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Introduction

Russia's security policy in the Arctic is a vexed question both in the policy-oriented and academic literature. 'Russian expansionism in the Arctic', 'Russian military build-up in the Far North', the 'New Cold War' and the 'end of Arctic exceptionalism' are common statements in Western publications. This school often portrays the Arctic as a zone of potential conflict because of unresolved maritime boundary and continental shelf issues, control over sea routes and the region's abundant natural resources, as well as because of the spill-over effect of several international crises (Ukraine, Syria).¹

Even Western official documents tend to interpret the Arctic as an area of growing tensions between different global and regional players and identify Russia (and China) as a source of national security threat. For example, according to the 2022 US National Strategy for the Arctic Region,

Russia has invested significantly in its military presence in the Arctic over the last decade. It is modernising its military bases and airfields; deploying new coastal and air defence missile systems and upgraded submarines; and increasing military exercises and training operations with a new combatant-command-equivalent for the Arctic. Russia is also developing new economic infrastructure in its Arctic territories to develop hydrocarbons, minerals, and fisheries and is attempting to constrain freedom of navigation through its excessive maritime claims along the Northern Sea Route.²

The recent US Department of Defense (DoD) Arctic strategy underlines: 'Increasingly, the PRC and Russia are collaborating in the Arctic across multiple instruments of national power. While significant areas of disagreement between the PRC and Russia remain, their growing alignment in the region is of concern, and DoD continues to monitor this cooperation'.³

On the other hand, many experts underline that the region has a long-term tradition of peaceful and mutually beneficial cooperation between various Arctic actors and a number of regional institutions to support this cooperative trend were established. This, more optimistic, school still believes that the Arctic can avoid the coming of a full-scale 'New Cold War', resumption of global military confrontation and the region will remain a zone of low tension, peace and stability.⁴

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This group of experts and scholars believes that the nature and role of military power has radically changed in the post-Cold War era and it will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. In the past, military power was a coercive instrument in a global confrontation between two superpowers and capitalist and socialist systems. The Arctic was part of this global confrontation; it was a region where both the United States and the Soviet Union pursued containment strategies based on the mutually assured destruction (MAD) doctrine.

In the post-Cold-War period, however, the roles of military power and the nature of military strategy—globally and regionally—have been significantly transformed because of the global geopolitical changes and revolution in military affairs. Now military power serves the Arctic nations to protect their national sovereign rights and economic interests in the region and perform non-traditional functions such as search and rescue (SAR) operations, prevention of natural and man-made catastrophes and elimination of their negative consequences, fighting illegal migration, poaching and smuggling.

Noteworthy, security threats and challenges to Russia cannot be reduced only to the military ones. Currently, the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF) faces diverse challenges at various levels. These challenges result considerably more from environmental, economic, and societal changes than from military threats and are attributed to the human rather than national/State security sphere. Hence, a more comprehensive understanding of security should be utilized to properly assess Russia's security-related problems in the High North. State sovereignty is not widely contested in the Arctic, and there are few regional threats to the survival of Russia as a State, if any; instead, common challenges such as climate change, or shared interests such as in developing the region's abundant natural resources, have led to extensive international cooperation among the Arctic States over the last three decades. Even the Ukrainian crisis was unable to eliminate this cooperative spirit in the Arctic although the pace and scope of regional cooperation have been noticeably reduced, and many joint projects and programmes have been frozen or completely discontinued.

This means that when Russia's Arctic security strategy is discussed, attention should be paid not only and not so much to its military component as to its policy in the field of human security. For this reason, this study aims to examine Russia's both 'hard' and 'soft'/human security strategies. In the 'hard' security domain, while Moscow tries to modernize its armed forces and military infrastructure in the Far North (as other Arctic States do), Russia's 'soft'/human security strategy aims to solve most persistent non-military problems such as climate change implications, economic hardships, environment degradation, conservation of biodiversity, maritime safety, protection of indigenous peoples' traditional way of life and culture, among others.

Threat perceptions

It should be noted that the general focus of Arctic policies has largely shifted from 'hard' to 'soft' security over the last three decades. Similar to other Arctic States, Moscow no longer fixates on the threat of large-scale nuclear war that dominated Cold War thinking, and now pays greater attention to threats and challenges that emanate from the non-military sphere. These soft security concerns include

demonstrating control over natural resources and waters within their jurisdiction, adapting to climate change, cleaning up environmental 'hot spots', and ensuring that Arctic residents are safe.

