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ZOIS REPORT

NEW ARCTIC REALITIES BETWEEN CONFLICTING INTERESTS AND AVENUES FOR COOPERATION

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Summary

Russia’s war against Ukraine has significantly impacted governance and international cooperation in the Arctic. Since February 2022 Western Arctic states have suspended most multilateral economic and scientific cooperation with Russia, and the Arctic Council, the region’s key intergovernmental forum, is currently unable to fulfil its role as an interface between science and politics. The resulting collapse of pan-Arctic climate research and environmental protection could have drastic consequences in the long term. Increased militarisation and resource extraction also have implications for security and stability in the region. Geopolitical tensions and a narrow focus on strategic interests may result in spillover effects on the Arctic region and further disregard for the concerns of indigenous populations. While the Arctic Council grapples with its current restraints, other cooperative frameworks, especially legally binding agreements, remain relevant. As well as looking at the practical consequences of the war for cooperation within the Arctic Council and beyond, this report analyses its effects on long-term Arctic dynamics and discusses possible ways of dealing with current challenges multilaterally without legitimising Russian aggression.

These are our main findings and recommendations:

- Rising political and military tensions in the Arctic predate the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and stem from Russia’s assertion of its perceived security needs in the region.
- While previously not a major concern, the security dilemma in the region has become more salient since February 2022. The war in Ukraine has exposed

the limits of Russia's conventional military capabilities. It is now hard pressed to realise its great power ambitions in the Arctic, but the potential for military escalation in the region is likely to remain low.

- To manage nuclear deterrence and reduce the risk of an unintended escalation, an Arctic Military Code of Conduct should be drawn up. In the meantime, existing bilateral treaties from the Cold War era on crisis communication and the prevention of military escalation should be reactivated.
- In the field of energy politics, the bifurcation of the Arctic into a Russian-Asian Arctic and a European and North American Arctic is becoming apparent. When Western sanctions led some Western firms to disengage from the Russian energy market, Russia looked to non-Western countries like India and China for the investment, skilled labour and technology it requires to realise important energy projects in the Arctic. For Western Arctic states, energy independence from Russia was a priority, and Norway has become the EU's main gas supplier. In a two-pronged strategy necessitated by the war, these states are continuing to develop fossil fuels while also supporting renewable energy projects.
- Science cooperation in the Arctic has fallen victim to the war in Ukraine. Data exchange between Russian and Western climate researchers is severely curtailed. The consequences of this could be devastating: Arctic warming is an important indicator for global climate developments, and without data exchange it will be impossible to model the broader impacts of climate change. Given the urgency of the climate crisis, every effort should be made to facilitate data exchange beyond official state channels, for example by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) or the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).
- Even before February 2022, Arctic indigenous populations were a particularly vulnerable segment of the Arctic population. Their problems have now been compounded by the war in Ukraine. With the paralysis of the Arctic Council, they have lost their main platform for multilateral engagement in the region. They are also feeling the effects of war-related inflation, energy supply issues and interrupted supply chains. Indigenous communities in the Russian Arctic have been a particular focus of Russia's recruitment policy, with the result that a disproportionately high number of men from these communities have died in Ukraine.
- The breakdown in relations between Russia and Western Arctic states has left the Arctic Council unable to fulfil its research mandate and act as an interface between science and politics. There is a consensus among the seven Western Arctic states that some level of collaboration with Russia is still necessary. Under Norway's chairship, technical and scientific cooperation at working-group level cooperation has been resumed with Russian scientists.

Introduction

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 sent shockwaves around the globe, and has also had fundamental consequences for the Arctic region. The Arctic region consists of the eight Arctic states (the United States, Canada, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, and Denmark with Greenland and the Faroe Islands) and a number of indigenous peoples, some of which transcend national borders. Russia is one of the most important Arctic states, with the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF) accounting for over 50% of the Arctic coastline as well as half of the overall population of the Arctic.¹ ► FIGURE 1

The economic interests in the Arctic are immense—and could prevail over climate protection concerns.

The Arctic is warming at an alarming speed² and 75 per cent of its former sea ice volume is already lost. The negative effects of this are currently being felt by the inhabitants of the Arctic, and a possible failure to limit global warming to 2°C in the Arctic would also have drastic consequences for global populations. At the same time, the melting of sea ice is opening up new transoceanic seaways and increasing access to the region's wealth of resources, including critical minerals, precious metals and rare earths needed for modern technologies. Regional economic development and resource extraction have gathered pace and military activity is also increasing³. The economic interests in the Arctic are immense—and could prevail over climate protection concerns.

Since its inception in 1996, the Arctic Council has been an arena for multilateral cooperation among the eight Arctic states, six organisations representing Arctic indigenous peoples (also known as 'permanent participants'), six working groups and around 40 non-Arctic states and international organisations with observer status. The work of the Arctic Council can be described as policy-shaping rather than policy-making. It has a strong scientific function: the working groups conduct research and have played a crucial role in generating knowledge and global awareness about Arctic climate and environmental issues. Their findings feed into political processes in the Council and guide the search for solutions to real and potential regional problems.

The Arctic Council has a remarkably good track record for cooperation on issues ranging from environmental protection and sustainable development to maritime navigation and biodiversity. For a long time, it appeared to exemplify 'Arctic exceptionalism',⁴ the notion that the Arctic is a place apart where peaceful coexistence is possible despite geopolitical tensions elsewhere. This Arctic exceptionalism and any kind of circumpolar vision has been upended by Russia's aggression. As a direct reaction to the invasion in February 2022, the West ended most multilateral economic and scientific

1 Arctic Council, *The Russian Federation*, <https://arctic-council.org/about/states/russian-federation/>.

2 IPCC, *IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate*, edited by H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts et al. (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157964>. See also Mika Rantanen et al., 'The Arctic Has Warmed Nearly Four Times Faster than the Globe since 1979', *Communications Earth & Environment* 3, no. 1 (2022): 1.

3 CSIS, *Arctic Military Activity Tracker*, <https://arcticmilitarytracker.csis.org/>.

4 Juha Käpylä and Harri Mikkola, *On Arctic Exceptionalism: Critical Reflections in the Light of the Arctic Sunrise Case and the Crisis in Ukraine*. FIIA working paper, vol 85. (Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2015).

FIGURE 1
The Arctic region



Map based on: <https://www.marefa.org/w/images/9/9e/Arctic.svg>

cooperation with Russia in the Arctic.⁵ This left the Arctic Council and a number of joint climate research projects paralysed. While the seven Western Arctic states put their work for the Council on hold, Russia, as Council chair from 2021 to 2023, increasingly sought to cooperate with ‘friendly’ countries like India and China in the region. In the intervening period, Finland and Sweden opted to join NATO.

Arctic populations—especially indigenous ones—are strongly affected by the changing climate and geopolitical landscape in their region. Some indigenous Arctic actors have chosen to articulate their most pressing concerns as security issues, often framed as ‘human security’, in an attempt to mobilise greater attention and state response.⁶ Indigenous populations depend on healthy ecosystems, freedom of movement and cooperation between the Arctic states, yet the paralysis of the Arctic Council has taken away their main platform for multilateral engagement in the region.

