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## Introduction

The Arctic region is politically and geographically diverse, with coastlines occupied by Russia, Canada, Denmark (through the Faroe Islands and Greenland), Norway, and the United States. Iceland, Finland, and Sweden are part of this geographic area. The Arctic is a geostrategic enclave where three continents meet, serving as the nexus of two oceans.



Figure 1. Arctic Region. Source: Dreamstime

The so-called Northeast Route and Northwest Route are routes that are becoming increasingly accessible thanks to ice melting. The Northeast Route runs along the Siberian coast, directly connecting the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. It currently enjoys improved navigability.

The Arctic also connects with the Atlantic through the passage designated by NATO as GIUK (an acronym for Greenland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom) or GIN (Greenland, Iceland, and Norway), centered on the Svalbard Islands, of great strategic interest<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> AZNAR FERNÁNDEZ-MONTESINO, Federico. “La geopolítica ártica después de la guerra de Ucrania”. Analysis Paper. IEEE 34/2023. Available in: [https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_analisis/2023/DIEEEA34\\_2023\\_FEDAZ\\_Ucrania.pdf](https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2023/DIEEEA34_2023_FEDAZ_Ucrania.pdf)

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## **Chinese Presence in the Arctic. Background**

China joined the Spitsbergen Treaty (Svalbard archipelago) in 1925, but the region did not attract much interest until the early 1990s. The Chinese Polar Research Institute (Shanghai) was established in 1989, and its first scientific participation in the Arctic took place in 1992. Since 1999, it has undertaken 13 scientific expeditions. In 2004, Beijing built the Yellow River Scientific Station (Ny-Ålesund-Svalbard), and in 2013 it was admitted to the Arctic Council as an observer. It is also worth mentioning that in 2019 China and Russia signed an agreement to develop joint oceanographic research in the Arctic Ocean.

In the 2000s, it began working with Nordic countries on energy issues. In 2005, Denmark and China launched the Wind Energy Development Program. In 2006, cooperation with Iceland in geothermal energy was strengthened. A Geothermal R&D Center was inaugurated in 2016. Since 2010, China and Norway have been cooperating in offshore wind energy.

In economic issues, the 2011 Twelfth Five-Year Plan mentioned the importance of polar regions for the first time, urging the exploitation of their marine resources. In 2013, COSCO shipping company made the first commercial voyage through the Northeast Passage. That same year, the oil company CNPC invested in the liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in the Russian Arctic. Since 2017, the Polar Silk Road (PSR) has been integrated into the Belt and Road Initiative.

The publication of the Arctic Policy White Paper (2018) indicated cooperation on maritime routes and promoting regional security. That year, they planned to build China's first nuclear icebreaker. Finally, in 2020, the text "Science of Military Strategy" (National Defense University) highlighted the importance of the Arctic to national interests.

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## **Strategic Vision of the Arctic**

China's Arctic vision has become more sophisticated, evolving from a scientific approach to a pragmatic geoeconomic and, ultimately, a geostrategic perspective. Becoming a "great polar power" is key to becoming a leading maritime power with global reach<sup>2</sup>.

China's Arctic strategy, consistent with its globalization model, seeks recognition as a legitimate Arctic actor, becoming more involved in polar affairs, and enhancing its geopolitical status and influence through diplomatic, economic, scientific, and military activities<sup>3</sup>.

Its presence in the Arctic reaffirms its role in global governance, challenging US geopolitical leadership. The Arctic, along with Antarctica, possesses a shared significance in a global geopolitical context.

## **Normative Approach**

The legal component of the Arctic strategy entails strengthening "discursive power" and its normative structure. The absence of a specific Arctic treaty provides China with opportunities to generate "discursive power"<sup>4</sup>.

The Arctic White Paper<sup>5</sup> emphasizes respect for Arctic governance but attempts to modify current territorial criteria for more globalized definitions. It advocates active participation in multilateral forums on Arctic governance, legitimizing its presence internationally.