Russia's current Arctic strategy does not discuss national security threats and instead prioritizes soft security threats such as the shrinking population in the AZRF; underdeveloped social, transport, and information infrastructure in the region; the slow pace of geological exploration for new mineral resource deposits; and the lack of a proper environmental monitoring system.⁵

The NATO military build-up and its increased military presence in the Arctic are mentioned on the bottom of a list of 'challenges' rather than 'threats' to Russia's national security. In short, hard security considerations must be conceptualized alongside the economic, environmental, and humanitarian interests that are the primary drivers of Russia's policy in the region.

Despite the increasing prominence of 'soft' security discourse, Russian military strategists still believe that conventional security threats require enhanced military capabilities and an expanded presence in the Arctic region. Given that all seven Western Arctic States are now NATO members, Russia naturally views the region through a strategic lens as well (although it is not reflected in Moscow's official conceptual documents). As has been the case for decades, Moscow considers the Kola Peninsula and its adjacent waters to be a region of special strategic importance for its national security.

Russian military analysts believe that the Arkhangelsk Air Defence Sector remains essential to prevent a surprise attack over the North Pole, and direct access to the Arctic and Atlantic oceans, and close proximity to potential US/NATO targets. Extensive military infrastructure makes this region well-suited for strategic naval operations. The Kola Peninsula hosts two-thirds of Russia's sea-based strategic nuclear forces. As the Norwegian and Barents Seas can still serve as the main launching areas for Western seaborne attack, Russian military experts insist that the Russian Northern Fleet must ensure the readiness of its anti-submarine forces in the Arctic.⁶

Given the prospects of a seasonally ice-free Arctic Ocean in the foreseeable future, Russian military analysts have accepted the possibility that the US could permanently deploy a nuclear submarine fleet and sea-based ballistic missile defence (BMD) systems in the Arctic Ocean.⁷ In this case, the US could create capabilities for intercepting Russian intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launches at the initial (boost) phase and make a preventive/'disarming' strike by ICBMs, submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and cruise missiles, regardless of whether they are nuclear-tipped or not. This kind of American strategic thinking can provoke Russia's continuing efforts to regularly modernize its strategic nuclear forces, with the aim of having sufficient potential to overcome the US missile defence system.

Recent international crises, particularly in Ukraine and Syria, and Finland's and Sweden's accession to NATO have soured the relationship between Russia and NATO member states in the Arctic. So far, Russia is watching what specific consequences the integration of Finland and Sweden into NATO will have. Moscow has not yet updated its Arctic military strategy in light of the changing geopolitical situation in the Far North. But it can be assumed that the reassessment of threat perception at the level of the Russian leadership has already begun. It is obvious that the role of military threats in the Russian perception of the Arctic situation will

increase, although this will not eliminate the need to solve problems from the ‘soft’ security domain.

‘Hard’ security strategy

Since critics of Russia’s Arctic strategy accuse Moscow of militarizing the Far North, it makes sense to figure out what place the military factor occupies in the Kremlin’s overall strategy in the region. Based on recent developments in Moscow’s Arctic policies it should be noted that along with the traditional functions, the Russian military has some new roles in the Far North. According to some experts,⁸ Russia’s military security strategy in the Arctic may have some non-traditional functions.

For example, one of the new purposes of Russia’s military power could be to ascertain its sovereignty over the country’s exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in the region, including disputable areas. Although the probability of an armed conflict because of maritime disputes is not very high, the military power is still viewed by Moscow as a tool to prevent such disputes from escalating to a dangerous phase.

Protection of Russia’s economic interests in the Arctic, including mineral and bio-resources, fighting smuggling and poaching, is also seen as another important mission of the armed forces.

Illegal migration might become another security challenge for Russia. This challenge can be effectively met with the help of not only police, but also border and coast guards as well as the Russian National Guard (internal troops) which are considered the parts of armed forces in a broader sense.