The initial termination of all cooperation with Russia in the Arctic Council following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine was a political imperative. Nevertheless, cooperation or at least conversations on important scientific and technical issues will have to be resumed at some point. Addressing the problem of climate change in the Arctic is not something that can be postponed until after the war. In May 2023, Norway succeeded Russia as chair of the Council and there are hopes that some steps to restore relations with Russia in Arctic affairs might be possible in the next two years. In a first step, Norway brokered an agreement among all Arctic states in September 2023 to continue informal collaboration within the working groups.⁷ However, beyond environmental protection and sustainable development, the complex combination of traditional and non-traditional security challenges in the Arctic will also require multilateral cooperation and the participation of non-state actors like indigenous peoples.

This report assembles the results of the Workshop ‘Interdisciplinary Approaches to Changing Arctic Realities—between Cooperation and Conflicting Interests’ organised online on 24 May 2023 by the KonKoop Network at the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS). It addresses developments in the Arctic region since February 2022 and the resulting insecurities from a strategic, geo-economic, social and climate research perspective. We ask what kind of cooperation remains indispensable to address these insecurities and through which multi- or bilateral channels can the necessary interaction now be organised.

The complex combination of traditional and non-traditional security challenges in the Arctic requires multilateral cooperation and the participation of non-state actors.

5 Russia also withdrew from some forums for multilateral cooperation. See: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, ‘Foreign Ministry statement on Russia’s withdrawal from the Barents Euro-Arctic Council’, 18 September 2023, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/rso/1904899/.

6 Wilfrid Greaves, ‘Indigenous peoples’, in: *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security*, edited by Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv, Marc Lanteigne, Horatio Sam-Aggrey, 313–326 (London: Routledge, 2020).

7 Astri Edvardsen, ‘Light at the End of the Tunnel for the Arctic Council’, *High North News*, 12 September 2023, <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/light-end-tunnel-arctic-council>.

Arctic Security: Tales of regional disputes and great power competition

The evidence of heightened political and military tensions in the Arctic seems overwhelming. Political cooperation between Russia and Western Arctic states has been terminated, paused, or reduced. The previous emphasis on good collaboration and neighbourly relations has all but vanished from political rhetoric. While NATO's new strategic concept does not explicitly mention the Arctic, the alliance has turned its attention to the region and holds military exercises there.⁸ Russia's military presence and activities have also increased, as have activities usually described as hybrid threats.⁹

The two most common explanations given for these rising tensions in the Arctic are both flawed. The first centres on regional causes and suggests that global warming has led to a scramble for resources and shipping lanes as well as aggravating unresolved disputes over maritime zones or borders.¹⁰ However, as the Norwegian Arctic expert Andreas Østhagen has pointed out, this is a misconception.¹¹ Neither competition over resources nor disputes about maritime borders can convincingly be linked to the rise of military tensions in the region. On the contrary: in the Barents Sea, for example, the prospect of resource extraction actually furthered agreement between Norway and Russia on a long-disputed maritime border in 2010.

The second explanation posits that the Arctic has become an arena for great power competition, with global tensions spilling over into the region. Yet, it is very difficult to identify patterns consistent with great power competition in the Arctic. There is not much to compete over: the spheres of control, access, and influence are largely settled, and Russia's supremacy there is an undeniable fact. Even if the activities of China and India and their recent strategic partnerships with Russia have raised eyebrows in the Western Arctic states, they have not yet fuelled political tensions.

If these explanations do not capture the reasons for rising tensions in the Arctic, then what does? At the heart of the problem are Russia's perceived power, resource and security needs, which predate the invasion of February 2022. Grounded in the Putin regime's great power aspirations and opposition to the West, these needs centre, firstly, on access to and power projection into the North Atlantic. Secondly, on strategic nuclear deterrence through second-strike capabilities delivered by submarines under the central Arctic Ocean sea ice, bombers, or intercontinental missiles shot over the pole as the

8 See NATO, *Strategic Concept* (Brussels: NATO, 2022), <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>.

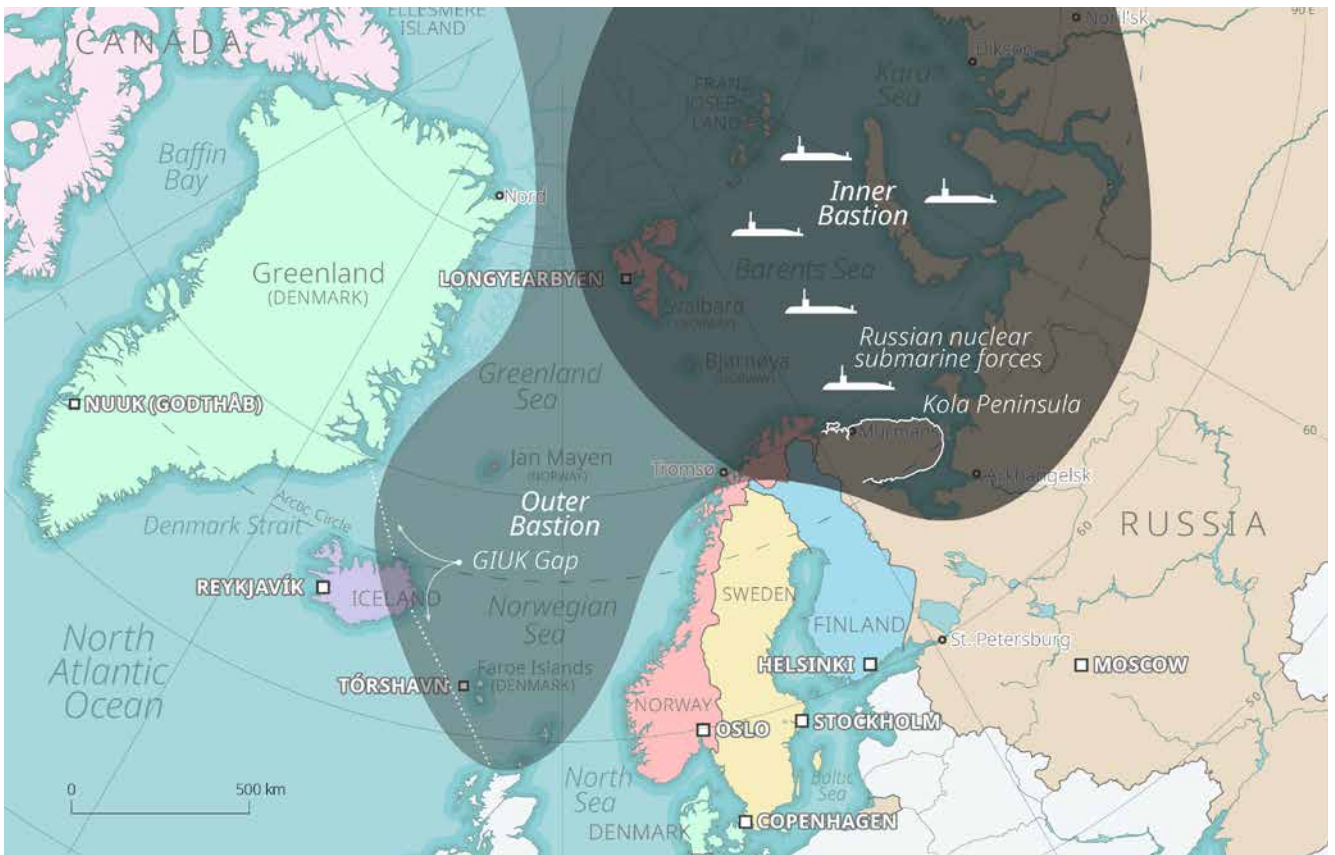
For the most recent statement on NATO in the Arctic, see Rob Bauer, 'The NATO Perspective on the Arctic', Arctic Circle Assembly, 21 October 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5KmhAbOXic>.

