

# **From Ice to Influence - How China Reshape Arctic Security Dynamics**

Analysing the evolving security dynamics through the lens of  
Regional Security Complex Theory

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# Abstract

Once a remote and frozen area, the Arctic has rapidly become a hotspot for global strategic and economic interest. As melting ice unlocks new shipping routes and new natural resources, the region's importance has increased, drawing non-arctic states into the competition for influence and opportunity. China's acceptance as an observer in 2013 marked a turning point in the region's security dynamics, and have increased activities and engagement in the Arctic region ever since. Therefore, this thesis is investigating how the growing strategic interest from China has influenced the security dynamics in the Arctic region. Using the regional security complex theory as a theoretical lens, the study analyses Arctic security developments between 2001-2013 before China's observer status and between 2013-2024. It examines the influence of China's observer status in the Arctic council on Arctic security dynamics, focusing on the essential structure from RSCT: boundary, polarity, social construction and anarchic structure. The comparative description of the Arctic region indicates an internal transformation with risk for external transformation through China's attempt to renegotiate its status. Arctic security has shifted from a regional issue to a globalised security arena. The thesis highlights the need for a comprehensive approach that considers both traditional and non-traditional security elements when assessing Arctic security dynamics.

## Keywords

Arctic Security, Arctic states, non-Arctic states, China, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), Security dynamics, Geopolitics, Regional Security.

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# 1. Introduction

The Arctic region, occupying about one-sixth of the globe and home to approximately four million people, has gained increasing global attention in recent decades. Historically perceived as a remote area, the Arctic is now at the centre of strategic and economic debates. During the Cold War, the region served as a buffer zone between the United States and the Soviet Union, reflecting its significance in global military strategies. Comprehensive discussions about Arctic security, particularly involving non-Arctic states, have emerged only in recent years. The Arctic's geopolitical importance has risen due to climate change, which has melted polar ice caps, opening new shipping routes and granting access to untapped natural resources (Gjørsv, Lanteigne and Sam-Aggrey, 2020, pp. 1–3). In other words, the region is now more open to economic activity due to environmental changes, and as a result leading to more security activity and a higher risk of becoming militarized (Lanteigne, 2020a, p. 311,314). These changes have attracted non-arctic states and intensified competition for economic opportunities (Gjørsv, Lanteigne and Sam-Aggrey, 2020, pp. 1–3).

The Arctic Council, established to foster cooperation among the eight Arctic states (Denmark, Canada, USA, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland), also includes observer states such as China, Japan, and South Korea, among others (Arctic Council Secretariat, 2023, p. 5; Gjørsv, Lanteigne and Sam-Aggrey, 2020, p. 3; Department of Defence, 2024, pp. 145–146). China's acceptance as an observer in 2013 marked a turning point in the region's security dynamics, and has increased activities and engagement in the Arctic region ever since. As a non-Arctic state, China has actively sought to position itself as a significant player, emphasizing its interests in scientific cooperation, resource access, and strategic influence. The 2018 White Paper on China's Arctic policy emphasises its ambitions to become a "near-Arctic state" and proposed the Polar Silk Road initiative. These developments have prompted both cooperation and concern among Arctic and global actors, particularly the United States, which views China's expanding presence and its growing partnership with Russia as potential challenges to regional stability (Department of Defence, 2024, pp. 145–146). In this evolving landscape, understanding the security dynamics in the Arctic requires examining how the regional security dynamics has changed since China became an observer state in 2013. This will give an opportunity to describe the importance of a relatively

new dimension, when China is perceived as a threat in the Arctic region with a limited military presence.

### 1.1 Aim and research question

The main purpose of this research is to investigate how China's growing strategic interests have influenced the security dynamics in the Arctic region. In order to investigate how China has influenced the dynamics, descriptions of the Arctic region will be provided through two different timeframes, between 2001-2013 and 2013-2024. I will highlight the Arctic security dynamics through the lens of Regional Security Complex Theory. This allows me to compare the timeframes and describe an evolution of the Arctic region before China became an observer state and after. To fulfil the purpose of the study, I will answer the following question:

- *How has the Arctic as a security region changed since China started showing strategic interest in the region?*

### 1.2 Outline

The following section includes an overview of previous research about the Arctic region, focusing on China's role in the Arctic region and how they have influenced Arctic dynamics. Further, a section about methodological choices is included. It entails a methodological discussion about limitations, choices, and data collection. A detailed discussion of the theoretical framework then follows, which introduces the essential structure of Regional Security Complex Theory and description of the role of external actors in regional security complexes. Furthermore, an analysis is provided and divided into three sections. It consists of how the Arctic region was described by the Arctic states during the time periods, following a comparison to describe the changing dynamics over time. The chapter that follows gives a short conclusion of the findings from the analysis answering the research question. Finally, the thesis finishes with an in depth discussion, connecting the results to previous research, how it fills a gap and future research.