Its internationalization strategy postulates freedom of navigation<sup>6</sup>, although at a distance from the current international legal status of delimiting the continental shelf of all Nordic states. Russia's claim to define its extended continental shelf as internal waters<sup>7</sup> is not challenged by China, but it dilutes potential exploitation rights by blocking its access to

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<sup>2</sup> PAUL, Michael. "China's Arctic Turn". Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. (03.02.25) Available in: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/chinas-arctic-turn>

<sup>3</sup> TINGSTAD, A, PEZARD, S & SHOKH, Y. "China-Russia Relations in the Arctic. What Are the Northern Limits of Their Partnership?" *RAND* (07.11.24) Available in: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA2823-1.html>

<sup>4</sup> LI, Z., YOU, X. & WANG, W. "Research on China's multi-layered strategic system for the Arctic route" *Zongguo ruankexue*, 2015(4), 29–37. Consulted: 05.03.25

<sup>5</sup> [https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2018/01/26/content\\_281476026660336.htm](https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm) Consultado: 15.02.25

<sup>6</sup> DALZIEL, Alexander. "Eurasian North – The geopolitics of Russia and China in the Arctic". *Macdonald-Laurier Institute* (13.06.24) Available in: <https://macdonaldlaurier.ca/eurasian-north-the-geopolitics-of-russia-and-china-in-the-arctic/>

<sup>7</sup> DEVYATKIN, Pavel. "China and the Arctic: Reflections in 2023". *The Arctic Institut.* (09.11.23). Available in: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/china-arctic-reflections-2023/>

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resources near the North Pole<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, China claims maritime corridors and passages (Northwest and Northeast) in the Northern Sea Route (NSR)<sup>9</sup> as international waters, emphasizing its neutrality regarding entry into disputed maritime territories<sup>10</sup>.

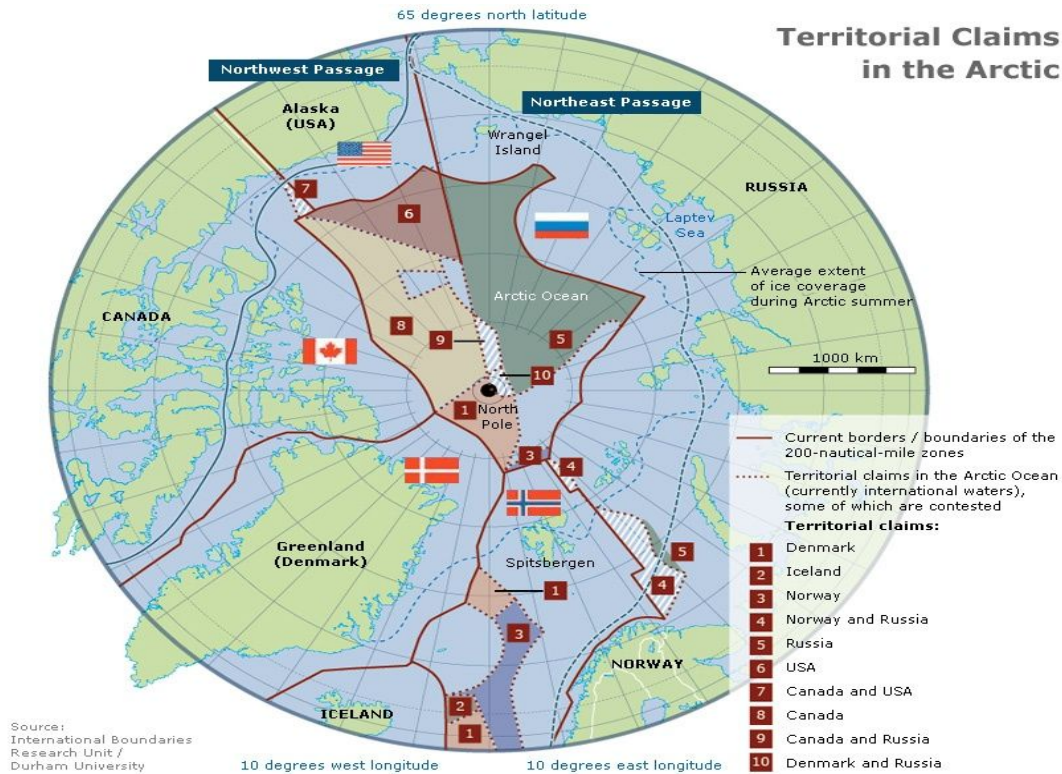


Figure 2. Territorial claims in the Arctic. Source: Durham University

Fragmented Arctic governance serves to advance its own "freedom for all"<sup>11</sup> approach, opening debate on the role of "non-Arctic states" in regional governance.