9 Katarina Kertysova and Gabriella Gricius, *Countering Russia's Hybrid Threats in the Arctic* (London: European Leadership Network, 2023), https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/23_11_22_Countering-Russias-Hybrid-Threats-in-the-Arctic15_ES_EK40.pdf; Mathieu Boulègue, *Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic. Managing Hard Power in a 'Low Tension' Environment* (London: Chatham House, Russia and Eurasia Programme Research Paper, 2019), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-06-28-Russia-Military-Arctic.pdf>.

10 Scott G. Borgerson, 'Arctic Meltdown. The Economic and Security Implications of Global Warming', *Foreign Affairs*, 87 (2008): 63.

11 Andreas Østhagen, 'Five Misconceptions in Arctic Security and Geopolitics', The Arctic Institute, 1 June 2023, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/five-misconceptions-arctic-security-geopolitics/>.

FIGURE 2
Bastion Defence and the GIUK Gap



Map based on: <https://www.fjia.fi/sv/publikation/the-geostrategic-arctic?read>

shortest distance between Russia and the American continent. And finally, on the conventional object defence of the resource-rich Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF) and its economically vital resource-extraction infrastructures, which now no longer have access to Western expertise and technology.

For the West, the first two are a major security concern. Access to the North Atlantic from the Arctic Ocean is through the so-called Svalbard Channel and the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) Gap. The naval harbours of the Kola Peninsula, which also host the Russian nuclear submarine force, are located in the same general neighbourhood. These harbours and access to the North Atlantic are protected by the Russian concept of Bastion Defence, which has both a defensive and an offensive dimension. Bastion Defence already includes strategies aimed at area denial for NATO forces, and might in future entail military operations to prevent Svalbard and Northern Norway from becoming bases for NATO surveillance of Russian military

activities in the Svalbard Channel and Barents Sea.¹² The resulting militarisation is, however, not an indicator of great power competition. It is symptomatic rather of an old-fashioned security dilemma in which an increase in one party's security diminishes the other party's perceived security and thus provokes countermeasures, which in turn set off further reactions to increase each side's military presence and capabilities. ► FIGURE 2

This security dilemma has not come about as a result of Russian aggression in Ukraine, but its salience has increased. Russia's decision to re-militarise and re-secure the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation over the last two decades is consistent with the dominant geopolitical narrative under President Putin that Russia's 'ontological security' has been jeopardised by NATO expansionism. In Ukraine, it has become clear that the Russian armed forces are not capable of realising their military objectives by conventional means. Yet it is able and—with blatant disregard for international humanitarian law or civilian casualties and costs—willing to inflict serious damage and harm. At the same time, Russia is in no position to keep up an arms race with NATO states. The apparent limits and overstretching of Russia's conventional military capabilities in Ukraine have led to an increased use of nuclear rhetoric and hybrid activities. For the Arctic, the consequences of this might be paradoxical: while tensions will remain high, the escalation potential will probably be low and thus, in terms of international conflict, the Arctic might remain stable.

The security dilemma has not come about as a result of Russian aggression in Ukraine, but its salience has increased.

In this constellation, the prospect for security-related cooperation seems bleak. The faltering of nuclear arms control between Russia and the USA as well as the paralysis of the Organization and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) merely reflect the state of tensions. Any attempt to resolve the Arctic security dilemma through disarmament or even just confidence-building measures seems utopian now. However, managing nuclear deterrence and reducing the risk of unwanted or accidental escalation should be in both sides' interests. Building on such interests, scholars put forward proposals for an Arctic Military Code of Conduct even before the full-scale war in Ukraine.¹³ In the meantime, bilateral treaties from the Cold War era on crisis communication and the prevention of escalating military incidents should be reactivated.¹⁴

Arctic 'swing geopolitics'

Russia's energy sector depends on foreign investment and technology transfer, but in the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine it has been bedevilled by a lack of skilled labour and infrastructure. Between 2014 and 2022, due to the sanctions imposed on Russia by the EU, the US and others, including Japan and South Korea, Western firms heavily involved in Russian energy infrastructure were under pressure to depart from Russia. One primary aim of

12 James K. Wither, 'Svalbard: NATO's Arctic "Achilles' Heel"', *The RUSI Journal*, 163 (2018), 28.

13 Duncan Depledge et al., 'Why we need to talk about military activity in the Arctic: Towards an Arctic Military Code of Conduct', in *Redefining Arctic Security: Arctic Yearbook 2019*, edited by Lassi Heininen et al. (2019), <https://arcticyearbook.com/arctic-yearbook/2019>.

14 For a compilation of such agreements, see: <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/bilateral-military-agreements-between-nato-member-states-and-the-soviet-union-on-the-prevention-of-incidents/>.

the sanctions was to frustrate Russia's abilities to exploit so-called 'frontier or unconventional oil resources'. Large energy companies like BP, Statoil/Equinor and Shell continued to be involved in the Russian energy sector (via joint ventures and investments), thus contributing to the Russian government's revenue streams. However, there was a noticeable spike in non-Western engagement with the Russian energy sector. In the last decade, Russia has pivoted south and east and worked with partners like China, India, Vietnam, and others, such as the Saudi oil company Aramco.¹⁵ In June 2022, it was announced that Aramco would replace the French company Total as a substantial overseas investor in Russia's LNG 2 project in the northern region of Siberia. Importantly, however, Russian-Saudi collaboration in the energy sector predated the 2022 invasion.¹⁶

What we are witnessing could be described as a form of 'swing geopolitics' — a short-hand term for explaining how the short- and longer-term strategic decisions of non-Arctic third parties reveal this region to be in the crosshairs of national, circumpolar, and global interests. China and India have their own distinct interests, but alongside Russia they all share one common interest and that is to ensure that the United States and its allies are not going to overdetermine the current and future international system.

