 'parachute journalism' are likely to lose their prominence and place to more nuanced, locally sensitive coverage of the region. Based on the current state of affairs in media and communications, it is safe to expect—if not to predict—that the growing penetration of fibre optic connectivity and the increasing presence of citizen news and social media, as well the resulting symbiosis between news outlets and social media accounts in the current media ecology, will factor more profoundly in portrayals of the Arctic.

The geopolitical tensions between the great players in the Arctic may become an obstacle to enhancing the cooperation

¹³⁴ US Department of State, 'Looking North: Sharpening America's Arctic focus', Remarks by Michael R. Pompeo, US Secretary of State, Rovaniemi, Finland, 6 May 2019.



Abbreviations

NSR	Northern Sea Route
UNCLOS	1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
FSB	Federal Security Service
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
GDP	Gross domestic product



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NARRATIVES IN THE RUSSIAN MEDIA OF CONFLICT AND COOPERATION IN THE ARCTIC

EKATERINA KLIMENKO, ANNIKA E. NILSSON AND MIYASE CHRISTENSEN

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