<sup>8</sup> BUCHANAN, Elizabeth. "Why Russia and China Won't Go the Distance in the High North". *RUSI* (08.05.24) Available in: <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/why-russia-and-china-wont-go-distance-high-north>

<sup>9</sup> XIA, X. "Research on the Development Layout of the "Ice Silk Road in the New Era". *Xueshu Qianyan*, 2018(6). Consulted: 10.03.25

<sup>10</sup> PEIQING, Guo; HUIWEN, Chen. "Chinese Perspective on the Arctic and its Implication for Nordic Countries". *The Arctic Institut.* (20.06.23) Available in: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/chinese-perspective-arctic-implication-nordic-countries/>

<sup>11</sup> BOULEGUE, M; DEPLEGUE, D. "The Face-off in a Fragmented Arctic: Who Will Blink First?". *RUSI.* (24.05.24) Available in: <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/face-fragmented-arctic-who-will-blink-first>

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## **Security Approach**

China's holistic concept of security encompasses a wide range of threats (political, economic, etc.) and is guided in the long term by the concept of "Total National Security" (总体国家安全). China views the Arctic as a security issue for its "overseas interests" (海外利益), which include both investments in foreign countries and the stability of strategic sea routes. Protecting these "overseas interests" is a primary objective of China's military strategy. Chinese defense sources have emphasized the importance of the "distant seas" and the security of sea routes. The Arctic, a space linked to ocean governance, is integrated into "new security domains" or "new strategic frontiers" (战略新疆域)<sup>12</sup>, aligning Arctic security closely with energy, environmental, and national security<sup>13</sup>.

China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) includes, for the first time, a specific chapter on the oceans. Therefore, it seeks to actively participate in ocean governance by developing international regulations to promote PSR<sup>14</sup>.

By strengthening its trade networks and seeking to protect its investments throughout the Arctic, China is positioning its security interests in the region, thus legitimizing its military projection.

## Military Context in the Arctic

China aspires to call itself a "great polar power" and, to do so, must enhance the role of its Arctic military capabilities by supporting scientific research and maritime transit. Chinese sources suggest positioning military installations in Jilin and the Tumen River to gradually expand into the Arctic regions<sup>15</sup>. The introduction of nuclear submarines, as requested by Russia, along with icebreakers could be key to China's Arctic strategy, as it would establish a more assertive military presence affecting the central Arctic. Additionally, its polar satellites give Beijing an advantage in tracking shipping routes or

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<sup>12</sup> Geostrategically important domains located outside the sovereign jurisdiction of individual states.

<sup>13</sup> SUN, K & WU, H. "New Arctic Security Situation and Safeguarding of China's Arctic Security Interests" *Nanjing Zhengzhixueyuan xuebao*, 2016(5), 71–77. Consulted:06.03.25

<sup>14</sup> EITERJORD, Trym. "What the 14th Five-Year Plan says about China's Arctic Interests". *The Arctic Institute*. (23.11.23). Available in: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/14th-five-year-plan-chinas-arctic-interests/>

<sup>15</sup> PURANEN, Matti & KOPRA, Sanna. "China's Arctic Strategy – a Comprehensive Approach in Times of Great Power Rivalry". *Scandinavian Military Studies* (26.12.23) Available in: <https://sjms.nu/articles/196/files/658ab62d3da14.pdf>

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mapping the seabed<sup>16</sup>.

Chinese security experts consider the Arctic an "aeronautical crossroads" between continents that control the Northern Hemisphere. Pentagon expert Iris Ferguson states that China's strategy toward the Arctic has profoundly changed. The region can be used by China to balance US power by expanding deniable hybrid actions or positioning its Navy on North America's northern flank.

However, Russia is not interested in an overly active and dominant China in the Arctic, or at least one that is not dependent on it<sup>17</sup>. Nor will Beijing accept the role of a junior partner<sup>18</sup>. In this regard, Russian Chinese military-technical cooperation has not increased significantly. Noteworthy among these is a conventional submarine project and the shared use of satellites or their positioning systems (BeiDou/GLONASS)<sup>19</sup>.