What has been so noticeable in and around 2022-2023 is how many countries outside Europe, North America and East Asia have been neutral about the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and many of those are becoming ever more invested in the Arctic, recognising opportunities to leverage relationships with Russia and others who work closely with Moscow. Countries like Brazil, China, South Africa and Saudi Arabia have formed the view that Russia is an important strategic and trading partner. Imports of Russian natural gas continued to flow west to European Union member states, even after the annexation of Crimea. The Russian energy sector continues to attract international attention, and some third parties such as China and India are benefiting from Russia's need to ensure that oil and gas investment and exports continue. In May 2023, India accounted for around 40–45% of Russia's crude oil exports and India is now one of the largest refiners of Russian oil, which is subsequently exported to the European Union. Other major refining hotspots for Russian Arctic oil include China, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

China is a major importer of Russian oil and gas, and like India it benefits from lower prices for those imports. China has made it clear that any viable future Arctic Council must include Russia, and there is growing evidence that the Arctic is being bifurcated between a Russian-Asian Arctic and a European and North American Arctic. China, India, and others have ambitious plans for the Arctic in the areas of science, energy, fisheries, and cross-oceanic transportation. Russia is a willing partner.

What is the future for energy geopolitics in the Arctic and beyond? Three drivers are identifiable at this point. First, while the EU remains committed to its

There is growing evidence that the Arctic is being bifurcated between a Russian-Asian Arctic and a European and North American Arctic.

15 For a discussion of Aramco's interest in Russian energy projects, see: <https://www.upstreamonline.com/exclusive/saudi-aramco-eyes-slice-of-arctic-lng-2-pie-after-totalenergies-russia-exit/2-1-1238998>.

16 Russia and Saudi Arabia have worked closely with one another in OPEC for some years now, and the two countries recently established a Russian-Saudi Joint Intergovernmental Commission. For further details, see: <http://government.ru/en/news/49769/>.

long-term plan to reduce dependencies on hydrocarbons (European Green Deal), enhancing Norway's position as the dominant gas supplier to the EU was unsurprising given the rapid decline in Russian natural gas imports. The current Norwegian government is seeking to develop further energy potential in the Barents Sea. In 2023, the Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum and Energy licensed over 90 exploration blocks in the Barents and Norwegian Seas.¹⁷ Norway, the UK, and the EU continue to work closely with one another to ensure that natural gas supplies are insulated as far as possible from disruption elsewhere. Renewable energy projects in the Nordic Arctic have been a source of conflict between governments and indigenous communities such as the Sámi, who complain of a lack of consultation about projects that disrupt their traditional rights to access land and water. The West's energy policy remains contradictory and energy justice a controversial issue in Arctic politics.

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Second, Russia will continue to work closely with non-Western partners to ensure the long-term energy development of its Arctic Zone, and this includes thousands of workers from China and Central Asia.

Third, in the North American Arctic—specifically in Alaska—there is a continued appetite for fossil energy projects. The Biden administration approved the Willow Project in the national Petroleum Reserve in northern Alaska.¹⁸ The US president had previously vowed that there would be 'no new drilling' on federal lands, but when US strategic reserves were used to stabilise oil prices after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the prospect of replenishing those reserves with new oil from Alaska proved too tempting. Local native communities have been vocal supporters of the Willow Project, stressing their need for sufficient resources to adapt to climate change. Elsewhere in the Canadian Arctic, local cooperation between indigenous communities and territorial governments has resulted in renewable energy projects such as the long-awaited Inuvik wind project.¹⁹

17 On the recent Norwegian licensing round and what are described as Awards in Predefined Areas (APAs), see: <https://www.spglobal.com/commodityinsights/en/market-insights/latest-news/oil/012423-norway-plans-to-include-more-barents-sea-norwegian-sea-blocks-in-new-apa-round>.

18 For a critical assessment of the Willow Project and why it was approved, see: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/03/16/willow-project-and-race-to-pump-last-barrel-of-oil-pub-89298>.

19 On the Inuvik wind project: <https://canada.constructconnect.com/dcn/news/infrastructure/2023/09/inuvik-wind-turbine-achieves-major-milestone-as-first-power-delivered-to-grid>. The steel components of the wind turbine were sourced from Germany and transported by barge to the site near the Mackenzie River. It is hoped that once fully operational, the project will reduce diesel consumption in Inuvik by 30 per cent.

Climate change and science cooperation in the Arctic

Towards the end of the Cold War, scientific cooperation proved to be a useful trust-building tool between Arctic actors and helped to construct shared ‘circumpolar’ areas of interest.²⁰ Prior to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, an unusual degree of scientific cooperation made the Arctic appear to be a place where geopolitical competition and conflict were absent.²¹ However, international polar research has fallen victim to the diplomatic consequences of the war in Ukraine.²² With restricted access to the field and national guidelines sometimes prohibiting cooperation with Russia-based Arctic scientists, it remains unclear whether and how science cooperation will resume.²³

The international scientific community can no longer access Russian data on the Arctic region. The consequences of this may prove devastating: Arctic warming is an important indicator for global climate developments, and without data exchange it will be impossible to model the broader impacts of climate change.²⁴ International Arctic researchers are currently cut off from over 60 per cent of their research region. This is also a great loss for German polar research. Since the early 1990s, the country’s two major polar research institutions, the Alfred Wegener Institute (AWI) in Potsdam and GEOMAR Helmholtz Research Centre in Kiel, have conducted 30 expeditions to the Russian marine Arctic and another 40 expeditions to terrestrial areas, such as the Lena Delta.²⁵ According to German oceanographer Heidemarie Kassens, the Russian Arctic is key to understanding climate change on our planet: ‘Research in the Arctic, and in particular climate research, relies on international collaboration, access, and continuous monitoring and data sharing among all regional actors of the Arctic, to understand and effectively respond to the climate crisis in the Arctic.’²⁶

The impact of geopolitical tensions on scientific conferences and events, travel and fieldwork, exchange programmes and secondments, funding decisions and especially international research expeditions has been profound. Kassens warns that if the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (UNCLCS) accepts in its pending final recommendation that the Lomonosov Ridge—an underwater ridge extending into the Arctic

Arctic warming is an important indicator for global climate developments, and without data exchange it will be impossible to model the broader impacts of climate change.

20 Pavel Devyatkin, ‘Can Arctic Cooperation be Restored?’, The Arctic Institute, 28 March 2023, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/can-arctic-cooperation-restored/>.

21 Abishek Saxen, ‘The Return of Great Power Competition to the Arctic’, The Arctic Institute, 22 October 2020, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/return-great-power-competition-arctic/>.

22 Warren Cornwall, ‘“We are cut off.” Tensions with Russia are hobbling Arctic research’, *Science*, 3 May 2023, <https://www.science.org/content/article/we-are-cut-tensions-russia-are-hobbling-arctic-research>.

23 Emilie Canova and Pauline Pic, ‘The Arctic Council in Transition: Challenges and Perspectives for the New Norwegian Chairship’, The Arctic Institute, 13 June 2023, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/arctic-council-transition-challenges-perspectives-new-norwegian-chairship/>.

24 Heidemarie Kassens, unpublished lecture at the ZOiS Workshop ‘Interdisciplinary Approaches to Changing Arctic Realities — between Cooperation and Conflicting Interests’, 24 May 2023, Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS), <https://konkoop.de/index.php/event/changing-arctic-realities/>.