## 2. Previous research

### 2.1 China's strategy in the Arctic

The growing strategic interest of China in the Arctic, particularly since it became an observer in the Arctic Council in 2013, has been an important academic discussion. Scholars have examined the multifaceted dimensions of China's Arctic strategy, including its connection to broader geopolitical goals and domestic political dynamics.

Jones and Zeng challenge the prevailing notion of China's strategic initiatives, such as the Belt and Road initiative (BRI), being carefully planned geopolitical strategies. Instead, they argue that initiatives like BRI are shaped by internal dynamics within China's fragmented and decentralized governance system, leading to outcomes that often diverge from Beijing's intended objectives. While their analysis does not specifically focus on the Arctic, the study provides a critical lens for understanding the inconsistencies in China's foreign policy execution. Suggesting that its Arctic activities might also be influenced by competing domestic interests rather than a cohesive grand strategy (Jones and Zeng, 2019, pp. 1416–1417).

Chen offers a contrasting perspective by situating China's Arctic activities within the framework of its grand strategy. He argues that China's approach to the Arctic is aligned with its broader geopolitical objectives, integrating diplomatic, economic, technological, and military dimensions to enhance its long-term influence and security. While China officially denies having a strategic agenda in the Arctic, Chen highlights evidence of coordinated efforts, such as polar research, investments, and diplomatic engagement, indicating a structure's approach to securing its geopolitical and economic interests in the region. This analysis positions China's Arctic strategy as a subset of its maritime strategy and a critical component of its overarching national objectives (Chen, 2012, p. 358,368,370).

Kopra and Puranen build on this perspective by emphasizing China's comprehensive approach to advancing its influence in the Arctic. They identify four key dimensions of China's strategy: political, economic, scientific, and military. The authors argue that this approach not only seeks to bolster China's economic interests and challenge prevailing legal norms but also integrates civil-military innovation and preparation for a potential military

presence. They note, however, that China has faced challenges in implementing its Arctic ambitions due to deteriorating relations with Arctic states, reflecting broader great power rivalries (Puranen and Kopra, 2023, p. 240,244,248) .

Together, these studies highlight the complexity of China's Arctic strategy, highlighting the interplay between domestic pressures, grand strategic objectives, and the evolving geopolitical context. While some scholars focus on the fragmented and adaptive nature of China's policies, others emphasize the coherence and integration of Arctic activities within broader national strategies. This divergence in interpretations requires the need for nuanced understanding of how China's growing involvement in the Arctic influences regional security dynamics.

## **2.2 Impact on Arctic Security Dynamics**

While discussions on China's Arctic strategy emphasize its multidimensional approach, incorporating political, economic, scientific and military elements, these activities do not occur in isolation. Instead, they have significant implications for the region's security dynamics. The following section examines how China's growing presence intersects with broader security challenges in the Arctic, shaping the geopolitical landscape and raising questions about the region's future stability.

Botillen & Riddervold explores the impact of geopolitical changes in the Arctic on maritime security. It focuses on four key actors: Russia, the US, China, and the EU. It analyses their strategies and interests in the region. The authors explore China, and the Arctic is becoming an area of great power competition, or whether it will retain its traditional stability. They present two alternative hypotheses: a neoliberal model that focuses on co-operation and international institutions, and a neorealist model that focuses on balance of power and territorial control. The text analyses how each actor acts according to these models, looking at their policies, military presence and approach to international institutions. They conclude that there is an increased potential for conflict in the Arctic, but the region has so far managed to remain peaceful, characterised by international cooperation. However, the text highlights that increased tensions between the United States and Russia, as well as China's growing presence in the Arctic, could lead to increased risks of conflict in the future (Botillen and Riddervold, 2022, pp. 366-367,369,375).

Wang builds on this perspective and explores the growing presence of Asian states in the Arctic and the consequences it has for the region. Asian states' increased interest in the Arctic region signifies that the circumpolar Arctic is no longer isolated, as globalization and international cooperation is evident. The author discusses both how the states creates conflict but also international cooperation (Wang, 2023, p. 6,8).