Russian Chinese activities, for now, have been limited to joint naval patrols near Alaska (2022-2023) and bomber patrol flights<sup>20</sup> in the Chukchi and Bering Seas, approaching Alaska in July 2024.

Although its naval presence is limited, in 2021 and 2024 the Chinese Navy sailed in the Bering Sea, conveying its willingness to position itself without Russian supervision<sup>21</sup>. The opening of the Arctic-Pacific to Chinese activities raises security issues for the United States (the Aleutian Islands) and the route through the Bering Strait.

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<sup>16</sup> ODGAARD, Liselotte. "Russia and China's Cooperation in the Arctic Is a Rising Nuclear Threat". *Hudson Institute*. (03.10.24) Available in: <https://www.hudson.org/arms-control-nonproliferation/russia-chinas-cooperation-arctic-rising-nuclear-threat-liselotte-odgaard>

<sup>17</sup> DALZIEL, Alexander. *Op.cit*

<sup>18</sup> GOBLE, Paul. "China and Russia Expand Strategic Cooperation in Arctic Against West". *Jamestown Foundation*. (08.10.24) Available in: <https://jamestown.org/program/china-and-russia-expand-strategic-cooperation-in-arctic-against-west/>

<sup>19</sup> ALÁEZ, Octavio. "China en el Ártico". *Global Strategy*. (26.11.22). Available in: <https://global-strategy.org/china-en-el-artico/>

<sup>20</sup> PAUL, Michael. *Op.cit*

<sup>21</sup> PEZARD, Stephanie, TINGSTAD, Abbie. "Is the Polar Silk Road a Highway or Is It at an Impasse? China's Arctic Policy Seven Years On". *RAND*. (06.02.25) Available in: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2025/02/is-the-polar-silk-road-a-highway-or-is-it-at-an-impasse.html>

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## Scientific Diplomacy and Research<sup>22</sup>

Science and scientific-technological cooperation (科技外交)<sup>23</sup>, as a diplomatic means, are key pillars supporting the Arctic strategy, as its research centers and scientific programs legitimize its interests and rights.

Currently, there are three Arctic scientific research facilities: 1) Ny-Ålesund-Svalbard Station (Norway), 2) Kiruna Satellite Communications Station (Sweden), and 3) China-Iceland Joint Observatory, Kárhóll (Iceland)<sup>24</sup>.

Beijing advocates strengthening its scientific capabilities<sup>25</sup> and expanding both its Arctic scientific facilities and developing national polar marine innovation and technology centers<sup>26</sup>. The Ocean University of China and the Institute of Oceanography, both in Qingdao, Shandong, are responsible for major polar research projects.

The State Oceanic Administration prioritizes achieving full autonomy<sup>27</sup> in sea ice remote sensing technologies, nautical cartography, and high-resolution microwave sounding technology. Research in underwater acoustics in the Chukchi Sea<sup>28</sup> is particularly noteworthy. Regarding underwater technologies, Beijing considers the construction of conventional/nuclear-powered icebreakers, ice-class vessels, and polar oil platforms strategically.

Scientific activity in the Arctic is linked to China's security strategy in the region. The Science of Military Strategy (SMS) document suggests that "the armed forces should actively cooperate with scientific expeditions"<sup>29</sup>. The combination of scientific and military interests, known as "military-civil fusion" (MCF), is prominently exemplified by the consolidation of scientific facilities<sup>30</sup> and oceanographic research for the Navy<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> PURANEN, Matti & KOPRA, Sanna. *Op.cit*

<sup>23</sup> REKETS, Marina. "China's Arctic Policy in a Time of Global Geopolitical Transformation: A Northern Orientation". *RUDN University, Moscow*. Available in: <https://journals.rudn.ru/international-relations/article/view/41024>

<sup>24</sup> A similar proposal in Greenland was rejected by Denmark for security reasons.

<sup>25</sup> EITERJORD, Trym. "Polar Expertise in China's 14th Five-Year Plan". *The Arctic Institute*. (07.12.23). Available in: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/polar-expertise-chinas-14th-five-year-plan/>

<sup>26</sup> Dalian Maritime University is deeply involved in polar-Arctic research and is a home port for Arctic shipping.