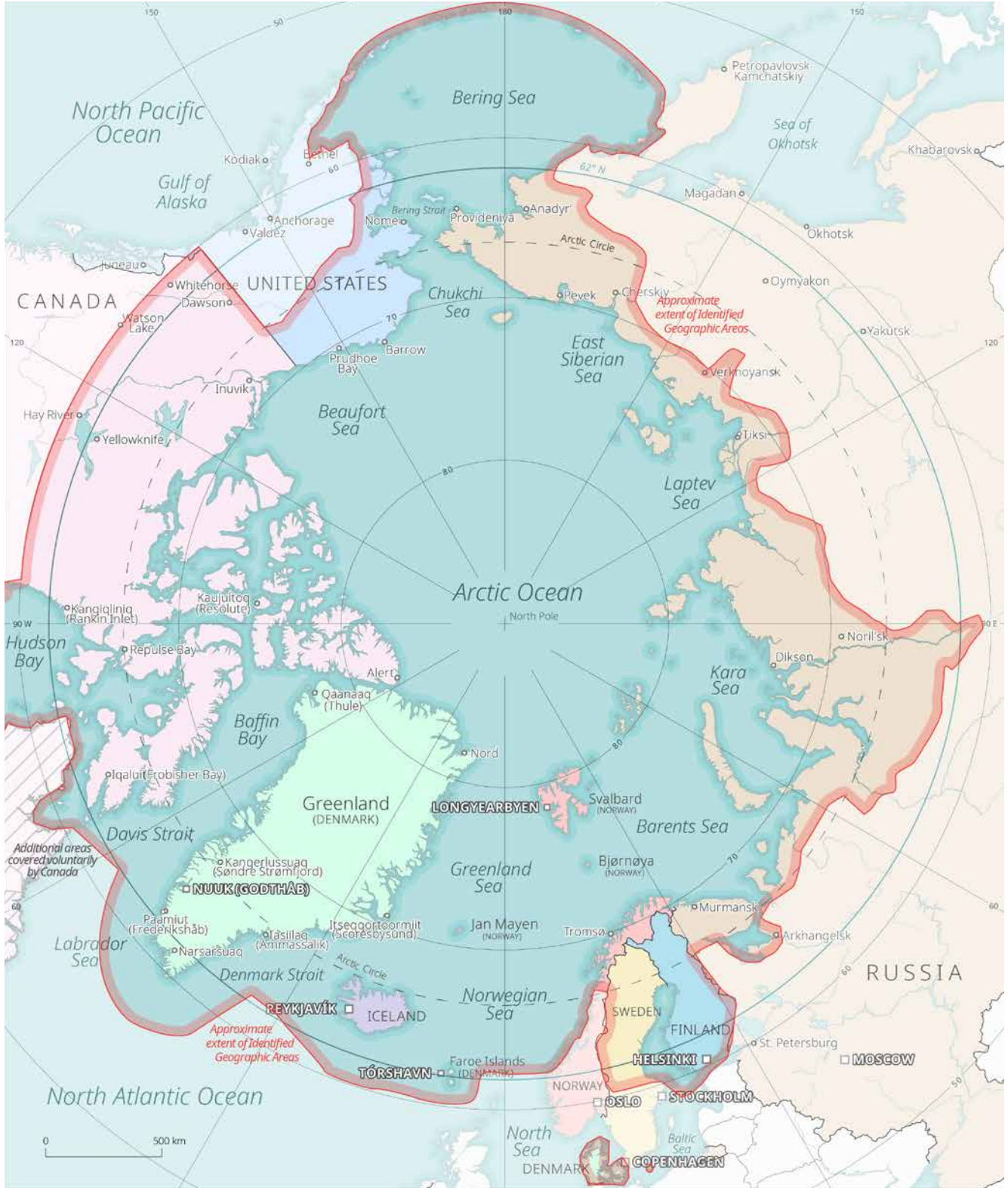
25 Kassens 2023.

26 Kassens 2023.

FIGURE 3

Agreement on enhancing international Arctic scientific cooperation

(Non-binding illustrative map covering the extent of the identified geographic areas described in Annex 1 of the Agreement)



Map based on: <https://iasc.info/cooperations/arctic-science-agreement>

Ocean—be recognised as a continuation of the Russian continental shelf,²⁷ international scientific expeditions into the international waters of the Arctic Ocean could become more difficult.

Russian scientists are also adversely affected by the present situation and cannot, for example, access international academic journals or publication databases like Elsevier anymore.²⁸ The Russian Arctic station ‘Snowflake’ on the Yamal Peninsula, which is due to open in late 2024, was originally conceived as a hub for international Arctic scientists. Now it will most likely be used for joint Russian-Chinese projects.²⁹

For more than two years, researchers have been pondering how to continue their research in the absence of data exchange with the Russian side. Efforts to restore scientific cooperation could—as they did during the Cold War—help to build trust.³⁰ However, unlike former times, there is no time to wait for an international research strategy to emerge; the pace of climate change is too fast. It has been suggested that non-Arctic states mediate between regional actors to foster scientific collaboration.³¹ There are other conceivable avenues for facilitating data exchange—possibly by means of third parties, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) or the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). That would be a low-threshold form of collaboration for the sake of science and the common good. Legally-binding cooperation formats, such as the 2017 Agreement on Enhancing Arctic Scientific Cooperation, which is supposed to facilitate access by scientists from the eight Arctic governments to Arctic areas and data, could once again prevail over soft-law, consensus-based Arctic cooperative frameworks. ► FIGURE 3

There is no time to wait for an international research strategy to emerge; the pace of climate change is too fast.

27 In February 2023, it issued recommendations on partly approving Russian claims. See: Recommendations of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in regard to the partial revised submission made by the Russian Federation in respect of the Arctic Ocean on 3 August 2015 with addenda submitted on 31 March 2021, https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/rus01_rev15/2023RusRev1RecSum.pdf.

28 Kassens 2023.

29 Olga Gertych, ‘Work underway to create the world’s first Arctic station powered by hydrogen and renewables’, *Siberian Times*, 20 December 2021, <https://siberiantimes.com/other/others/news/work-underway-to-create-the-worlds-first-arctic-scientific-station-powered-by-hydrogen-and-renewables/>; Pavel Devyatkin, ‘Can Arctic Cooperation be Restored’, The Arctic Institute, 28 March 2023, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/can-arctic-cooperation-restored/>.

30 Devyatkin 2023.

31 Ebru Caymaz, ‘Conflict or Collaboration? The Role of Non-Arctic States in Arctic Science Diplomacy’, The Arctic Institute, 14 March 2023, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/conflict-collaboration-role-non-arctic-states-arctic-science-diplomacy/>.