Babin & Lasserre analyses how Western scholars and media view Asian states' interest in the Arctic and their participation in the Arctic Council. The study focuses mainly on Asian states, including China, as potential threats to the sovereignty of Arctic states. The participation of Asian states in the Arctic Council remains extremely weak and limited by a very restricted status. Asian states were described as a threat to the sovereignty and authority of the Arctic states. The study shows that it is important to be critical of the fears expressed, and the behaviour of Asian states does not necessarily correspond to the expectations that have been created. The behaviour of these Asian states at the AC meetings does not warrant fears among the Arctic states (Babin and Lasserre, 2019, p. 146,148,154).

Kobzeva & Todorov also analyses the Arctic Council and how China can change the arctic regime. They use regime-theory to analyse the arctic regime and identify China's possibilities to affect it. The authors argue that China, despite increased engagement, does not have the possibility to make a decisive change of the core principles within the Arctic regime. However, the authors emphasize how China might modify specific rules and policy areas even though they cannot change the core principles (Kobzeva and Todorov, 2023, pp. 1-3,6).

Some authors contradict this view and argue that China is using a push-in strategy despite not being a full member of the arctic council. China actively seeks influence through bilateral relations and economic investments. This raises concerns for the US and NATO. China's actions are reshaping the Arctic into a more global arena and reshaping arctic governance through its push-in strategy (Biagioni, 2023, pp. 2-3,5-6).

Building on Biagoni's argument, Lanteigne develops this by saying that states can overcome the geographic hurdle of physical distance, by demonstrating a distinct identity that ties the given states to the region. All thirteen observer states are active in developing their own individual policies in the region. Those countries falling under the all-round category have begun to blur the lines between Arctic and non-arctic states in matters related to security and

governance. China may be the most active member on that list. The all-round countries of non-arctic states have presented a challenge to the concept of who is not an arctic stakeholder, and to what degree that status can and should be measured. The development of the polar Silk Road by China, is leading towards redistributing governance power between Arctic and non-arctic states, which challenges Kobzeva & Todorov and Babin & Lasserres arguments (Lanteigne, 2020b, pp. 384–386, 394).

Macdonald addresses the increasing cooperation between China and Russia in the Arctic and its potential implications for Western Arctic states. The author argues that while there is little evidence that China and Russia are cooperating in a coordinated anti-western alliance, their increased economic and military presence in the region nevertheless poses a potential threat. This paper examines the strategic, political and economic factors driving their interactions in the Arctic and assesses the risks to Arctic states. As the Arctic becomes increasingly important and tensions between the great powers Russia, China, and the United States rise, the region is expected to be influenced and disrupted by great power rivalry (MacDonald, 2021, p. 194,198)

This body of research highlights the multifaceted ways in which China's strategic interest influences Arctic security dynamics since becoming an observer in the Arctic Council. The studies underscore that China's engagement is both cooperative and competitive, blending economic investments and diplomatic efforts with initiatives like the Polar Silk Road. These activities challenge traditional governance models and Arctic exceptionalism, as well as raise security concerns for traditional Arctic powers like the US and NATO. Together, these perspectives demonstrate that China's growing involvement has not only globalized the Arctic but also reshaped its governance and security environment.

### **2.3 Non-arctic actors and future governance challenges**

The previous section explores the security implications of geopolitical shifts and the involvement of major powers like China, Russia, and the United States. These dynamics also raise critical questions about governance. As non-arctic actors claim interests in the region, their actions challenge traditional governance models and the balance of power among Arctic nations. The text section delves into the evolving role of non-arctic actors in Arctic governance and their potential to reshape the rules and norms of regional cooperation.

Hong explores China's increasing interest in the Arctic, emphasizing its strategic goals and pragmatic approach. Hong highlights the complex interplay between arctic states over issues such as sovereignty, jurisdiction, resource competition, and military capacity. She also considers how non-arctic actors like China introduce new dynamics, including access to international shipping routes, seabed resource exploitation, environmental concerns, and scientific research. The involvement of non-arctic states is influencing the nature of Arctic governance, adding layers of complexity to regional security (Hong, 2014, p. 274,283-285).