<sup>27</sup> PURANEN, Matti & KOPRA, Sanna. *Op.cit*

<sup>28</sup> Russian cooperation in under-ice acoustics and underwater communications is highlighted.

<sup>29</sup> XIAO, T. (Eds.). *The Science of Military Strategy (战略学)*. 2020. Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe.

<sup>30</sup> LIU, F. & LIU, D. "Arctic security and China's national security interests from the perspective of the new "National Security Law" *Zhongguo Ruanxexue*, 2018(9), 8–14. Consulted:12.03.25

<sup>31</sup> PAUL, Michael. *Op.cit*

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The MCF supports military projection and enhances its Arctic military capabilities. The development of nuclear icebreakers, aircraft for extreme cold, and the Beidou satellite navigation system are examples of scientific strategy.

The Ny-Ålesund station undertakes glaciology and space physics projects. The China Research Institute of Radio Wave Propagation (CRIRP)<sup>32</sup> conducts atmospheric/ionospheric observations (aurora borealis, electrons, etc.) and their impact on radar signals, ultimately useful for aerospace detection and tracking<sup>3334</sup>.

Another line of research involves deploying ground-based satellites to improve meteorological remote sensing and monitoring marine areas and shipping routes. In support of oceanographic research, it launched its first polar satellite in 2019.

Similar projects to the Kiruna satellite station in Greenland, Iceland, and Finland have not prospered. However, CETC, a Chinese state-owned company, has supplied antennas for a new "scatter radar"<sup>35</sup> connected to other Scandinavian satellite stations. Likewise, the use of the SvalSat ground station by satellites from Chinese aerospace institutions<sup>36</sup> is raising concerns in Norway.

The Kárhóll Observatory (Iceland) monitors the Kármán line (upper atmosphere) using LiDAR technology<sup>37</sup>.

The "freedom of scientific research" advocated by China is raising security concerns in Arctic nations, which have reconsidered continuing collaboration with China (as is the case with the Kiruna station).

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<sup>32</sup> KANTCHEV, Georgi. "Russia and China Defy the West Deep in the Arctic". *The Wall Street Journal*. (16.10.24) Available in: <https://www.tovima.com/wsj/russia-and-china-defy-the-west-deep-in-the-arctic/>

<sup>33</sup> *Newsweek*. "China's expanding Arctic ambitions challenge the U.S. and NATO" (21.07.24) <https://www.newsweek.com/2024/08/09/china-russia-us-arctic-north-pole-strategy-svalbard-norway-sea-route-1916641.html>

<sup>34</sup> Norway prohibits the transmission of data "solely or primarily" for military purposes.

<sup>35</sup> *Newsweek*. *Ibidem*

<sup>36</sup> Shenzhen Aerospace Dongfanghong (e.g).

<sup>37</sup> Canadian Arctic Security. "Chinese research in the Arctic". (10.07.24) Available in: <https://canadianarcticsecurity.ca/2024/07/10/chinese-research-in-the-arctic/>

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### **Geoeconomic Context. Russian Chinese Partnership**

The Russian Chinese partnership in the Arctic is based on the compatibility of economic strategies. Chinese interests in the supply of energy resources and the diversification of global maritime routes<sup>38</sup> are linked to Russia's need for Chinese assistance in implementing strategically significant projects and allowing the import of high-tech Russian energy and telecommunications equipment<sup>39</sup>.

### **Commercial Focus. Polar Silk Road**

The Polar Silk Road is the geoeconomic arm of China's comprehensive strategy for the Arctic. Arctic maritime routes are at the forefront of China's economic objectives. Although Russia has a different interpretation of sovereignty over the Northeast Passage (including the Polar Silk Road), the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf strengthened Russia's Arctic Policy 2035 by validating the extension of its continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles<sup>40</sup>.

Although Russia provides China with access to the Arctic through its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)<sup>41</sup>, China needs Russia to guarantee the NSR as a stable maritime corridor<sup>42</sup> to toughen up its PCR to connect to the North Atlantic. Russia wants the NSR to wind up in Murmansk<sup>43</sup>.