Arctic societies and peoples — emerging insecurities

Arctic populations—and especially indigenous people—are strongly affected by the changing climate and geopolitical landscape in their region. Russia’s ongoing war in Ukraine has further increased the burden on an already vulnerable ecosystem and the people that subsist on it. Of the Arctic’s overall population of about 4 million, approximately 10–12 per cent is of indigenous origin (► FIGURE 4),³² and the largest indigenous Arctic population of approximately 250,000 resides in the Russian Far North.³³ Indigenous communities are associated with certain territories and have often been marginalised by the modern states in which they live. Notwithstanding their role in the Arctic Council, indigenous voices still struggle to have their interests represented at the respective national levels. They are also disproportionately affected by unemployment, health issues, lack of prospects and suicidal tendencies—problems rooted in the structurally weak development of the Arctic region.³⁴ Economic activities, especially in the extractive industry (EI) and the resulting environmental pollution threaten their traditional livelihood, which is still partly based on hunting, gathering, nomadism and pastoralism.

Indigenous voices still struggle to have their interests represented at the respective national levels.

In an attempt to draw greater attention to their cause and elicit appropriate state responses, some indigenous Arctic actors have chosen to articulate their most pressing concerns as ‘human security’ issues.³⁵ The concept of human security was first used in the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) 1994 Human Development Report and has been widely discussed in the Arctic context.³⁶ It can be understood as a people-centred notion of security focused on the individual as part of a community and/or society and its vulnerabilities as a referent for security.³⁷ The four main threats to human security identified in the literature are particularly relevant to Arctic indigenous communities: demographic marginalisation, environmental degradation, disruptions to traditional ways of life, and the psychosocial consequences of alienation from the land.³⁸

32 Alexey L. Andreev et al., ‘Demographic Development and High North Communities in Eight Arctic States’, in: *The Handbook of the Arctic. A Broad and Comprehensive Overview*, edited by Egor V. Pak, Artem I. Krivtsov, and Natalia S. Zagrebnaya, 875–885 (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

33 <https://www.arcticcentre.org/EN/arcticregion/Arctic-Indigenous-Peoples>; <https://arctic-council.org/about/permanent-participants/>.

34 Diandra Ayu Larasati, ‘Russo-Ukrainian War and the Indigenous Arctic Population’s Human Security’, *Modern Diplomacy*, 9 June 2023, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/06/09/russo-ukrainian-war-and-the-indigenous-arctic-populations-human-security/>.

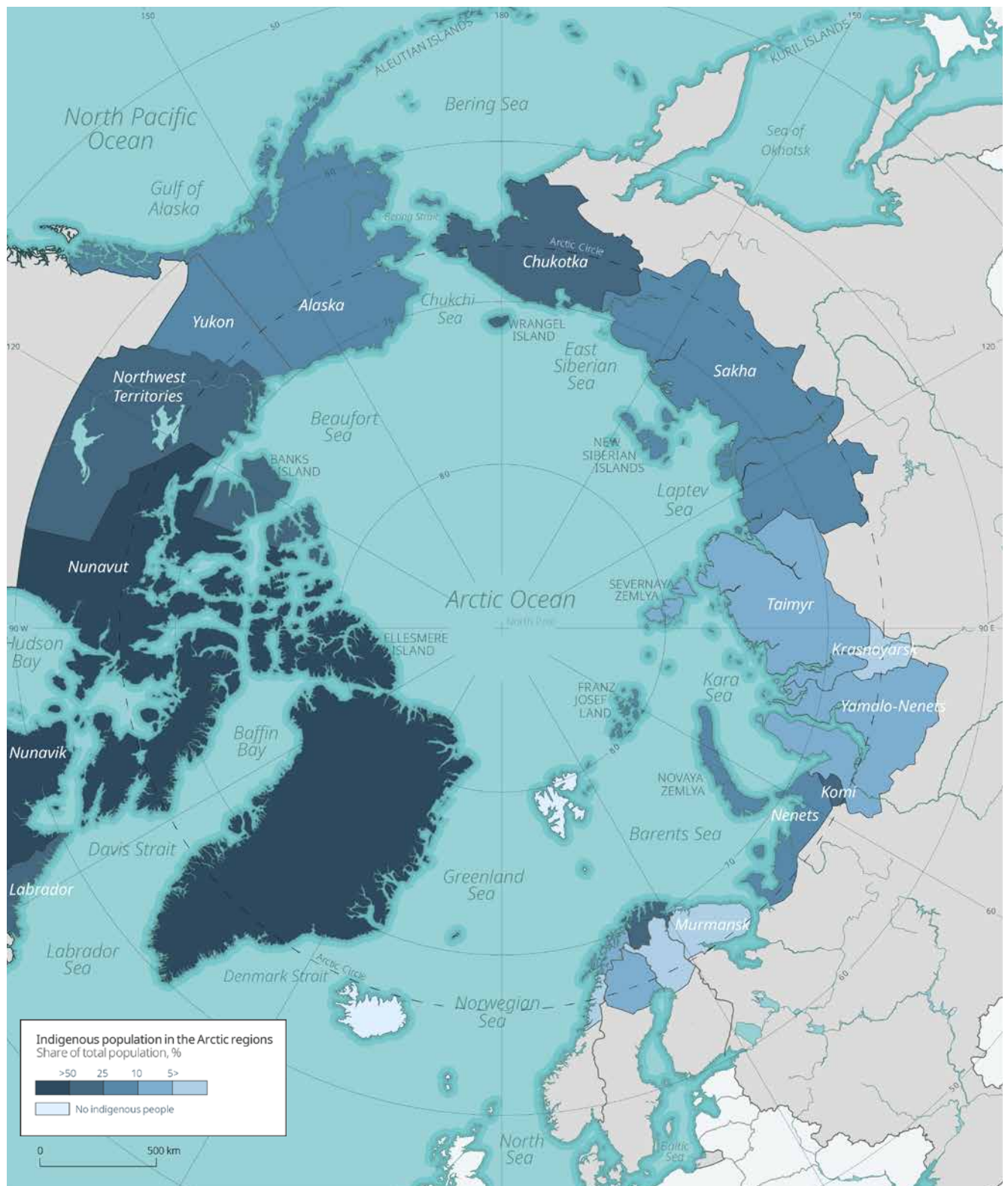
35 Wilfrid Greaves, ‘Indigenous peoples’, in: *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security*, edited by Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv, Marc Lanteigne, Horatio Sam-Aggrey, 313–326 (London: Routledge, 2020).

36 During the past 15 years scholars have explored how the concept of human security translates into an Arctic context (Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv et al., ‘Gender and intersectional approaches to security in the Arctic’, in: *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security*, edited by Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv, Marc Lanteigne, Horatio Sam-Aggrey, 406–416 [London: Routledge, 2020]). See also the discussion about the suitability of the term with regard to the Arctic in Franklyn Griffiths, ‘Not that Good a Fit? “Human Security” and the Arctic’, *Arctic Security in the 21st Century: Conference Report*, 55–62 (Vancouver: Simon Fraser University School for International Studies, April 2008), and Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv et al., ‘Human Security in the Arctic — Yes, it is Relevant!’, *Journal of Human Security* 5, no. 2 (2009): 1.

37 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *Human development report: New dimensions of human security*. (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); See also Niels Einarsson et al. (eds.), *Arctic human development report*. (Akureyri: Stefansson Arctic Institute, 2004).

