

Past the freezing point?

A comparative analysis of the Sino-American Arctic
geopolitical discourses and their implications for the thawing
North.

Abstract

The political climate in the Arctic is changing in tandem with the world's climate. As the ice thaws and leaves a previously frozen sea open, it likewise opens up for new opportunities as estimated abundances of resources become reachable for the first time. The diminishing ice also opens up new water ways for shipping routes and tourism, providing new economic opportunities. This has piqued the interests of many states in the world, inside and outside of the Arctic. China, the world's second largest economy, has notably made itself more present in the region through its observatory status in the Arctic Council, cooperation with Arctic states and by publishing an Arctic policy. The United States, largest economy in the World and Arctic state, has also increased its activity in the Arctic. These states have since accused each other of aggressive behaviour and are pushing opposing narratives. This paper analyses these discourses and narratives from a geopolitical viewpoint and argues that their interests lie in gaining power through accessing resources and keeping the other away. It also argues that the implication of this is that the Arctic is increasingly becoming a hostile political environment and a piece in the global balance of power.

Key words: The Arctic, China, Unites States of America, geopolitics, discourse analysis.

Word count: 9986

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1 Introduction

It has become abundantly clear that the environmental changes ravaging the Earth have, and will continue to have, devastating effects on all climates and regions. Perhaps the most evident to the eye is the melting of the polar regions with the shrinking of ice shelves, opening seas and images of malnourished polar bears struggling to provide for themselves in a changing Arctic (Kopra et al, 2020: 62; Macko, 2010: 107-117). While these are all visible changes, the effects reach much further than the physical environment as previously unreachable parts of the world suddenly are within the grasp of mankind and consequently become part of the global system of economy and power relations (Kopra & Koivurova, 2020: 1; Stepien et al, 2020: 125).

The Arctic region is made up of multiple states; Canada, Denmark (through Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Norway, Sweden, Russia and the United States of America, spanning across America, Europe and Asia and all with their own claims on land and sea (National Geographic; Van Pay, 2010: 61-77). However, the interest and claims on the melting North is not limited to the Arctic nations and is reaching the agendas of states further south and far away from the pole (see for example Wills, 2014: 2-4), emphasising the economic importance of the now exposed sea and land, even outside of the region itself. Notably, the economic significance includes natural resources in the shape of minerals, fossil fuels and fish, shipping routes (notably the Polar Silk Road planned by China (Lanteigne, 2021), and possibly tourism (Loureiro Bastos, 2018; China's Arctic Policy, 2018).

This leads to the question of power. With the United States as the leading economic power situated in the Arctic through Alaska and a rising China leaving all other economies far behind (World Bank, 2019), combined with a notably increased Chinese interest in the Arctic (Lanteigne, 2014: 5-11), the tension between the two major powers in regard to the region seem enviable and raises questions about what the intentions they harbour and what the possible implications of those could be. This will be discussed further in the next section on the purpose of this paper.

1.1 Purpose

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to explore the intents and interests of China and the United States; to attempt to make sense of the agendas and goals they have for the Arctic region. In doing so, the aim is to create a deeper understanding of the role of the Arctic in the eyes of the major players in the international political system and what this could mean for the future. As it is becoming increasingly important in a time with rising tensions, this knowledge could prove crucial in understanding both further developments in the Sino-American relations and the security situation in the Arctic as a whole. The Arctic may be interesting in its own right, but it is also one piece of a whole system.

The purpose is also closely tied to the method of the research, which for this paper will be discourse analysis. Through analysing the words and context used to justify claims, through forming identities and shaping the narrative, to access and wield power, the aim is bringing light to the beforementioned agendas, goals and interests. In essence, the purpose is to understand the Chinese and American discourses surrounding their activities in the Arctic, analysing them and lastly comparing these to each other in order to see what their interest and agendas are, and how these differ and coincide.

1.2 Previous research

Relevant previous research on the topic is fairly recent and in a bit of a boom, perhaps due to the changes posed by climate change and the expressed interest by the states in question. Østhagen (2019) expresses the effects of the beforementioned changes on geopolitics in the region and while it has a focus on the EU, it does provide a solid base on what the current geopolitical conflicts and potential future clashes are. *Climate Change and Arctic Security* (2020) edited by Heinen & Exner-Pirot is an anthology collecting perspectives on Arctic security, including the role of China. Further research on the resources and the role of these with special attention to international law can be found in Loureiro Bastos (2018), contributing with context to the analysis.

When it comes to the specific cases of China and the US, there are several studies published. Gayazova's (2013) research on China's marine rights in the Arctic sheds light on China's claims on Arctic waters and is important when examining the motivation and framing by China that will be analysed below. Further important work on China in the Arctic include Lanteigne (2014, 2021), Weidacher Hsiung (2016), and Grieger (2018). As for the US, there are decidedly less research done, perhaps due to less controversy regarding its Arctic presence. However, Backus (2012) do contribute with research on the US in terms of Arctic security and Wegge (2020) summarises some important points about the American Arctic strategy. A more comprehensive overview of the US and the Arctic until Obama's presidency can be found by Corgan (2014), but in general the literature is quite sparse in comparison. Hopefully this paper will contribute through filling some gaps in the research.

Lastly, a special mention of research on the topic is the anthology *Polar Geopolitics? Knowledges, Resources and Legal Regimes* (2014) edited by Powell & Dodds. Through different perspectives, the authors relay their research on theory, UNCLOS in the Arctic, legal regimes, as well as country specific research centring on the Arctic States and their specific conditions and interests. While the geopolitical theory presented and used is closer to critical geopolitics than the classic version of the theory (which will be used in this paper and specified in detail shortly), it provides useful information and perspectives on how laws work in the Arctic and the importance of resources and globalisation. For this research, the chapters on the United States, on China and on Northern Geopolitics proved the most useful, but the whole anthology is a useful and comprehensive source of geopolitical considerations in regard to the Polar regions.