Lanteigne links the increasing risk of militarization in the Arctic to the region's growing economic value and globalization, with non-arctic actors like China playing a pivotal role in shaping security dynamics. Since becoming an observer in the Arctic Council, China has expanded its diplomatic presence in the region. Lanteigne argues that understanding Arctic security requires incorporating non-traditional elements such as economic security alongside military concerns. He further argues that the Arctic constitutes a distinct security region closely linked to global actors, particularly China, which seeks to establish an Arctic identity to avoid exclusion from the region's economic development. This analysis highlights the dual nature of the Arctic as both a regional and global security space (Lanteigne, 2020a, pp. 314, 316).

While Hong (2024) and Lanteigne (2020) emphasize China's pragmatic and strategic use of multilateral initiatives, Eiterjord extends this perspective by analysing how scientific methods and technology territorialize the Arctic both physically and discursively, revealing the underlying security concerns of Arctic states (Eiterjord, 2024, p. 94). Similarly, Pedersen highlights the symbolic yet important role of foreign research stations in shaping perceptions of sovereignty and regional governance, highlighting the multifaceted nature of non-arctic actors' influence in the region (Pedersen, 2021, p. 419).

Osthagen critiques the concept of the Arctic as a cohesive security region. He argues it is rather a collection of sub-regions with diverse security concerns. Traditional definitions of a security region, based on geographical proximity and shared threat perceptions, do not align with the Arctic realities. Osthagen emphasizes that Arctic security is influenced by global power struggles, such as those between NATO and Russia or the US and China, rather than only by regional factors. While regional cooperation frameworks like the Arctic Council have facilitated dialogue, they exclude traditional military security issues, underscoring the need

for multi-level analysis to fully grasp the region's complex security dynamics. Østhagen ultimately calls for caution in oversimplifying Arctic security narratives, stressing the importance of recognizing the region's fragmented and globally intertwined security concerns (Østhagen, 2021, pp. 56, 67–69).

These studies collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of Arctic security, shaped by China's growing interest and its interplay with global and regional dynamics. While Hong and Lanteigne emphasize China's increasing influence through strategic and economic activities, Østhagen challenges the coherence of the Arctic as a unified security region. It emphasizes the need for nuanced, multi-level analysis to understand its evolving dynamics. However, external factors affect many regions. Similarly, the Arctic may have internal security dynamics but be influenced globally. Lanteigne suggests analysing the region through regional security complexes, but it will be a unique one because of China's external influence.

## 2.4 Conclusion

Despite extensive research on China's growing strategic interest in the Arctic and its impact on security in the region, there is still a significant gap in the literature. Previous studies have highlighted several aspects of China's engagement. China has positioned itself as a near-Arctic state and used diplomatic and economical means to strengthen its presence in the region (Lanteigne, 2020; Chen, 2012). Research has analysed how China's activities interact with the strategies of other major powers, particularly Russia and the United States, and how this influences the security balance in the Arctic (Macdonald, 2021; Botillen & Riddervold, 2022). China's observer status in the Arctic Council has been examined from the perspective of both constraints and opportunities, with an emphasis on how China influences specific policy areas such as ocean governance and scientific cooperation (Babin & Lasserre, 2019; Kobzeva & Todorov, 2023). Lanteigne and others highlight the link between economic globalization and militarization risks in the Arctic. However, there is a lack of detailed exploration of whether China's presence has contributed directly to military competition or changes in defence postures among arctic states. This includes increased NATO activity or Arctic-specific military policies in countries like Canada, Norway, or the US. At the same time, there is a lack of systematic analysis that applies theoretical frameworks such as Regional security complex theory to understand how China's strategic interest and activities have reshaped Arctic security dynamics.

Although China's activities are well documented, it is insufficiently analysed how these influence security relations between Arctic and other non-Arctic states. This includes bilateral and multilateral interactions, as well as the use of science and technology as security tools (Eiterjord, 2024). Lanteigne (2020) points out that China's activities contribute to blurring the line between Arctic and non-Arctic interests, but how this impacts security dynamics remains insufficiently explored. There is no long-term analysis of how China's observer status in the Arctic Council since 2013 has influenced the region's security dynamics. This timeline is crucial for understanding the changes in relations between Arctic and non-Arctic states. Many studies focus mainly on hard security issues such as militarisation, while economic and environmental security, as highlighted by Lanteigne (2020) and Kobzeva & Todorov (2023), are under-researched. Research has not yet fully explored the link between economic and security implications. Few have analysed how China's Arctic Strategy influences security escalation between the Arctic States. There is a need for a broader definition of security regions that includes non-traditional security aspects such as economic security. Filling this research gap requires a study that systematically analyses China's impact on Arctic security dynamics through a theoretical framework such as RSCT. Regional security complex theory has rarely been used to analyse the Arctic as a security region where external actors play a role. Such an analysis can provide insights into the specific mechanisms that link China's activities to changes in security relations, as well as illuminate linkages between regional and global security.