Russia and China present the NSR as a strategic logistics artery, but Russia's Maritime Doctrine (July 2022) considers it to pass through its territorial waters; therefore, Arctic Sea routes are its own waterways, with the rights established in Article 234 of the

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<sup>38</sup> DALZIEL, Alexander. *Op.cit*

<sup>39</sup> 70% of the equipment for the Arctic-Yamal LNG project is Chinese; LNG is transported on Chinese, Korean ships.

<sup>40</sup> BUCHANAN, Elisabeth. *Op.cit*

<sup>41</sup> GRACEFFO, Antonio. "China and Russia Arctic Policy Convergence? Shifting Geopolitics in the North". *Geopolitical Monitor*. (14.10.24). Available in: <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/china-and-russia-arctic-policy-convergence-shifting-geopolitics-in-the-north/>

<sup>42</sup> REKETS, Marina. *Op.cit*

<sup>43</sup> *The Economist*. <https://www.economist.com/china/2024/06/19/china-and-russia-have-chilling-plans-for-the-arctic> (19.06.24)

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UNCLOS<sup>44</sup> prevailing.

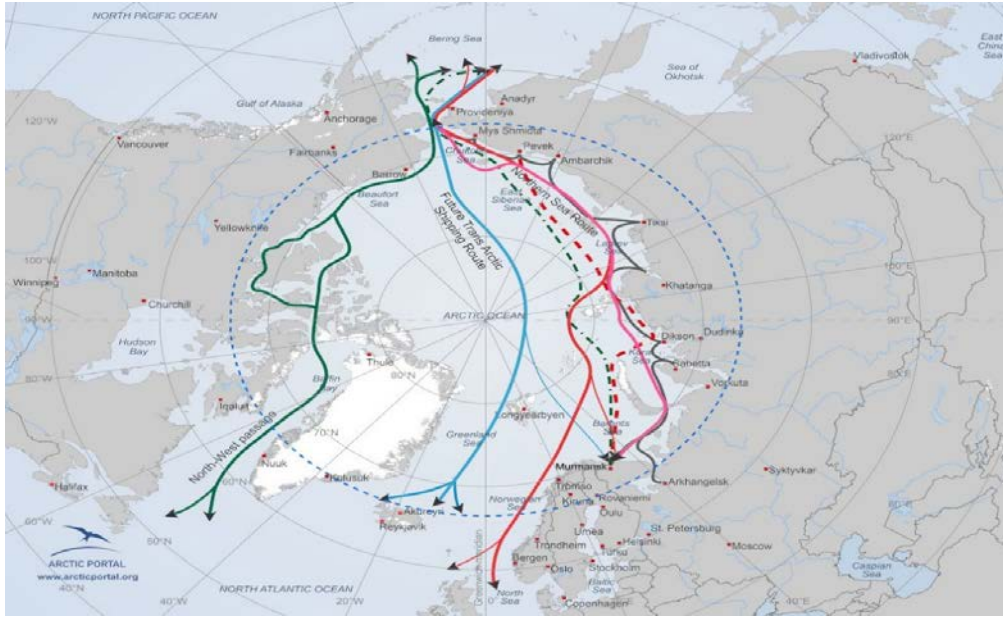


Figure 3. Arctic trade routes. Source: Arcticportal.org

Furthermore, navigating through the Russian EEZ entails transit fees and the requirement of exclusive escort by Russian icebreakers<sup>45</sup>. China expects more favorable conditions for its shipping lines' passage through the NSR, reducing icebreaker service and pilotage fees, which China claims are high. Furthermore, navigating through safe but shallow coastal waters entails chartering smaller container ships and higher costs<sup>46</sup>.

However, both nations agreed to boost the NSR in 2023<sup>47</sup> by officially inaugurating a regular maritime corridor in the Arctic. That year, the Murmansk Memorandum was signed to promote cooperation between the Chinese Coast Guard and the Russian Border Guard<sup>48</sup>.

The Russian company Rosatom, the administrator of the Arctic corridor, has signed agreements with the Chinese shipping companies Hainan Yangpu NewNew Shipping (2023) and COSCO (2024) to strengthen the NSR. These agreements include the joint

<sup>44</sup> United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

<sup>45</sup> BUCHANAN, Elizabeth. *Op.cit*

<sup>46</sup> DETSCH, J & GRAMER, R. "The Geopolitics of New Arctic Shipping Lanes". *Foreign Policy*. (30.05.24) Available in: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/05/30/arctic-geopolitics-russia-china-maritime-trade-northern-sea-route/>

<sup>47</sup> Opening of the port of Vladivostok to Chinese commercial activities.