1.3 Research question

Reflecting the purpose, of understanding the Chinese and American interests in the Arctic, the research question is as follows:

What interests do China and the United States have in the Arctic region and what are the implications of these?

2 Theory

The theory to be used is classical geopolitics. Classical as opposed to critical geopolitics due to the purpose of this paper being to examine the effect of geographical factors on politics and not the creation of meaning tied to spaces like the critical geopolitical theory does. Critical geopolitics are more concerned with critical aspects of security, such as human security (Wu, 2018: 787-788). As this is not what this paper aims to analyse and not in line with the purpose, the more appropriate theory to use is the classical version of geopolitics. Following is an explanation of the theory itself with extra attention to northern geopolitics and why it is highly relevant in understanding the Chinese and American Arctic policies.

2.1 Geopolitics

Geopolitics at its core is the relationship between the physical conditions and politics, leading states to act in certain ways due to their geographical situation and in relation to that of other states. It is deeply tied to the realist tradition of political thought and shares many of the foundational assumptions of the workings of the world found in realism (Wu, 2018: 786-787, 790). The framework used for this paper is primarily based on that presented by Zhengyu Wu (2018) but complimented by sources specifically linking the theory to the Arctic region. Thus, the theory will be presented below, and the specific framework summarised and specified.

2.1.1 Core assumptions

The term “geopolitics” was first introduced by a Swedish political scientist by the name of Rudolf Kjellén in the late 19th century (Dodds, 2007: 24-25). As

previously mentioned, it is a realism-based theory and consequently shares the assumptions that the international stage is defined by anarchy between states and that war is a natural expression of that. Power is an important concept due to it being the unit of measure of a state's relation and security vis-à-vis another in this system, and this power is in turn based on technology, economy and resources (Wu, 2018: 791).

What sets geopolitics apart from other strands of realism is its classification of geopolitical actors; sea powers, land powers and land-sea (or rimland) powers. Sea powers has been the dominant power through history and has kept its dominance through managing land and rimland powers through balancing and intervening as to not let a single power grow large enough to pose a challenge. For a sea power to maintain its status, it needs to retain its resource base and avoid a rivalling land power from seizing a bigger base of resources or hegemony through surrounding a sea (Wu, 2018: 792-805). For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on resources, as surrounding the Arctic Ocean would not be feasible for any state (at least not at the present moment). The technological aspect of power in geopolitics is the material and organisation that a state possesses and are able to use to compete with other states; how advanced a state is technologically, including weapon and information technology, impacts its ability to wield power in relation to another (Wu, 2018: 787-816).

Essentially, the goal of a state is to secure as much power as possible and that power has its source in geography and technological advancements. Through securing resources and hindering rivalling powers from seizing resources and land, a state is able to establish or maintain dominance.

2.1.2 Geopolitics in the North

Having gone through the general theory and core assumptions of classical geopolitics, there is a need to understand how the Arctic region fits into geopolitical thought. As established, geopolitics connects access and possession of geographical factors to power and security in the realist sense of the terms (Heinen, 2014: 244), but as a result of these factors significantly differing from location to location, the framework for analysis should take the specific conditions into consideration. While it is true, and stated above, that the Arctic is a part of a

larger international system, it is nevertheless a space with unique conditions that impact geopolitics in the area. The main aspect of the geopolitics in the Arctic not covered above is trade routes, due to changes in the ice sheet and opening up of passages. This ties into access to resources and economic possibilities (Powell & Dodds, 2014: 7). Moreover, the area is on the rise, in terms of geopolitical value, and promised yet largely undiscovered value makes it a lucrative investment for states within and outside of the immediate area (Heinen, 2014: 243-244). In conclusion, geopolitics in the Arctic need to consider the fact that the conditions are changing rapidly, and the area is home to a predicted wealth of resources that has never previously been accessible.

2.1.3 Framework

To shortly summarise the framework to be used in the analysis in this paper, the classical geopolitical theory as presented by Wu (2018) is its base. A state is assumed to work towards securing land and resources, as there are assets in which power can stem from. As such, it is important for a state to assure that another will not gain control over a larger number of resources, due the anarchic system where power means survival. Technology and advancements also impact this. A dominant power, usually a sea power, needs to manage other up and coming powers to maintain its dominance in the system of states.

When it comes to the Arctic, the richness of resources makes it a valuable region to seize control over. This is especially true due to the novelty of the impact of climate change, leading to new routes with economic significance and the promise of discovering new sources of fossil fuels. The framework takes this into consideration as the Arctic is opening up for states to claim and gain access to resources, in other words: power, never before existing in the system of states and therefore being a prime example of competition for a dominant state to maintain its power and a challenger to even out the field.

2.2 Why is it relevant in this case?

The relevance of the theory in the case of the Arctic is tied to the greater power politics of the world. Due to the great powers being the most important actors, and great powers in the geopolitical sense being the biggest and most well-endowed states. It is also theoretically relevant what kind, sea, land or rimland, power they are, as a result of the historical dominance of the sea power and struggle for the land power to compete. According to Wu, a great challenge for the current dominant sea power, the US, is containing and preventing powers on either side of the oceans from being powerful enough to disrupt the balance of power (Wu, 2018: 792-805). In the case of China, it has grown powerful enough to hinder the USA from maintaining this balance, has become even more of a threat, and the competition for resources for the two states more tense and urgent. In the light of this, a geopolitical analysis would be incomplete without these two powers.