Moreover, the Russian military should be prepared to prevent potential terrorist attacks against critical industrial and infrastructural objects, including oil and gas platforms, nuclear plants, and nuclear waste storages located in the northern regions. This threat became especially evident with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022. Russian security services and military are forced to take into account the facts of Ukrainian terrorism against Russian nuclear power plants, as well as other Russian critical infrastructure facilities. For example, since October 2022 Ukrainian terrorists and drones attacked the Kursk nuclear plant located close to the Ukrainian territory on the regular basis. In May 2023, the Russian Federal Security Service has prevented Ukrainian terrorist attacks against the Kalinin and Leningrad nuclear power plants. So far, these acts of terrorism have been directed against facilities located in other regions of the country, but no one can guarantee that they will not affect the Arctic regions of Russia (for example, the Kola nuclear power plant).

The Russian military should be also ready to fulfil some dual-use functions, such as SAR operations, monitoring air and maritime spaces, providing navigation safety, and mitigating natural and man-made catastrophes.

Interestingly, Arctic research is becoming one of the important missions of the Russian military because its air force and navy have unique technical capabilities for doing this. For instance, the Russian Ministry of Defence played a key role in preparing a second submission on the expansion of the Russian continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean for a UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (filed in August 2015, approved by the Commission in February 2023).

Finally, the Russian military carry some symbolic functions. For many Russians, deployment of significant forces and development of the military infrastructure in the Arctic demonstrates that the country retains its great power status and still has world-class military capabilities. Interestingly, in some other Arctic States (e.g. Canada, Norway, Finland), military presence in this region is also seen as a symbol of their *Nordicity* (Northern identity).

However, it should be noted that these new roles do not preclude military power from fulfilling its traditional functions, such as protection of national territory in the Arctic, power projection, deterrence, containment, etc. For this reason, maintaining strategic nuclear and conventional capabilities as well as their modernization remain important priorities for Moscow's military policies in the Far North.

The significant degeneration of the Soviet-era military machine in the Arctic in the 1990s and early 2000s left the Russian nuclear and conventional forces badly in need of modernization. The main idea behind the modernization plans is to make the Russian armed forces in the Arctic more compact, better equipped, and better trained to meet new challenges and threats.

Nuclear deterrence and MAD doctrines remain key elements of the Russian military strategies, as well as symbols and guarantees of great power status.⁹ Therefore, maintaining strategic nuclear capabilities and modernizing strategic nuclear forces are the highest priorities of Moscow's military policies, both in the Arctic and globally.

In terms of the Russian fleet of strategic nuclear-powered submarines, only Delta IV-class submarines are being modernized with a new sonar system and Sineva (Skiff SSN-23) third-generation liquid-propelled SLBMs with a range from 8300 to 11,150 km which can carry from four to ten nuclear warheads.¹⁰ Russia plans to equip the Northern Fleet's six Delta IV-class submarines (which will remain on alert status until 2030 or later) with at least 100 Sineva missiles that can be launched from under the sea ice and thus evade radar detection until launch.

In the future, the new Borey-class fourth-generation nuclear-powered strategic submarines will replace the huge Typhoon-class submarines which were the core of the Russian strategic submarine fleet in the past (the last Northern Fleet's Typhoon *Dmitri Donskoy* was decommissioned in 2022). The Borey-class submarines carry the Bulava system, a new-generation solid-fuel SLBM that is designed to avoid possible future US ballistic missile defence weapons and has a range of over 9000 km. These submarines are equipped with 16 Bulava missiles (each of them has from six to ten warheads).¹¹

The Northern Fleet operates two Borey-class submarines and the third one is planned to be operational in 2024.¹² There are also plans to build two more Borey-class submarines for this fleet by 2027.¹³

This new generation of strategic submarines carries Bulava and/or several types of cruise missiles (including hypersonic ones) and torpedoes and can conduct multipurpose missions, including attacks on aircraft carriers and potential missile strikes on coastal targets.

In addition to the strategic submarines, the Northern Fleet includes several multipurpose nuclear-powered submarines equipped with cruise missiles: two Yasen-class (the newest generation), two Oscar II-class, three Akula I and Akula II-class, two Sierra II-class and one Victor III-class submarines.¹⁴ Some of them are being

equipped with the Tsirkon hypersonic missiles which cannot be intercepted by the existing NATO air defence systems.