<sup>48</sup> PAUL, Michael. *Op.cit*

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construction of high-class icebreakers, infrastructure, and ice-class container ships<sup>49</sup> to operate a year-round shipping line connecting China with Russian ports.

China's current chartering operations in the Arctic focus on bulk cargo transport through the Northeast Passage and direct shipments to Russian ports along the NSR. Although Chinese vessels do not use the NSR intensively, its growth is expected to provide opportunities for the ports of Qingdao and Dalian. Currently, cargo (especially oil) flows from Russia to China<sup>50</sup>.

China may be interested in attempting to transit the NSR anyway to demonstrate its geopolitical status. To boost maritime traffic, China has explored the possibility of its vessels calling at the ports of Zarubino (Russia) and Rajin (North Korea) or accessing the Sea of Japan via the Tumen River, although this is not yet supported by Russia and North Korea<sup>51</sup>.

### ***Energy and Mining***

Arctic energy resources have strategic value in diversifying their supply chain and limiting their vulnerability.

Climate change has prompted not only the import of Russian LNG, but also a long-standing interest in Arctic wind and geothermal energy<sup>52</sup>. Since 2013, China has invested in LNG extraction/liquefaction projects (Yamal-Nenets, Arctic-LNG) and the "Power-of-Siberia1"<sup>53</sup> gas pipeline through equity participation. (The Russian company Novatek is the main owner of the gas fields).

However, investing in Russian projects carries significant risks for China aggravated by sanctions against Moscow. The "Power-of-Siberia2" gas pipeline has been delayed; it did not receive full Chinese commitment due to disagreements over pricing<sup>54</sup> and reluctance

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<sup>49</sup> ODGAARD, Liselotte. *Op.cit*

<sup>50</sup> *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/politics/national-security/russia-china-artic-sea-nato-2ca1ea10> (03.02.25)

<sup>51</sup> YOUNG, Dick. "Russia and China Tighten Grip on Arctic: A Warning to the West". (04.02.25) Available in: <https://www.youngresearch.com/researchandanalysis/russia-and-china-tighten-grip-on-arctic-a-warning-to-the-west/>

<sup>52</sup> WANG, Yue. "The Arctic for China's Green Energy Transition". *The Arctic Institute* (16.11.23). Available in: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/arctic-chinas-green-energy-transition/>

<sup>53</sup> Großwald.org. "Geopolitics and Arctic Shipping Lanes: NATO, China, Russia" (26.12.24) Available in: <https://www.grosswald.org/geopolitics-and-arctic-shipping-lanes-nato-china-russia/>

<sup>54</sup> LAMAZHAPOV, E, STENSDAL, I & HEGGELUND, G. "China's Polar Silk Road: Long Game or Failed Strategy?". *The Arctic Institute*. (14.11.23) Available in: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/china-polar-silk-road-long-game-failed-strategy/>

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from Mongolia. Other projects have been delayed due to technical complexity regarding to weakening permafrost.



Figure 4. Power-of-Siberia LNG projects. Source: Financial Times

Russia needs to facilitate Chinese port investments in the eastern Arctic (Tiksi, Pevek). The floating LNG terminal (Murmansk) and the Sosnogorsk/Port-of-Indiga rail connection are examples of Russia's efforts to encourage its investments<sup>55</sup>. China is also developing a LNG transfer center (Bechevinskaya-Kamchatka).

Furthermore, access to nickel, copper, platinum, and rare earth deposits in Siberia complements China's dominance in the extraction and refining of critical and rare earth minerals. Chinese expertise in their processing can be very useful for Russia<sup>56</sup>.

However, China is reluctant to financing certain projects. Russian legislation prevents Chinese majority participation in LNG projects. Chinese control of these projects is not currently contemplated by Russia.

<sup>55</sup> There is a future project to build a railway in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) to Magadan.

<sup>56</sup> The Chinese company CCCC has agreed with the Russian company Rustitanc to mine titanium and quartz in Pizhenskoye (Komi Republic).