Given the current situation in the Arctic with the estimated abundance of resources combined with the challenge to US dominance posed by a rising China, the turnout in the Arctic could be vital for the Sino-American relations in the future and as a consequence the whole world. Understanding the interest and intentions of these two powers is to shine light on events that might shape the future. Therefore, it is highly relevant to analyse the geopolitical implications of a changing Arctic and to make China and the United States the objects of analysis.

2.3 Propositions

The propositions for this paper reflect the theory in relation to the research question; the geopolitical answer to what the interest of China and the United States in the Arctic would be before properly analysing it. They are thus:

China and the United States want to secure access to and lay claim on resources in the Arctic, in order to increase their power.

The United States wants to do so in order to maintain its dominance, while China's motivations are to even out the gap between itself and the United States.

This could possibly lead to conflict, due to the importance for both of them to keep the other from gaining access to the regional resources.

3 Methodology

This is a comparative small-N study, examining the two cases of China and the United States of America, with the beforementioned purpose of understanding their Arctic agendas. In order to analyse the intents of China and the US, a discourse analysis will be performed on official documents and statements released by the two states. Through this, one will be able to discern how they go about to reach their geopolitical ambitions through the creation of identities and narratives, framing of claims and establishing power. In this section, methodology, selection of material, discourse analysis as well as the operationalisation of the study will be explained.

3.1 Research design

This is a comparative study, and a small-N by categorisation due to the number of cases that are examined. The idea of comparison in academic, and in particular political, studies is to examine if a phenomenon acts differently depending on the case and the different factors present in different cases. Through this, a researcher can analyse the same variable across cases and test or develop new theory of how this variable affects others (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 232-234).

It is also a question and discussion of validity in the selection of design and the number of cases. When it comes to external and internal validity in comparative studies, single-N (one case) studies are characterised by high internal validity and lower external validity due to the number of specific details of the case the researcher is able to consider but how this leads to the result having less of a chance of being replicated elsewhere. Large-N (a large number of cases) studies have the opposite problem with the internal validity being lower but the external being higher due to the pattern observed across the many cases. Small-N (more than one but less than many) studies have the advantage of having higher

internal validity than large-N and higher external validity than single-N studies (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 234-239, 251-255).

Landing and limiting to the two cases thus enable this study to consider the cases in relative depth and still compare the result to each other to understand the differences and patterns they exhibit. By comparing how the Arctic discourses are realised in China and the United States, one is able to analyse the geopolitical implications which in turn is in line with the purpose of this paper.

3.2 Selection of cases and material

The case selection is also tied into the research design, which dictates that the strategy of selecting the cases is based in the theory to be used and are usually either by similarities or differences (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 238-239). For this paper, the main consideration when choosing the two cases was the importance of the dominant power in geopolitics, and the contending power rising to challenge. This is elaborated in the theory section above, but the essentials is that the selection of cases was wholly guided by the theory to ensure the best possible outcome of the study.

The material used to collect the data is a result of the method of analysis and operationalisation that will be discussed just below but will still be explained and discussed here. As the purpose of the paper is to analyse and understand the intentions of the two states in questions, primary sources outlining these are required. This is further elaborated by Steinberg:

“Policy documents matter. For at least three decades, scholars in political thought and international relations have been urging that attention be paid to the discursive constructions that underpin the documents by which statespersons frame problems and solutions. Words may not win or lose wars, but neither are they simply propaganda used to explain (or sell) a policy to the public or government officials. Rather the stories that are told about a place locate it in a discursive frame – one of conflict or cooperation, fear or opportunity, difference or similitude – and these frames establish tropes by which places are constructed as *geopolitical objects*. These tropes, in turn, inform the policies that guide practices and that, through their recitation, reproduce the discursive construction of situation and places” (Steinberg, 2014: 133).

Consequently, the policies published by China and the US are highly relevant when approaching this subject as they contain the discourses that this paper aims to analyse and put into a geopolitical perspective. The main Chinese documents to be analysed are the 2018 *Arctic Policy* and the at the date of writing recently published five-year plan under the title *The Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for the National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China and the Outline of Long-term Goals for 2035*. The main American documents are the 2013 *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*, the 2019 *Report to Congress. Department of Defence Arctic Strategy*, and the 2013 *United States Coast Guard Arctic Strategy*.

In addition to these, other official documents or statements released by representatives from the two states will be used to compliment the data and provide for a more comprehensive analysis. In the case of China, these are statements in the form of a speech by the Chinese Special Representative for Arctic Affairs, Gao Feng, during the 2019 Arctic Circle Assembly, a statement by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying as well as articles published by the state-owned newspaper *Global Times*. These have been assessed to be representing the image the Chinese government want to display to the general public, as thus relevant for this study. To keep them apart, they have been numbered 1 to 3.

When it comes to the United States, there will be an addition in the shape of a speech given by the Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, at the Arctic Council Ministerial in May of 2019. The smaller scope of sources is due to the difference in material, where there is a higher number of policy documents instead of state-run media. All in all, the material has been selected to give an accurate image of what each state wants to achieve in the Arctic by their own words, published for the world to see, hear, and interpret.

3.3 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is concerned with power and the creation of narratives and identities; how language is used in a specific context in order to influence opinions and perceptions of something, to make it an accepted “truth” (Halperin

& Heath, 2020: 368-373). For this paper, the framing of each state's claim to the Arctic, what identity in regard to the Arctic they project and what words they use to justify these are the main focus. Therefore, the specific method of discourse analysis used will be inspired by the Structured Discourse Analysis (SDA) presented and used by Sjöstedt & Noreen (2021). SDA, while having the same core assumptions as specified above, analyses the statements themselves, the manner and context in which they were issued, and their relation to other statements (Sjöstedt & Noreen, 2021: 7, see also: Themnér & Sjöstedt, 2019). By identifying the narratives to be analysed, guided by the purpose and the research question, the policies and statements from the Chinese and American states can be operationalised through this method of analysis. Additionally, the concept of articulation in the sense of creating and establishing connection between elements (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 372), will be used to further connect the usage of specific language in order to justify claims. In the end, the discourse analysis method used in this paper will look at the statements issued by the states of interest, their context and underlying meanings with special attention to the articulation of claims and identities.