Along with nuclear-powered submarine fleet the Russian navy modernizes the diesel-electric one. The Northern Fleet has four Kilo-class and two Lada-class submarines which are being equipped with the *Caliber* high-precision cruise missiles.

The Northern Fleet actively modernizes its surface vessels. Among the largest warships undergoing the modernization process the aircraft carrier *Admiral Kuznetsov*, missile cruiser *Admiral Nakhimov*, and frigate *Admiral Chabanenko* should be mentioned. In addition to two new generation Gorshkov-class frigates, two new ones should join the Northern Fleet in 2024–25. They are built with the use of Stealth technology and equipped with *Oniks*, *Caliber* or *Tsirkon* anti-ship/multi-purpose missiles.

The Northern Fleet's military-administrative status is changing over the last 10–15 years. In 2010, this fleet became an integral part of the Western Military District. But in December 2014, given an 'increased NATO military threat' in the Arctic, President Putin decided to create a new 'North' strategic command (three years ahead of schedule). This reform led to the radical change of the fleet's configuration because the land forces deployed on the Kola Peninsula were subordinated to the naval command. Particularly, the three existing brigades (80th Arctic, 200th motorized infantry, and 61st naval infantry) and some other military units on the Kola Peninsula were merged into the 14th Army Corps under the Northern Fleet's command, which was charged with coastal defence functions. The Russian Defence Ministry plans to modernize these land units by equipping them with weapons specially designed for the cold weather conditions and better preparing them to cope with new, non-traditional, threats and challenges.

After Finland and Sweden joined NATO, the Russian Ministry of Defence made plans to reorganize the 14th Army Corps into a full-fledged Army. These plans, however, may be delayed because the 200th motorized infantry and the 61st naval infantry brigades are currently participating in the Ukraine war.

The growing tension with NATO has forced Russia to pay more attention to its air-defence force units, which are stationed in the AZRF—on the Kola Peninsula, near Severodvinsk (Arkhangelsk region), Chukotka, and on Novaya Zemlya, Franz Josef Land, the New Siberian Islands, and Wrangel Island. Some of these units have re-established old Soviet airfields and military bases in the region and are equipped with RS-26 Rubezh coastal missile systems, S-300 and S-400 air-defence missiles, Tor-M2DT and the Pantsyr-S1 anti-aircraft artillery weapon system.¹⁵ These units merged into a joint task force in October 2014. Further measures to increase Moscow's military potential in the region include the creation of a new air-force and air-defence army, including regiments armed with MiG-31 interceptor aircraft, S-400 air-defence missile systems (to replace the S-300 systems), and radar units.¹⁶ One core goal is to restore continuous radar coverage along Russia's entire northern coast, which was lost in the 1990s. To that end, Moscow has committed to establish thirteen airfields, an air force test range, and ten radar sites and direction centres in the Arctic in the near future (see [Figure 1](#)).

The above-mentioned modernization programmes were by no means aimed at restoring the former Soviet military power in the Far North. Here are some figures related to the comparison of Soviet and Russian military capabilities in the Arctic.



Figure 1. Russian military bases in the AZRF.

Source: https://img-fotki.yandex.ru/get/15519/269684333.28/0_14a732_a0611ce5_orig.png
(Accessed 28 December 2024)

In 1991, the Northern Fleet consisted of 36 strategic and 96 tactical submarines, as well as of 67 large surface ships; one motorized rifle division and one marine brigade were based in the Kola Peninsula.¹⁷ Currently, the Northern Fleet has 8 strategic and 19 tactical submarines, as well as 10 large surface ships; one motorized rifle brigade, one Arctic brigade and one marine brigade are stationed on the Kola Peninsula,¹⁸ which is significantly less than the USSR had in this region during the Cold War.

To sum up, investments in Russia's military modernization programmes in the Arctic are less about power projection than about strategic deterrence, domain awareness and dual-use capabilities which can be used to patrol and protect Russia's recognized national territories which are becoming more accessible. It should be noted that Russia's Arctic defence modernization programmes are designed to update their armed forces and better equip them to cope with new threats and challenges in the Far North, rather than assigning them with offensive capabilities which are comparable with the Cold War era ones and can be used to coerce or conquer Moscow's northern neighbours.