38 Florian Stammer et al., ‘Human security, extractive industries, and indigenous communities in the Russian North’, in: *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security*, edited by Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv, Marc Lanteigne, Horatio Sam-Aggrey, 377–391 (London: Routledge, 2020).

FIGURE 4
Indigenous population in the Arctic regions



Map based on: <https://archive.nordregio.se/en/Maps/01-Population-and-demography/Indigenous-population-in-the-Arctic-regions/>

The UNDP's seven interrelated dimensions of human security (economic, food, health, environment, personal, community and political security) have now become intertwined with complex other political, social and cultural concerns.³⁹ Arctic communities have had to deal with side effects of the ongoing war in Ukraine, such as rising inflation, energy supply issues and interrupted supply chains. Some of these problems arose during the pandemic, but they have been aggravated ever since, especially in remote areas. Rising costs, especially for staple food products and energy, put a strain on local budgets. The fact that goods have to be delivered by sea or air makes them even more costly.

A disproportionately high number of men from small indigenous communities in the Russian Arctic have died in Ukraine.⁴⁰ This is because Russia has targeted these communities in its conscription policy. The likelihood of criticism or even protest from representatives of Russian indigenous peoples is small: the official Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East (RAIPON) has been co-opted by the Kremlin at least since 2014 and supports the Russian war in Ukraine—despite the devastating consequences for its own people.⁴¹ In March 2022, a group of prominent Russian indigenous activists founded a new organisation, the International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (ICIPR). In several open letters, it condemned the full-scale war against Ukraine and called upon international organisations to suspend their recognition of and cooperation with RAIPON.⁴² As an organisation acting from abroad, it has, however, no influence on developments in Russia.

A disproportionately high number of men from small indigenous communities in the Russian Arctic have died in Ukraine.

With the paralysis of the Arctic Council since February 2022 Arctic indigenous peoples have lost their main platform for multilateral engagement in the region. For the most part, the Council had been a forum in which these six non-nation state groups⁴³ (also known as 'permanent participants') could contribute to formulating and implementing Arctic policies. The ongoing political stalemate in the Council means that Russia is likely to continue to cooperate with interested observer states like China and India. It is expected to do so, moreover, outside the institutional framework of the Arctic Council. As a result, Arctic indigenous communities could be affected by encroachments into

39 Rauna Kuokkanen and Victoria Sweet, 'Indigenous security theory: intersectional analysis from the bottom up' in: *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security*, edited by Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv, Marc Lanteigne, Horatio Sam-Aggrey, 80 – 90 (London: Routledge, 2020).

40 Anti-Discrimination Centre, 'To the International Day of the World's Indigenous People', 8 August 2023, <https://adcmemorial.org/en/video-en/to-the-international-day-of-the-worlds-indigenous-people/>; Elizabeth Owen, 'War In Ukraine Poses "Terrible Threat" for Russia's Saami People, but Solutions are Few', 1 October 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-komi-saami-indigenous-war-mining-threat/32618040.html>; Worldcrunch, 'Indigenous of Russia, The Silent Victims of Putin's War', 7 February 2023, <https://worldcrunch.com/focus/russia-indigenous-people-problem>.

41 RAIPON, 'The Association of Indigenous Peoples and Far Eastern Regions of the Russian Federation in Support of President Vladimir Putin', *Association Information Center*, 1 March 2022. <https://raipon.info/press-tsentr/novosti/assotsiatsiya-kmnss-i-dv-rf-vystupila-v-podder-zhku-prezidenta-nashey-strany-v-v-putina/>.

42 Indigenous Russia, 'Statement of the Indigenous Peoples in connection with the full-scale military aggression of Russia against Ukraine', 18 May 2022, <https://ctrcenter.org/en/activities/406-statement-of-the-indigenous-peoples-in-connection-with-the-full-scale-military-aggression-of-russia-against-ukraine>; Indigenous Russia, 'Appeal of the Indigenous Peoples to international organizations and missions of states at international organizations', 23 May 2022, <https://ctrcenter.org/en/activities/407-appeal-of-the-indigenous-peoples-to-international-organizations-and-missions-of-states-at-international-organizations>.

43 The permanent participants of the Arctic Council are: the Aleut International Association, the Arctic Athabaskan Council, the Gwich'in Council International, the Inuit Circumpolar Council, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East, and the Saami Council.

the region to extract resources by actors not bound by Arctic Council policies.⁴⁴ Russia updated its national Arctic strategy in February 2023, removing any reference to the Arctic Council and instead placing greater emphasis on bilateral cooperation in the areas of research and commerce.⁴⁵

Despite everything—all major state actors in the Arctic, including Russia as the last and Norway as the present Arctic Council chair, have declared that ‘knowledge coproduction with indigenous peoples’ is a priority.⁴⁶ That should, however, not obscure the fact that indigenous peoples and other Arctic societal groups still struggle to have their voices heard at the respective national levels. The Sámi peoples in the European Arctic, for example, have repeatedly complained that renewable wind energy projects are often planned without the active consultation of those affected. Consequently, indigenous populations and other inhabitants of the Arctic remain vulnerable to external threats and national security considerations, be they Russian or Western, trumping their interests and needs.⁴⁷

Cooperation at a crossroads: The future of the Arctic Council

The Arctic Council emerged in the post-Cold War era, in the spirit of Mikhail Gorbachev’s vision of Arctic cooperation expressed in his 1987 speech in Murmansk. The Council’s soft-law, consensus-based approach worked well in peacetime, but it has been severely challenged since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The working groups have been rendered dysfunctional by the breakdown in communications between Western and Russian researchers. On the material level, this hinders the exchange of data on thawing permafrost, Arctic biodiversity, such as migrating birds, and other environmental indicators from the Russian territory. Satellite imagery and remote sensing are used as alternatives, but they are not ideal. On the social level, institutional and political cooperation with Russian academics is no longer possible to the same extent as before the war despite researcher-to-researcher collaboration being made possible ‘on paper’. Established researcher networks, cultivated over years, have already been considerably weakened. In the current situation, the Council’s function as an interface between science and politics is seriously undermined.

To understand how the premises for international Arctic scientific cooperation have been affected, it is crucial to understand how science is dealt with in the Arctic Council. The research conducted in the six working groups is intertwined

44 Diandra Ayu Larasati, ‘Russo-Ukrainian War and the Indigenous Arctic Population’s Human Security’, *Modern Diplomacy*, 9 June 2023, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/06/09/russo-ukrainian-war-and-the-indigenous-arctic-populations-human-security/>.

45 Karen van Loon, ‘Arctic cooperation remains a conundrum’, Egmont Institute, 16 May 2023, <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/arctic-cooperation-remains-a-conundrum/>.

46 Arctic Council, *Russian Chairmanship 2021 – 2023*. <https://arctic-council.org/about/previous-chairmanships/russian-chairmanship-2/>; Norwegian Government, *Norway’s Chairship of the Arctic Council 2023 – 2025*, 28.03.2023, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/norways-chairship-of-the-arctic-council/id2968490>.