# 3. Compare to Describe

## 3.1 Research Design

### 3.1.1 Choice of method

Case studies are a good method when the aim is to get closer to a phenomenon (Alvehus, 2019, p. 79). The theory in this case is a tool to describe the empirical data (Alamaa, Melander and Stubbergaard, 2022, p. 18). Case studies should not be theory-free; the analysis must clearly show what phenomenon is being studied (Esaiasson, 2017, p. 38). In order to answer the aim and the research question, a comparative description of a case study method will be used. Descriptive studies provide answers to where, how, who and whom, which is directly connected to the research question (Esaiasson, 2017, p. 37). Descriptive studies classify reality, and the main point of comparison is a theoretical construct. This means that the theory should guide what is being compared and what is the focus of the analysis (Esaiasson, 2017, pp. 136–137). A comparative descriptive analysis corresponds to a deductive approach. It is characterised by a structured process where the initial analysis of the empirical data is done on the basis of theories or previous research, which is why the approach can be considered more deductive. A predefined template is used based on previous research or theories, i.e. what is to be analysed in the texts has been decided in advance. The theory is therefore present from the start and guides the analysis itself. The researcher must be aware of the potential risk that the theory may become too controlling. However, this does not have to be a problem if the purpose of the analysis is clearly formulated and the analytical framework is used as a guidance, rather than excluding potentially relevant information (Isaksson, 2021, pp. 286–300).

### 3.1.2 The role of theory

Comparative description involves constructing relevant concepts to capture key aspects of reality, requiring clear conceptual frameworks and analyses schemes to draw conclusions (Esaiasson, 2017, pp. 37-38,137). The first task in a descriptive analysis is to construct an analytical tool that captures key aspects, serving as a guideline for the investigation. Good analytical tools must meet certain requirements, both technical and intellectual: technical is based on clear principles, and operationalizable components, and intellectual by suggesting new associations and insights (Esaiasson, 2017, pp. 137–139).

I use Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) as it aligns with the method and provides a robust framework for analysing regional security dynamics, guiding the entire process to ensure relevance to the research question. Regional security dynamics refer to the relationships between states, non-state actors or external actors within a geographical area that influence security outcomes (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, pp. 3–4). The analysis is based on the essential structure of RSCT: boundary; polarity, social construction; and anarchic structure, focusing on how external powers can influence a regional security complex through penetration. An example of how social construction has been operationalised is with the question: *What is the pattern of amity and enmity between the actors?*. This allows me to systematically analyse and describe the changing security dynamics since China became an observer state, which is directly connected to the research question.

This type of case study will both give me depth and theoretical grounding and make my findings meaningful within both Arctic studies and broader security studies (Alamaa, Melander and Stubbergaard, 2022, p. 18). If the analysis scheme is poor, there is a risk of not measuring what is supposed to be measured (Esaiasson, 2007, p. 38). To ensure that the analysis scheme is as good as possible, I have used the essential structure of the theory to construct questions that were used to analyse my two observations and finally illustrate differences and similarities through a comparison.

### 3.1.3 Delimitations

To be able to answer the research question, this case contains two observations, one observation of how the region looked like between 2001-2013; and another one of the region between 2013-2024. These timeframes will be compared with each other to describe the changing security dynamics over time. These timeframes are used because China became an observer state in 2013 in the Arctic Council. So, in order to describe the change I analyse the period when China is not an observer, with the period when China is an observer. It is important to note that the year 2013 is split between the two timeframes. In other words, I have analysed the first timeframe until the date China was accepted as an observer state, and the second timeframe from when China was accepted and onwards.

This study will give a deeper understanding of the changing security dynamics within a security region, but also how an external actor can change both the external boundary and internal dynamics over time. I do not intend to explore the Arctic Council but rather the Arctic

region as a whole. The reason behind this decision is that the Arctic Council's main tasks do not include security and military policy. Analyzing the eight Arctic countries will generate a comprehensive view of the security dynamics and where the countries align or differentiate.