3.4 Operationalisation

In order to operationalise this, identification of which narratives to analyse is needed. In order to efficiently answer the research questions, these need to be in line with the purpose of the paper. As this purpose is to identify the geopolitical interests in the Arctic of China and the United States, the narratives in question will be in regard to their claims on the Arctic, how resources are mentioned, as well as how power and dominance are present. To identify these narratives in the texts, they will be coded.

3.4.1 Claims

For narratives of claim on the Arctic, the coded statements will be those containing “Arctic State”, “Homeland”, “sovereign(ity)”, “Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)”, and variations of these terms. These are all tied to ownership, rights

and freedoms, and access to land and sea. By using these as indicators, the idea is to chart how the states frame their claim to the Arctic, which terms that are used and in which context. Essentially, this will display the respective narratives of claim on the Arctic.

3.4.2 Resources

For narratives of resources, the coding will be of statements regarding “fossil fuels” such as “oil” and “gas”, “mining” and “minerals”, “fishing”, and “trade routes”, or “polar silk road”. These are important due to their importance to economy, both to the functioning of modern states (in terms of transportation, electricity, food security) and as a commodity of the world market. Control and access to resources are central to geopolitical theory, and therefore analysis of this discursive narrative is vital to understanding why and how China and the United States express interests in the region. Trade routes could potentially feel loosely connected to the resource narrative, yet it is included due to its connection to economy and importance in transportation of goods, resources. The Chinese Polar Silk Road is of specific importance in this context, as a Chinese project putting a Chinese infrastructure in the Arctic. How interests in resources are framed in the analysed material will give a good indication of the intention of the states, as the importance of certain resources can be made clear and fit into the geopolitical analysis.

3.4.3 Power and dominance

The coding regarding narratives of power and dominance will be of statements containing “influence”, “control”, “military”, “power”, and “security”. This is based on the central place that power and dominance take in the theory and while some aspect of it is covered in the previous categories, leaving it out would miss some discursive material of weight. Mapping out how these terms are used will aid in understanding the competition over power that is happening in and outside of the Arctic in a hope to be able to find out what the implications the power struggles are on a regional, and possible global scale.

4 Results

The results of the research will be presented in this section. First, the individual countries policies and statements will be examined using the method discussed above and analysed accordingly. Secondly, a comparative analysis will be performed that will highlight differences and similarities in the two cases, relating these to the theory, and analyse possible implications of these.

4.1 China

China's interest in the Arctic is fairly recent, dating back to the 1990's. Since then, it has had a presence in the Arctic and after being admitted into the Arctic council as an observer state in 2013, increasingly frequently involved in Arctic Affairs (Grieger, 2018: 2). It was, however, not until 2018 that a policy regarding the Arctic was released by China, relaying the official intentions and goals China has for the region. There has also been a significant rise in events and forums regarding the Arctic organised by China (Kopra, 2020: 42-43). As of yet, these interests have mainly taken the physical form of investments in scientific research and also notably in economic ventures. There are largely in the shape of investments into extraction of resources and shipping routes (Østhagen, 2019: 13-14). The framing of the Arctic has to a great extent been as an international, global, issue as opposed to a regional one, perhaps to more easily motivate its own position and presence (Leteigne, 2014: 11). It is against this background that the analysis of the policies and statements will be conducted, and important knowledge to have before delving into the material presented below in order to understand the context in which it was created.

4.1.1 Narratives

Claims

For narratives of claims, a notable aspect is the coined term “Near-Arctic State”. It is present in the Arctic Policy, and continuously defended and perpetuated throughout all of the articles and by Spokesperson Hua. It is absent from the Special Representative Gao’s speech and the Five-Year Plan however, but the Special Representative was still sure to emphasise the proximity between Asia and the Arctic:

“The Asian continent, the Eurasian continent and the Arctic Ocean are bound by each other [...] In each winter, the freezing cold from the Arctic flows all the way down to my hometown, Beijing. So, it is fair to say that that Asia and the Arctic are never far away from each other. Under the amazing power of nature, they have frequent interaction and are deeply influenced by each other”. (Gao, 2019).

There is no mention of “homeland” in any of the documents or the speech, which was to be expected as it is a term more associated with the United States. “Sovereign(ty)” is most frequently mentioned in the Arctic Policy, recognising that the states situated in the Arctic have sovereign rights to be respected, but in the context of describing and emphasising its own rights as a non-Arctic State to “carry out activities”. It is again mentioned in article 2, referring to respecting the sovereignty of others, echoing the Arctic Policy. In the same vein, “Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)” is mentioned recognising that the coastal Arctic States have these, while describing that other parts are outside of a particular state’s jurisdiction. Article 3 also mentions EEZs, referring to the United States having one in the Arctic and that it is of political significance. In conclusion, there is a narrative of claim that in many cases can be followed like a red thread.