47 AWI, German Arctic Office, ‘Arktische Indigene Völker’, September 2021, <https://www.arctic-office.de/publikationen/arktische-indigene-voelker/>.

with the political processes in the Council, such as the decision-making in the ministerial meetings and meetings between the Senior Arctic Officials. Several things incentivise scientists to cooperate and create new knowledge in the Council, including the translation of knowledge between science and politics, the maintenance of researcher networks, and the fact that scientific practices in the Council are, at least partially, independent.⁴⁸

Since February 2022 debates on the future of the Arctic Council have revolved around the resilience and usefulness of this institution; among other things they have addressed the role of soft law, the severity of environmental threats in the Arctic, and the value of international scientific cooperation. When Norway took over from Russia as Council chair in July 2023, it announced that the survival of the Council was its main priority. Several factors are at play here: Firstly, the inclusion of Arctic indigenous groups as permanent participants in the Council, despite lacking decision-making power, underscores the importance of their voices in decision-making processes. The potential dissolution of the Arctic Council would weaken their ability to contribute. Secondly, the Arctic Council, through its working groups, has played a crucial role in generating knowledge over the past three decades. This collaborative effort has raised global awareness of Arctic climate and environmental issues. If the Council were to collapse, these networks and the accumulated knowledge would be difficult to reconstruct. Moreover, Norway's reputation as an environmental leader—despite its commitment to exploiting oil and gas—would suffer if the primary cooperative effort on Arctic environmental and climate matters were to disintegrate. The third rationale for Arctic states' commitment to preserving the Council is its significance in addressing shared challenges.

Despite current political obstacles, the Arctic's ongoing climate and environmental problems require international collaboration. And so, despite the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine, a consensus remains among the seven Arctic states to leave the door open for Russia's reintegration once that is politically and ethically tenable. Including all Arctic states in the Council is part of its consensus-based nature, but political cooperation with Russia is currently impossible.

Scientific and technical cooperation at working-group level has, however, slowly resumed with Russian scientists in particular issue areas and specific projects. New guidelines for the technicalities in the working groups have been created, and one of the main challenges of the current Norwegian chairship is the balancing of science and policy in the Arctic Council. So far, an emphasis on 'technical' and scientific work appears to be the rationale for the activities in the working groups and the survival strategy for the Arctic Council as a whole.

A consensus remains among the seven Arctic states to leave the door open for Russia's reintegration.

⁴⁸ Serafima Andreeva. 'Science at Stake — Russia and the Arctic Council', *Arctic Review on Law and Politics*, Vol 14, (2023) 112 – 131, <https://doi.org/10.23865/arctic.v14.5455>.

Conclusion: The outlook for Arctic governance and cooperation

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has fundamentally changed the landscape of governance and international cooperation in the Arctic. While some of its effects—especially the collapse of pan-Arctic climate governance and environmental research—are already clearly visible, other developments, such as increased militarisation, intensified resource extraction and a growing disregard for the needs of indigenous populations in the face of geostrategic considerations, will possibly escalate further. The resumption of the activities of some Arctic Council working groups is a starting point, but the Arctic Council will not be able to function as a forum for high-level dialogue and cooperation on these pressing issues in the foreseeable future. For now, cooperation is reduced to singular low-level issues on the basis of bilateral agreements between countries that share a border with Russia, namely Norway, Finland, and the US. The low level of tensions in the High North in the past was also due to the unilateral restraint of countries like Norway to resort to its naval deterrence capabilities.

With regard to Arctic governance, global institutions like the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, international functional rules like the Polar Code, multi-lateral dialogue formats on the technical and operative level, such as the Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF, 2015), and legally binding transregional agreements like the Central Arctic Fisheries Agreement (CAOFA, 2021) tend to be more impactful at present than cooperative frameworks like the Arctic Council when it comes to dealing with Arctic problems.

Within the narrow boundaries of not providing legitimacy to an aggressor state and at the same time maintaining a baseline of coordination with Russia, this report has identified some policy options for Western governments. On a military-strategic level, it is clear that the root of growing tensions and militarisation does not lie in the Arctic region itself, but in an increased security dilemma in the North Atlantic, fuelled by rising conflict between the West and Russia as well as the great power ambitions of Putin's Russia. With an improvement of relations highly unlikely, the main aim can only be to mitigate the risk of spillover effects, unintended incidents and unwanted escalation by maintaining existing or putting in place new emergency mechanisms for the prevention and de-escalation of military accidents and the management of increasing military presence. This could include the creation of an Arctic Military Code of Conduct⁴⁹ or revisiting bilateral military agreements dating back to the Cold War. The revitalisation of existing instruments for dealing with non-traditional threats to security is also conceivable, for example the agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response (MOSPA) of 2018 and the Arctic Search and Rescue Agreement (SAR) of 2011.⁵⁰

49 Duncan Depledge et al., 'Why we need to talk about military activity in the Arctic: Towards an Arctic Military Code of Conduct', in *Redefining Arctic Security: Arctic Yearbook 2019*, edited by Lassi Heininen et al. (2019), <https://arcticyearbook.com/arctic-yearbook/2019>.

50 Schaller, Benjamin and Horatio Sam-Aggrey, 'NATO, the OSCE, and the Arctic region: European security organizations and the High North', in: *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security*, edited by Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv, Marc Lanteigne, Horatio Sam-Aggrey, 348 – 361 (London: Routledge, 2020).

With regard to science cooperation, the Arctic Council as an important interface between science and politics is currently dysfunctional. However, for the sake of science, the common good in the region, and the fight against climate change, technical and scientific cooperation at working-group level is currently being resumed and should be maintained as an ethical imperative. The working groups of the Arctic Council play a crucial role in defining realistic priorities and indispensable baselines for Arctic climate and environmental research despite the hostile political context. This could then act as a starting point for exploring avenues for low-threshold exchanges of data and research findings, possibly through the mediation of third parties like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) or the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

In the economic, social, and diplomatic spheres, the heightened focus on energy sovereignty in Europe and the US could mean that the needs of the Arctic indigenous populations are neglected even further in the face of 'geopolitical imperatives'. The war in Ukraine has increased the vulnerability of those populations. The effects of war-related inflation, energy supply issues and interrupted supply chains as well as a disproportionately high recruitment rate of young men from the Russian High North for deployment in Ukraine has had disastrous effects on indigenous and other communities in the Russian Arctic and beyond.

This dynamic also presents an opportunity for the Norwegian chairship of the Arctic Council in its current phase of paralysis. As the indigenous peoples' most established platform for multilateral cooperation, it could act as an advocate for their rights, pushing for more inclusion on the national level, especially in the context of (renewable) energy development projects.

Neither a leadership change in Russia nor an end to its brutal war of aggression in Ukraine appear likely soon, so the current disruption to Arctic governance and cooperation seems here to stay. In order to deal with the multifaceted challenges the Arctic is confronted with today, affected countries and populations will not only have to adopt a broader approach to security, but also strike an issue-specific and carefully weighted balance between limited interactions with and political steadfastness towards Russia.

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