'Soft'/human security strategy

As mentioned above, human security became Russia's main priority in the AZRF. In the *Human Development Report* of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), this phenomenon was defined as 'safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression' and 'protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life—whether in homes, in jobs or in communities'.¹⁹ Besides that, the main components of 'human security' were identified in the text of the Report, including economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. Moscow's human security strategy in the AZRF is being built around these seven priorities.

Economic security

The 1994 UNDP Report defines economic security as an 'assured basic income', either from one's own labour activities or from a social, public safety net.²⁰ In other words, it should be assured that individuals will be able to find a remunerative job that will allow them to earn a decent income.

Moscow's efforts to stabilize and improve the AZRF socio-economic situation resulted in a general decrease of the unemployment rate in the region over the last two decades, although it remains higher than in Russia at large (see Table 1).

Such an important component of economic security as providing the AZRF population with a decent income is also present in Moscow's policy in this region. The average monthly wages in the AZRF increased from 72,493 in 2017 to 109,943 roubles in 2022, while in Russia as a whole, this increase over the same period was from 44,907 to 72,885 roubles (see Table 2). However, it should be borne in mind

Table 1. Unemployment rate in the AZRF and Russian Federation (per cent).

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
AZRF	11,9	10,0	8,1	9,4	8,6	8,8	7,8	6,9	7,0	8,7	7,4	6,9
Russia at large	10,6	9,0	7,9	8,2	7,8	7,1	7,1	6,0	6,2	8,3	7,3	6,5
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
AZRF	6,1	6,3	6,0	6,7	6,8	6,4	5,9	5,4	6,0	4,7	4,1	3,2
Russia at large	5,5	5,5	5,2	5,6	5,5	5,2	4,8	4,6	5,8	4,8	3,9	3,2

Source: Federal Service of State Statistics. The Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation, 2023 at https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/arc_zona.html (Accessed 29 June 2023) (in Russian).

Table 2. Average monthly wages in the AZRF and Russia at large (rouble).

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
AZRF	72,493	78,668	83,512	90,776	95,810	109,943	122,096
Russia at large	44,907	49,895	53,918	57,982	64,270	72,885	83,281

Source: Federal Service of State Statistics. The Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation, 2023 at https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/arc_zona.html (Accessed 29 June 2023) (in Russian).

that the cost of living in the AZRF is significantly higher than in other Russian regions, and that this statistic does not take into account inflation, which was 40.22 per cent for the same period.²¹ This means that the real standard of living of the AZRF population has not increased in recent years but, in fact, has decreased.

It is also necessary to take into account the significant difference in the socio-economic development of the AZRF regions. For example, in 2022, the unemployment rate in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Area was only 1.7 per cent, while in the neighbouring Nenets Autonomous Area (NAA) it was 7.3 per cent (see Figure 2).

There is a rather difficult situation with the socio-economic development of the AZRF indigenous peoples. For example, according to some accounts, the unemployment rate among Russia's indigenous people has been estimated between 30 per cent and 60 per cent, which is three to four times higher than

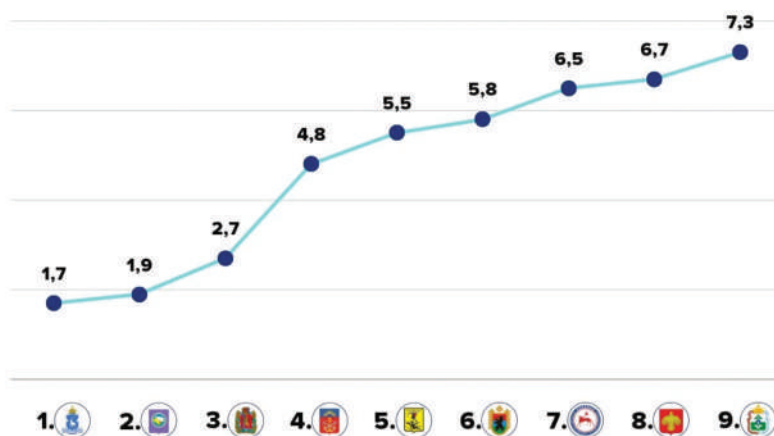


Figure 2. The unemployment rate among the AZRF regions in 2022 (per cent).

1. Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Area.
2. Chukotka Autonomous Area.
3. Krasnoyarsk Province.
4. Murmansk Region.
5. Arkhangelsk Region.
6. Republic of Karelia.
7. Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)
8. Republic of Komi.
9. Nenets Autonomous Area.

Source: Sevmorput, 'The Arctic Unemployment', 25 April 2023 at <https://dzen.ru/a/ZEq8XkaU21Z6jLf> (Accessed 29 June 2023) (in Russian).

that of other residents of the AZRF.²² This indicator may vary among different AZRF regions. For instance, the unemployment rate among the indigenous peoples of the Chukotka Autonomous Area (whose share in the total population of the region is more than 30 per cent) is higher than the average for the region by 1.2 times. In the NAA, the unemployment rate of the rural population, where indigenous peoples predominate, is almost twice the level of urban unemployment.²³

Occupational structure is an important aspect of the AZRF indigenous peoples' economic security. The more flexible indigenous peoples are in choosing their professions, the more opportunities they have for getting high-paying jobs. Conversely, the lack of flexibility in the choice of profession can affect the level of employment in the region and wages of indigenous peoples.

There is a trend common for many AZRF indigenous communities in terms of occupational preferences: many young indigenous men, unlike women, tend to step into a path dependency and consequently they are unable to choose alternative paths and adapt to changes. They prefer (sometimes on their own, sometimes as a part of a family decision) 'traditional male professions' (mechanics, snowmobile drivers, etc.)²⁴ that are in line with indigenous ideas of traditional 'masculine' occupations and help them with reindeer herding and hunting.²⁵

To change the AZRF indigenous peoples' socio-economic situation to the better the Russian federal, regional and municipal authorities try to:

- create and develop the industrial and technological infrastructure of traditional economic activities of indigenous peoples;
- promote the domestic and foreign markets of goods, works and services produced within the framework of traditional economic activities of indigenous peoples;
- develop the tourism industry in places of traditional economic activity of indigenous peoples;
- train personnel for the implementation of traditional economic activities of indigenous minorities (for this purpose a network of community colleges and universities is being developed in the region);
- modernize local generation facilities, expand the use of renewable energy sources, liquefied natural gas and local fuel in places where traditional economic activities of indigenous peoples are carried out, and
- popularize entrepreneurship among indigenous minorities.²⁶

Food security

Food security is another important element of human security. According to the UNDP's definition, food security implies the constant 'physical and economic access to basic food'²⁷; more specifically, this means both the availability of food and the possibility to acquire it.

In the AZRF context, the food security concept acquires a deeper meaning because access to food supplies in such an isolated and remote area is not simple and represents a real challenge. Many remote coastal communities have a stable connection to the 'mainland' only *via* maritime transport on the seasonal basis. The

so-called ‘northern supply’ – which includes foodstuff, other consumer goods, fuel, and construction materials—takes place every summer and lasts about four months. The rest of the year, these remote settlements are almost cut off the central part of the country.

The AZRF indigenous peoples represent a special case in terms of food security. They have already experienced negative consequences related to the import of foods that have replaced traditional staples. In this case, food security intersects with health security. Climate change also threatens food security in the AZRF because seasonal patterns are altered, animal cycles are changed, fish migrate, and the conditions for the growing of plants are modified. In addition, microplastic pollution has become a global problem. Microplastics are now found in Arctic fish and animals that have become unsafe to eat.

Health security

Health security is defined by the UNDP²⁸ as the availability and access to adequate health systems, together with the elimination of threats to the health of individuals.

Unfortunately, the AZRF is replete with health security problems. These include, for example, the low fertility rate, which led to the ‘demographic crisis’, i.e., the decline of the local population.

The AZRF indigenous peoples have extremely high adult mortality rates. Just over one-third of indigenous men (37.8 per cent) and less than two-thirds of indigenous women (62.2 per cent) in Russia reach the age of 60.²⁹ At the national level, the figures are 54 per cent for men and 83 per cent for women. Besides, 36 per cent of Russia’s indigenous people die prematurely from non-natural causes, which is more than double the 15 per cent national average. Infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, a typical indicator of extreme poverty, cause 60 deaths per 100,000, which is almost three times the national average of 23 per 100,000. Furthermore, deaths during childbirth and child mortality are significantly above the national average. Alcoholism is a major factor in the indigenous peoples’ acute health crisis (including women).