Resources

To start with regarding the discursive narratives of resources, “fossil fuel” is never mentioned outside the context of either “non-fossil fuel” or claiming a more environmentally friendly usage of it. In other words, not relevant in this context and only in the speech, Arctic Policy and Five-Year Plan. For the specific resources, “oil” is mentioned many times in the Five-Year Plan in regard to its importance for the energy safety of China and an emphasis on constructing

networks of pipelines across regions. In the Arctic Policy, China expresses an interest in participating in exploitation of Arctic oil. It is once again mentioned in article 3, simply stating an estimated abundance. Not surprisingly, “gas”, “mining” and “minerals” are present in the same documents (apart from article 3 not mentioning “mining”), in the very same context. Quite plainly, they are framed as important resources China is willing to invest in. As for “fishing”, China’s right to fish in the high seas of the Arctic Ocean is strongly states in the Arctic Policy, in addition to plans to explore for future fishing:

“China enjoys the freedom or rights of scientific research, navigation, overflight, fishing, laying of submarine cables and pipelines, and resource exploration and exploitation in the high seas, the Area and other relevant sea areas, and certain special areas in the Arctic Ocean, as stipulated in treaties such as the UNCLOS and the Spitsbergen Treaty, and general international law”. (China’s Arctic Policy, 2018)

This is largely copied in article 3, and the speech by Special Representative Gao states that China has been a part of forming the agreement for fishing in the Arctic high seas. Lastly, “trade routes” or “polar silk road” is mentioned in the Arctic Policy, Five-Year Plan and the speech. It addresses a want to establish a Chinese trade route through the Arctic. To conclude, the narrative of resources express China’s intentions and especially its right to fishing in the Arctic,

Power and dominance

Narratives tied to power and dominance are not as easily discerned. However, there is still some evidence to be found. “Influence” is mentioned in the Five-Year Plan in context of the brand of the Polar Silk Road, and a wish to strengthen this. It can also be found in article 1, where the United States is accused of using the Arctic to further its influence. “Control” is only mentioned once in relation to the Arctic in the Five-Year Plan, and then in a wish to improve the control system of the Polar Silk Road. For “military”, it is made clear in the Five-Year Plan that China intends to modernise its military. In all of the articles, a military is mentioned. Article 1 and 3 narrates a dismissal of speculations of China increasing a military presence in the Arctic, and article 2 quotes Spokesperson Hua’s questioning the United States’ military elsewhere. The Spokesperson states, answering a question:

“Mr. Pompeo is not bad at calculating distance. Since he has figured out that China is 900 miles from the Arctic Circle, has he ever measured the distance between the continental United States and the South China Sea? The South China Sea is more than 8,300 miles away from the continental United States, or 5,800 miles away from Hawaii. [...] What fiction is the U.S. side weaving on the South China Sea issue?” (Hua, 2021)

“Power” in the Five-Year Plan is expressed as a wish to have a greater “soft power”, as well as refers to China as a great power. Other than that, it is only mentioned as something the United States wants in article 3. Lastly, “security” is mentioned several times in the Arctic Policy, but mostly relating to security from the harsh environment. The Five-Year Plan similarly fails to provide security tied to the Arctic. For the other sources, Spokesperson Hua states that the United States are overestimating the security threats in the Arctic, also cited in article 2. Thus, there are very few overt narratives of Chinese power and dominance in the Arctic, but rather a narrative of being wrongfully accused.

4.1.2 Analysis

As seen above, the overarching narrative regarding the Arctic that the Chinese government is putting forward is one of China as a peaceful nation interested in science and investment, while simultaneously justifying its presence through framing itself as a “Near-Arctic State”. This in particular is relevant due to the pattern in which it appears; first in the Arctic Policy and from then on mentioned as an unquestionable fact in the articles and by Spokesperson Hua. This could be argued to be a clear case of articulation, where China is establishing a connection between itself and the Arctic through use of language, where one did not exist before. As it is followed up in the articles, and thus under the guise of being stated facts, the narrative is reinforced. One other thing to take into consideration is that these sources are in English, and thus presumably intended for an international audience. Consequently, it can be interpreted as China using this narrative to justify its claim on, and involvement in, the Arctic and Arctic affairs to the international community.

As for “sovereign(ity)” and “Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)”, the usage of these fit into the overarching narrative of the peaceful China. Again, though, these are often mentioned in relation to China having rights to areas not covered by

these. The resources, “oil”, “gas”, “minerals”, with “mining” grouped into these, figure into the cooperative peaceful image of China willing to invest and exploit these. Interestingly, they are not mentioned as “fossil fuels” and as a consequence seemly missing from the narrative of China as working towards a green, non-fossil fuel future. It appears as if these two messages contradict each other, and that the general, bigger narrative has some inconsistencies. For “fishing”, it is first mentioned in the Arctic Policy, and later revealed through Special Representative Gao that China took an active part in forming the agreement for high seas fishery in the Arctic, continuing the narrative of cooperative China while at the same time furthering its narrative of China being a natural actor in Arctic affairs, a Near-Arctic State. Moving on to “trade routes” and the “Polar Silk Road”, it implies a permanent Chinese presence, fitting into the narrative of the Chinese claim on the Arctic.

Continuing on that vein, the Polar Silk Road fits into the soft “power” that is expressed in the Five-Year Plan as desirable. By establishing itself in the Arctic and creating an “influential” brand, tied into the narrative of the very same peacefulness and cooperativeness. Another crucial part of this narrative is found in the vehement denial of Chinese military ambitions in the Arctic, something that is direct opposition to the narrative that is pushed. The United States is used as a contrast to China, emphasising its militarism to amplify the Chinese peacefulness. In the end, what is created is a counter-narrative, under the overarching narrative, where the United States is portrayed as aggressively using the Arctic as a way to further the American agenda and increase the scope of its influence.

The bigger, general, overarching narrative mentioned throughout this analysis is formed using all of these components, from the respectfulness, the scientific, the green-energy focused, the cooperativeness, and the being unaggressive, pacifistic, gentle. It is formed by spinning the United States as the antithesis of China, criticising it and putting China on the Global Force of Peace-pedestal. Yet, there is also the companion narrative of the Near-Arctic State, creating a new identity to gain access to Arctic affairs and take part in the shaping of the future of the Arctic. The friction between these two narratives is smoothed over by the peacefulness and non-aggression in the first one, leaving the carefully crafted image of China as a rightfully present, natural and peaceful partner in all Arctic ventures.