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## China and the Arctic Nations

China has sought to build bilateral relations with Arctic states through scientific cooperation and renewable energy. Beijing has visibly strengthened its diplomatic presence in these countries since 2014, but its strengthening role, its independent stance, and the growing imbalance with these countries (trade, research, etc.) have created security dilemmas for them.

Attempts to develop the PSR have, until now, involved a certain recognition of Russian dominance in the Arctic, but it does not want to distance itself from the Arctic nations. As an observer of the Arctic Council, it has sought opportunities to work with Moscow and other countries<sup>57</sup>. A defender of multilateralism, Beijing has emphasized the cooperative and peaceful nature of its Arctic policy<sup>58</sup>. However, various Chinese initiatives have met with resistance from the Arctic states.

Attempts to acquire land in Svalbard (Søre Fagerfjord), Iceland, and Finland<sup>59</sup> (Rovajärvi), as well as an abandoned base in Greenland (Grønnedal), have not prospered. Similarly, proposals to remodel the port of Kirkenes (Norway) or build airports in Greenland have also failed<sup>60</sup>. In other cases, oil projects (Iceland) or iron ore mining (Greenland) have succumbed to unprofitability.

The breakdown of collaboration between Arctic nations and Russia in the Arctic Council following the invasion of Ukraine has not prevented China from seeking to reactivate polar ties with them. They offer high potential for its interests, although there are fundamental differences regarding the future international legal status of this region<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> DAGAEV, Andrei. "The Arctic Is Testing the Limits of the Sino-Russian Partnership". *Carnegie Politika* (18.02.25). Available in: <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/02/russia-china-arctic-views?lang=en>

<sup>58</sup> China emphasizes unofficial connections between elites and institutions.

<sup>59</sup> In Sodankylä, the Finnish government halted a Joint Research Center for Arctic Space Observations due to security concerns.

<sup>60</sup> China has attempted to establish itself in Longyearbyen (Svalbard) by offering to build housing.

<sup>61</sup> REKETS, Marina. *Op.cit*

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## Conclusions

The Arctic has emerged as a geopolitical space where Russia's tensions with the transatlantic community and the strategic rivalry between the United States and China converge.

China's growing presence in the Arctic region is based on the one hand, on its strategic need to gain weight and influence as a maritime and global power and positioning itself in the Arctic serves that purpose. Likewise, the concept of "Total Security" encourages China to strengthen its energy security and stimulate its geo-economic and commercial strategy by inducing PSR through the development of NSR.

China wants to be seen as a relevant player in the Arctic, and Russia is currently the only option available for its multidimensional presence. The scientific cooperation that underpinned the initial relationship with Arctic Europe has given way to an asymmetric model where Chinese trade, investment, and scientific research have generated security concerns. Therefore, geopolitical dynamics are allowing the growth of China's presence in the region and its rapprochement with Russia.

The Russian Chinese partnership in the Arctic functions as a "kind of marriage of convenience," where their interests, especially economic ones, and the dynamics of convergence-divergence come to the fore. Russia needs financing and technology to develop its Arctic region; China wants to take advantage of the mining and energy resources of the Russian Arctic and preferential access to NSR. In this context, Russia relies heavily on Russia to alleviate the pressure on its supply chains due to sanctions.

Considerations of China's geopolitical risk and Russia's interest in maintaining its hegemonic status in Arctic affairs lead to divergences between the two. Furthermore, China's hesitation regarding certain investments (Power-of-Siberia 2), as well as its determined commitment to boosting its polar technology (construction of nuclear icebreakers), reflect the prospect of gradually reducing its dependence on Russia for access to the Arctic.

Viewing the NSR as a Russian waterway, Moscow will not accept China becoming a dominant player. Nor will Beijing compromise if Russia perceives China as a mere guest to Arctic domain.

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The strength of the Sino-Russian relationship in the Arctic will depend on the one hand, on the breadth of their bilateral relationship and, on the other, on the diversity of the overall Arctic economy. For Beijing, working with all Arctic nations is a priority, as the success of establishing the Arctic Sea as a strategic maritime corridor depends on it. China's security concerns related to its Russian investments motivate it to diversify risks and opportunities among different Arctic actors, enabling it to distance itself from Russia.

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