The AZRF indigenous peoples demonstrate a higher suicide rate than the average in the entire country. Between 1998 and 2002, the incidence of suicide among northern indigenous peoples was over 100 per 100,000 – more than double the national average of 38 per 100,000. In the Koryak district in northern Kamchatka, this figure is 133.6 per 100,000.

As per Russia’s Arctic strategy, health security strategies in the AZRF have four main directions: development of an adequate health care infrastructure in remote areas; prevention policies (measures to overcome low nutrition, get access to tele-medicine or e-health services, address existing social problems such as alcoholism, drug addiction, sedentary lifestyles, and gender inequality, develop sport and other community and group-based activities, etc.); mitigating external environmental factors (such as curbing and reducing pollution); and securing sufficient resources for coping with health security problems.³⁰

Environmental security

According to the 1994 UNDP Report, environmental security is a ‘healthy physical environment’.³¹ The healthy environment can be threatened by economic, industrial, and military activities, pollution, degradation of ecosystems, or climate change. These threats can be local or the result of trans-border and global activities.

Continued neglect of ecological aspects of the AZRF industrial activities resulted in heavy pollution in many Russian northern regions. Experts identified 27 impact zones in the AZRF, which are polluted to the extent that seriously threaten both the local ecosystems and the population’s health (Figure 3). The most problematic impact zones include the Norilsk industrial agglomeration (more than 30 per cent of total pollutants), the West Siberian region where oil and gas production is concentrated (30 per cent), the Murmansk Region (10 per cent), and the Arkhangelsk Region (5 per cent).³² According to some experts, around 15 per cent of the Russian Arctic is heavily polluted.³³

To address the numerous AZRF environmental problems, Moscow launched a programme to clean the region in 2011. In 2015, another AZRF cleaning programme was launched with special focus on the Arctic archipelagos.

Russia also pays great attention to the nuclear waste treatment problem, which was inherited from the Soviet past. The Russian Government programme



Figure 3. The AZRF impact zones.
Source: Map compiled by the author

on nuclear and radiological safety for 2008–2015 succeeded in dismantling 195 retired nuclear submarines (97 per cent of the total quantum), removing 98.8 per cent of radioisotope thermoelectric generators from service, and dismantling 86 per cent of these generators. Centralized long-term storage facilities for spent nuclear fuel were constructed. Moreover, 53 hazardous nuclear facilities were decommissioned, 270 hectares of contaminated land was remediated, and open water storage of radioactive waste was discontinued.³⁴

The Russian AZRF regions now try to prevent and reduce pollution rather than to focus on the elimination of accumulated ecological damage.³⁵ They believe that reduction of air pollution will help to mitigate climate change and suggest a number of specific measures to reduce dangerous emissions. These policies are viewed as more adequate and efficient than eliminating the environmental damage mostly created in the Soviet era. At the same time, this is a good example how climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies can complement and reinforce each other.

Personal security

Personal security refers to the absence of sudden and unpredictable physical violence.³⁶ Such physical violence could either be caused by States, loose or organized groups of individuals; or be targeted at specific groups (such as women or children). Threats to personal security might arise from outside the community, from specific individuals in one community, or from the community as a whole.³⁷

Although at present, crime is not a major concern in the AZRF, existing cooperation networks and expertise should be strengthened to avoid potential new threats. Unfortunately, personal security is hardly covered in Russia's national policies and Arctic strategies, and mostly left for municipalities and local communities themselves.

Community security

According to the 1994 UNDP Report, individuals often 'derive security from their membership in a group—a family, a community, an organization, a racial or ethnic group that can provide a cultural identity and a reassuring set of values'.³⁸ Ensuring community security means that the language, culture, or—more generally—integrity of those groups is preserved. Within the AZRF context, it is widely assumed that threats to security can affect the more vulnerable communities such as indigenous peoples, women, children, and old generation.

The protection of indigenous languages, culture, traditional economies and way of life is already formally included in all Russia's Arctic strategy documents and normative acts. Moscow also works on establishing knowledge centres (community colleges, universities and research institutes) where traditional knowledge can be gathered and transmitted following both traditional and modern, scientific ways. Such institutions contribute to the enhancement and transmission of traditional culture and language, and thus reduce insecurity within the community.