4.2 United States of America

The United States has been an Arctic state since its acquisition of Alaska from Russia in the year of 1867 (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia). It is also one of the coastal Arctic states, meaning that it has sovereignty over a portion of the Arctic Ocean and hence an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) under its jurisdiction (Government Offices of Sweden, 2011: 22; Rothwell, 2014: 22-23). As such, it is a member of the Arctic Council (Ottawa Agreement, 1996), and actively participates in scientific and environmental concerns in the region (Arctic Circle).

The American interest in the Arctic was lukewarm until the 1990s, when the first national Arctic strategy was issued and then rose to greater importance in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. However, the attention to the Arctic remained on the backburner during most of the time (Corgan, 2014: 65-76). Lately, as a response to China and Russia expressing more interest in the region, there has been an upsurge in American attention to the Arctic with reference to greater instability and security risk (Wegge, 2020: 367-368). In conclusion, the framing of the Arctic has largely been that of a region of less concern until recently, when it gained traction as a response to other states' engagement in the area.

4.2.1 Narratives

Claims

Narratives of claim are certainly present in the documents and the speech. Firstly, "Arctic State" is present in all sources. In the National Strategy and the Coast Guard Strategy, it is mentioned as a category of states, and in the former that the United States wishes to collaborate with the other ones. In the Report to Congress and the speech, however, it is mentioned in the context of China defining itself as a "Near-Arctic State":

"China does not currently have a permanent Arctic military presence, but is increasing its presence through economic outreach, investments in Arctic states' strategic sectors, and scientific activities. China maintains research stations in Iceland and Norway and has pursued energy development and infrastructure projects in Russia, such as the Yamal liquefied natural gas project. China also continues to seek opportunities to invest in dual-use infrastructure in the Arctic. Despite China's claim of being a "Near Arctic State," the United States does not recognize any such status". (Department of Defense, 2019).

“Homeland” is extensively mentioned in the Report to Congress, as a term relating to the United States’ domestic territory of which a part is located in the Arctic. It is mentioned as something that needs to be secured from outside threats that might come from the Arctic. Only once it is mentioned in the National Strategy and a few times in the Coast Guard Strategy, but with the same implication. “Sovereign(ity)” is mentioned in the context of the United States having sovereignty in the Arctic, something that needs to be secured, as well as recognising that the other Arctic States have sovereignty and that non-Arctic states do not have sovereignty in the Arctic. “Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)” is only mentioned in the Coast Guard Strategy, stating its size and importance in terms of the resources found there. It seems that the focus is on emphasising the United States’ geographical location and territory.

Resources

In terms of resources, “fossil fuel” is only mentioned once, in the National Strategy, as a threat to the Arctic environment through its emission. “Oil” is mentioned in all of the sources, both as an important resource (*Thirteen percent of the World’s undiscovered source*) in all but the Report to Congress and as a potential risk factor if spilled in all. “Gas” is mentioned exclusively as an important resource (*Thirty percent of the World’s undiscovered source*) in all of the sources, the only case sticking out being the Report to Congress with the context being China’s investment in Russian gas. “Mining” is mentioned only in the Coast Guard Strategy, as an important economic venture in the area. “Minerals” is also strictly mentioned, often together with “oil” and “gas”, as a valuable resource that can be found in the region of the Arctic. All but the Report to Congress mentions this. “Fishing” is also mentioned in all but the Report to Congress, and as a vulnerable resource in danger to illegal activity as well as an Arctic resource in general. Former Secretary of State Pompeo especially mentions China as a risk factor to the supply:

“Do we want the fragile Arctic environment exposed to the same ecological devastation caused by China’s fishing fleet in the seas off its coasts, or unregulated industrial activity in its own country? I think the answer is pretty clear.” (Pompeo, 2019).

Finally, “trade routes” is sparsely mentioned in the Coast Guard Strategy but is of more significance in the speech. There, the Polar Silk Road project is emphasised as a potential threat, together with Chinese fishing stated as a part of a pattern of the consequences of Chinese presence and investment.

Power and Dominance

To start with, “influence” is only mentioned once where it is of relevance; in the Report to Congress, part of American interest is explicitly defined as “advancing American influence”. “Control” is mentioned in the Report to Congress and the Coast Guard Strategy, where it is mostly mentioned as needed to exercise their duties of protection but also that there is a need to control borders in the sea and that Russia is exercising more control in the Arctic. “Military” is present in all of the sources. In the Coast Guard Strategy, the Arctic is mentioned as an important strategic place for military activity, and in the National Strategy there is a recognition of military presence being allowed in international law:

“Existing international law provides a comprehensive set of rules governing the rights, freedoms, and uses of the world’s oceans and airspace, including the Arctic. The law recognizes these rights, freedoms, and uses for commercial and military vessels and aircraft”. (National Strategy for the Arctic Region, 2013: 8-7)

The speech and the Report to Congress stick out by mentioning a notably increased Russian military presence in the Arctic and that this has a risk of resulting in Russia illegitimately staking claims, as well as elaborating on the expansion of its own American Arctic military. “Power” is mentioned in the speech as the Arctic being a place for power and competition, something that is echoed in the Report to Congress where projecting power in the Arctic is continuously mentioned throughout in addition to stating that Russia considers itself a great power in the Arctic in the context of its strengthening military presence. “Security” is mentioned extensively in all of the sources. The one distinguishing itself from the others is the speech, where the context is Chinese security ambitions in the Arctic, while the others are mainly concerned with national security interests and potential threats coming from the Arctic, defined once vaguely as competition from China and Russia in the Report to Congress. It

is also notable that the Arctic is mentioned in this context as important in the greater global balance of power, in the same document.