Except for the indigenous peoples, an often-neglected community security problem in the AZRF is gender empowerment and the promotion of gender equality measures, both at the economic and the community and political levels. Both the

Russian government and civil society institutions try to address human security challenges ranging from men's violence against women, sexual harassment and abuse, guest hetaerism, girls' early marriages, and women's access to health care, education, and well-paid jobs.

Political security

The UNDP Report³⁹ attributes political security to a society 'that honours their basic human rights'. As Martin⁴⁰ notes, within the Arctic context, enhancing political security might refer to ensuring that local and indigenous communities are part of the different decision-making processes regarding issues that affect them.

Russia is often criticized by the West for the lack of political freedoms, tolerance to political opposition, and free mass media. However, in the case of the AZRF, such criticism might not be entirely relevant because Moscow tries to actively involve its Arctic regions, cities, municipalities, and indigenous communities in strategic planning and decision-making.

Despite the obvious importance of the human security agenda for Moscow, none of its Arctic strategic documents explicitly mentions this concept. Based on the analysis of most recent documents,⁴¹ Russia's priorities are economic security (sustainable use of natural resources, economic development, business interests in the AZRF, etc.) and environmental security (climate change, balance between environmental protection and economic development, protection of the Arctic ecosystem and biodiversity, etc.). Community security (tackling societal and community-based problems, gender equality, promotion of women and youth empowerment, job creation, innovation, etc.) and political security (increasing participation of local inhabitants in decision-making processes, promoting the well-being of indigenous people, etc.) are of secondary significance for Moscow. Food and health security is merely mentioned in Russia's Arctic strategies, while personal security is completely ignored.

In other words, there is no comprehensive approach to human security. Russia's strategic documents are focused on the interests of the State, and the interests of the AZRF inhabitants take second place. However, tracing the evolution of Moscow's Arctic strategies, the 'human dimension' is growing in significance in the above documents.

Conclusion

Several conclusions emerge from the above analysis:

As Russia's Arctic policy documents and regional behaviour demonstrate, Moscow's security strategy in the region is a combination of strategic deterrence and constructive dialogue. On the one hand, Russian strategic and conventional military modernization programmes are tied to the US/NATO-Russia competition and are linked to the North because of the locations of military bases (particularly on the Kola Peninsula and Arctic archipelagos) and the potential polar routes for the US and Russian strategic delivery systems. On the other hand, Moscow aims to a stable, peaceful region, where respect for sovereign rights is an essential precondition for sustainable development and security. Russia has incentives to avoid conflict with other Arctic players because Moscow has to solve numerous domestic problems in the AZRF and for this reason, needs a favourable international environment in the region.

Russia's investments in the defence sector aim at not only modernizing its armed forces deployed in the region, but also be better prepared to fulfil the military's new functions such as protection of national sovereign rights and economic interests (including prevention of poaching and smuggling), dual-use functions (SAR operations, fighting oil spills, monitoring maritime and air spaces), precluding illegal migration and potential terrorist attacks against critical infrastructure, research support for the civilian authorities in areas such as cartography, charting safe maritime routes and legal claims on extension of the continental shelf, being a symbol of Russia's greatness, etc.

It is safe to assume that the focus of Russia's security policies is gradually shifting from the 'hard' to 'soft'/human security problématique. Moscow has already familiarized itself with the human security concept, although the latter is not used in Russia's official documents. To some extent, the human security thématique is embedded in Russia's Arctic strategic documents and linked to the AZRF's sustainable development agenda. At the same time, in Moscow's regional policies, economic, ecological, food, health, personal, communal, and political dimensions of human security are quite often not properly harmonized with one another. Priority is given to economic and environmental aspects of human security strategies, while other dimensions are often ignored or given less attention. Russia's Arctic strategy is still highly State-centred and focuses first on the State, and then on the AZRF inhabitants.

At the same time, Russia made great strides in implementing some human security-related projects (mostly economic and environmental) over the last 15 years. There was a clear shift from survival or reactive strategies to capacity-building, proactive human security or sustainable development strategies in the region. However, there is still a long way to go, in terms of both the development of adequate policies and their effective implementation. Moscow should also strike a proper balance between the military and human components of its security strategies in the Arctic.

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