4.2.2 Analysis

Overall, there seems to be a discursive narrative where the Arctic is portrayed as a natural part of the American mainland, putting emphasis on the fact that the United States is an “Arctic State” and has a significant domestic outpost in the region and all the right that follows. However, the main narrative that is being pushed is one of mostly Chinese and to a lesser degree Russian aggression, carefully pointing out that China is not entitled to any special access or rights in the region. Consequently, the Arctic is narrated as being an area of American influence that needs to be protected from Chinese interests. The “Near-Arctic State” definition is refuted and cast aside as pure fiction, and the non-existence of Near-Arctic State is given more importance than the Arctic-ness of the state of the United States. The most important factor of the narrative is nonetheless the United States lawfully existing as in the Arctic in the community of other Arctic States, while China is attempting to infringe on that exclusive identity by making up terms.

The resources and the emphasis on thirteen percent of the World’s undiscovered oil and thirty percent of the World’s undiscovered gas supply fit into the narrative of the Arctic part of the United States being a significant and inseparable part of the state, motivating the importance put on it. Chinese presence is portrayed as a threat to resources, especially to the fish supply and by establishing itself as a permanent presence in the Arctic through the Polar branch of its Silk Road project, something that in the American narrative is a danger to the region with potential disastrous consequences. The overarching narrative is hence that the United States is a true Arctic State acting within the bounds of its sovereignty and willing to collaborate with its fellow other Arctic states, while China on the other hand is appropriating the Arctic identity through creating and adopting a non-existing identity on top of establishing itself in places where it does not belong and could cause great harm to important resources. Directly,

Chinese influence is connected to danger and given malicious characteristics, linking their activity to a pattern of ill behaviour. China thus works as a contrast to the legitimacy of the United States, and together with Russia motivates the need for expansion of the American military capacity in the Arctic region.

Perhaps the most prominent part of the overarching narrative is the framing of the Arctic as a part of the global balance of power, making it a place where American military force is needed and justified. The Arctic is given a role in a bigger and global context; another place where American interests and security can be threatened and need to be defended if necessary. Intersecting with the Arctic being within American sovereignty, the need for defensive capabilities is heightened and all other military presences potential threats to the homeland. Other states, Russia and China, are competition to potentially be dealt with and security threats to the whole region through illegitimate claims and increased influence. In the end, the general discourse perpetuated throughout the sources reviewed in this paper is of America needing to defend its territory against aggressors in the shape of China and Russia and counter their advances through increasing their own influence as a collaborative and respectful state only responding to other's ill intent.

4.3 Comparative geopolitical analysis

Starting with the reason as to why a power struggle is taking place in the Arctic, specifically, and why it has become such a significant area for both of these states can be sourced back to power and how power can be measured in assets: resources and land. Never before available land and resources does in turn provide an opportunity for a rising power, in this case China, to even out the playing field, given that they are able to get a hold of this new source. This creates a problem for the dominant power, here the United States, as it would make its own amount of resources comparatively a smaller share of the total and as a consequence, their power. In other words, China would need to make sure to secure its grip on Arctic resources both to increase its own power and hinder the United States from comparatively increasing its dominating power, and the United

States needs to hinder China from accessing too large a number of resources to protect its dominance.

Comparing these two cases, it is clear that both of their interests lie in securing access to the Arctic and that they wish to exclude the other as much as possible. In the case of China, this is done by articulating a new identity to more closely associate themselves with the Arctic while simultaneously painting the United States as militaristic and aggressive, resulting in China from this viewpoint looking like the more trustworthy and dependable part to cooperate with. As they are not an Arctic state by location or law, they need to gain access through actual Arctic states in order to take advantage of most resources and secure their place in the region. In the case of the United States, it, as an Arctic state with access to its own EEZ within the Arctic Ocean and resources, has less of a need to cooperate with the other Arctic states. On the other hand, keeping China out of the region is indeed still within their interests due to the power tied to resource access, leading it to use a similar tactic of framing China as a direct threat to the region. Both of them use their respective narratives to contrast the other's aggressiveness to their own benign presence, but there is a difference in how they portray themselves.

Starting with China, the Chinese interests are self-portrayed as scientific and cooperative, wanting what is best for the region and to work towards a peaceful and developed Arctic. The United States, however, chooses to portray itself as a dependable ally in face of an emerging threat; as a stable and dependable force standing up to the intruders and ensuring a better future for the Arctic. There are still similarities in what the "end goal" is, a good future for the region, but the methods are vastly different. In the end, the framing of the other as dangerous and untrustworthy is consistent and in line with both of their interests.

An important factor to add is the overtness and covertness of the United States and China, respectively. The United States is openly addressing the situation as the Arctic as competitive and a part of the global balance of power, while China resolutely is sticking to its narrative of pacifism and accusing others of falsely accusing China of having military ambitions. Essentially, having different starting positions leads to them taking different routes in order to achieve their respective goals. China is making a move in a region where the United States already has an established presence and where they would not be able to challenge it militarily even if it would have wanted to. It is more effective for China to establish itself

through cooperation and deals with other Arctic states than to risk not getting access to as much resources as a result of open conflict with the biggest power in the region. Investments and control over trade routes, through the Polar Silk Road project, secures and anchors China in place and effectively hinders the United States from potentially seizing that opportunity.

Looking at the relationship between the two states in this analysis, it circles back to the United States being the dominant power in the world with the largest economy and largest army, and China the second largest and quickly growing economy making moves to increase the scope of its influence across the world, including in the region of the Arctic. Managing the emerging and possible competitor for power is essential for the United States if they want to remain the dominant global power and this explains the reaction from the United States; the increased military presence, the harder rhetoric, and the increased emphasis on the Arcticness of its own state.

While there is no denying that both China and the United States have rights to be in the Arctic, and that they are clear when recognising that, those are based on different legal grounds. Sovereignty and an EEZ do without a doubt give the United States an unmovable and permanent base, but they cannot deny China the right to movement in the high seas and cooperation with other states. Therefore, raising concerns, quite like former Secretary of State Pompeo did, and using discourse and narratives to sway other states view on China while also strengthening its military in the Arctic sends out signals to the rest of the world what their stance is and to China that they are prepared to act if necessary. China then would have to counter that narrative with its own (as described above) and, again, gain power through influence and investments like the Polar Silk Road that gives it power over the movement of resources rather than directly over the resources themselves.

To conclude the analysis, the most important part from a geopolitical perspective is the power relationship between the United States and China and how the melting Arctic with its undiscovered resources affects this. The situation where the two biggest economies are in competition over control over new sources of power, and over the narrative. China needs the Arctic in order to be able to compete with the United States, in order to have more leverage and comparatively increase its power. The United States needs the Arctic to not be in

the hands of China due to not wanting China to increase its power comparatively. Keeping the other from the resources is within both of these states' interests, and they do so by using narratives to frame the situation to their own benefits.

5 Discussion

Based on the findings in this paper, there are two distinct narratives pushed by the two largest economies. The pattern here is the way in which they demonise the other by giving them these aggressive characteristics; to make them seem unreasonable, untrustworthy, and undependable. One interesting aspect of this is in which channels they choose to portray this narrative, and what that implies. As can be seen through the presentation of the narratives under the results, China does not mention the United States in its official Arctic Policy or in its Five-Year Plan, while the United States official document frequently features China and Chinese presence as important factors. Instead, the Chinese framing of the United State is done through their propaganda machine, by releasing articles that give of the appearance of being fact while extremely skewed. The Foreign Ministry Spokesperson also strikes a harder tone in her statements, but she is also defending what the Arctic Policy says and others questioning that narrative. One other difference is the tone of the speeches at the Arctic Council, that both perpetuated their respective state's narrative, but in different ways and in line with the image of themselves they portray. The American Secretary of State was not afraid to point out China as a threat and danger (and consequently itself as a more trustworthy partner), while the Chinese Special Representative speaks only of its own connection with the Arctic and its own achievements. In the end, this allows China to stay civil and non-confrontational in official settings, while the United States communicated its narrative directly.

One aspect that is not mentioned or taken into consideration in the analysis is Russia. The reason for this is not being one of the cases and the lack of mentioning from other sources than the American documents. However, circling back to the theory and the sea, land and rimland powers, there is a clear case to be made regarding the relationship between China and Russia on the other hand, and the United States. It could be argued that having these two powers collaborate is a direct threat to the dominant power and that the United States would have to act to minimise this threat, with the possible outcome being open conflict. This is of

course speaking in hypotheticals but adding that factor could give a depth to the Arctic conflicts of interest not achieved in this paper. That is not to say that there is no value in this analysis, simply that adding another variable would measure something different that could add to the understanding of the Arctic geopolitics. The fact that China and the United States are the rising and dominant powers remain, and that make them theoretically relevant, with or without Russia.

Moving on to other matters, a question to be asked is if there is a possibility for conflicts to break out in the Arctic. Theoretically, there is always a risk for conflict in the realist perspective given that states are in a state of anarchy and struggle for power. In the scene of the Arctic, however, it is unlikely that a conflict will break out unless China makes a provocation against the United States' territory, which in turn is highly unlikely as there would not be anything to gain from attacking a bigger military power far away from one's own base. The United States might need to manage China and keep them from gaining too much power but taking military action unless actually provoked would certainly not be the American interest either. There is a higher chance of any conflict to be of the cold variety, with a looming threat of the possibility for conflict. As can be seen in this paper, there is a rhetoric in use that suggests that both of these states see the other as a potential threat, combined with China developing its army. However, this does not seem likely in the current times.

To summarise this discussion, the main points to take away is that the Arctic as a region is victim to a verbal discursive battle, but that this conflict is not likely to take physical form in the current state of the world. Adding Russia into the analysis would be useful to understand the full picture of the Arctic political climate and could be a valuable variable to take into consideration when discussing the Sino-American relationship in the future. However, for this paper the purpose was to analyse the discourses and what they say about Chinese and American interests in the Arctic and that discussion is left for another researcher.

6 Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has analysed the China and the American geopolitical discourses, how they motivate their claims on land and resources, how they speak about resources and how narratives of power and dominance are present in their official communication with the world. Looking at the propositions made in the theory section, one can see that China and the United States indeed are looking to secure their places in the Arctic and use the Arctic as a place to wield and access power. Given the United States' strong reaction against China and Chinese presence, it would also be plausible to assume that the United States are unwilling to have a competitor increasing its influence in the Arctic. China's own narrative would also suggest that there is some truth in the proposition that it wants to move towards reaching the United States' level of power. While it has been deemed unlikely that a conflict would break out in the Arctic between the two states, there is still a theoretical possibility for this to happen. However, it is still highly unlikely.

Finally, to answer the research question, what interests do China and the United States have in the Arctic region and what are the implications of these? After having gone through the material and analysed it, the conclusion must be that it seems like both China and the United States are interested in being able to have access to the Arctic in order to take part of the resources there as the ice melt away and opens for new opportunities in the shape of exploitation and shipping routes. As they are so preoccupied with also accusing each other of being aggressors, it would appear that their interests also stretch out to keeping each other from being seen as trustworthy cooperation partners while painting themselves as forces for good in the region. This implies that while, as previously stated, it is not necessarily likely that a conflict will break out, the situation in the Arctic will remain somewhat hostile as their interests are in direct opposition to each other. This also implies that the Arctic will remain a part of the global balance of power, a part in shaping the future for the rest of the World as well. What this future will look like, however, remains to be seen.

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