## 3.2 Data Collection

The data consists of a wide range of factors describing the Arctic security dynamics to account for the complexity of interactions within the regional security complex. I use primary sources and secondary sources, to generate diversity and credibility. The primary sources form the basic and original material (Finnegan, 2006, p. 142). My main sources consist of official documents about the Arctic countries' strategy in the region, as they highlight the security dynamics. The official documents are the countries national strategies in the Arctic region. Either the Arctic strategy is written in foreign policy documents, or it is a document of its own. The documents give a shallow overview of the countries strategies and mostly represent wish lists. To give a deeper understanding of the dynamics, I also use documents from countries intelligence services. These documents contain a deeper description of the current situation and challenges in the Arctic. Secondary sources judge or interpret the material in primary sources (Finnegan, 2006, p. 142). The secondary sources consist of newspaper articles to strengthen certain trends, policies, or events. Together, the sources give a deep understanding of the dynamics.

These sources are not neutral data. Their selection and interpretation is affected, not only by access or timing, but also by the researcher's aims and viewpoints (Finnegan, 2006, p. 139). The highest number of documents exists between 2016 - 2024. The US provides the highest amount of available documents, and the most recent once. The Nordic countries provide fewer documents. Documents from Russia are very limited, especially in the second time frame. It is the only one available document from 2013. Therefore, I have used data from other countries mentioning Russia's strategy. To address Russia's Arctic Strategy during the second time frame, I use a newspaper article which summarises Russia's policy.

### 3.2.1 Evaluation of sources

It is easy to assume official documents coming from an agency that is part of the government to be authoritative and objective. However, it is important to remember to read it from a certain viewpoint and remain critical (Steve Buckler and David Dolowitz, 2005, p. 63). The selection of documents is guided by their direct relevance to Arctic security dynamics and

their authorship by official governmental or defence institutions. This selection might exclude less formalised perspectives, such as those from non-governmental actors or local communities. The amount of policy documents about the Arctic strategy is very limited, especially for the first period between 2001 and 2013. This may cause an imbalance in the analysis where recent trends are overrepresented. Therefore, it is a need for caution in drawing conclusions about long-term patterns. However, this imbalance of available sources between the periods is also interesting because it shows how the countries think the arctic strategy is of greater importance. There is also an imbalance between how many documents each country has. Even though these sources are official documents, I would also like to highlight that policy documents are mainly wish lists rather than actual policies or practices. To mitigate the risk of imbalance of sources and idealized visions, I have included newspaper reports about certain events. Documents from intelligence services may offer more grounded assessments of security trends, but their focus on national interests could introduce bias.

## 4. Theory

*In this chapter, the theory is presented. It begins with an overall explanation of the Regional Security Complex Theory and how external actors can influence a region and change its essential structure. In the second part, the essential structure in a regional security complex is discussed, while also focusing on external penetration from outside actors. Lastly, the chapter ends with a description of the analytical framework.*

### 4.1 Regional Security Complex Theory

The concept and theory of the regional security complex was first put forward by Buzan and Weaver in 1983. The concept was developed to provide an opportunity for taking a broader approach to security studies than had previously been possible. It focused on military, political, economic, social and environmental perspectives. This concept allows for a more accurate analysis of security relationships and, thus, a better description of different regions in the world (Sadurski, 2024, p. 2). The regional security complex advocates the regional level as the appropriate one for a large practical security analysis. Normally two too extreme levels dominate security analysis, national and global. Studying only national security is not in itself a meaningful level of analysis, because security dynamics are inherently relational (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 40).

Buzan and Weaver define a regional security complex as a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 44).

The regional level is where the extremes of national and global security interplay occurs. The general picture is about the conjunction of two levels: the interplay of the global powers at the system level, and clusters of close security interdependence at the regional level. The security of the separate units and the process of global powers intervention can be grasped only through understanding the regional security dynamics (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 43).

Regional security complexes are defined by durable patterns of amity and enmity, taking the form of regional, geographically coherent patterns of security interdependence. The formation of RSCs derives from the interplay between the anarchic structure and its balance of power consequences, and pressures of local geographical proximity (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 45). An RSC is formed by a group of states located close to each other, between which there are characteristic security relationships that distinguish them from other regions. Therefore,

geography is one of the most critical determinants of the formation of a given RSC, enabling specific interactions to emerge and determining the course of the boundary of this complex within a particular region (Sadurski, 2024, p. 2).

One purpose of RSCT is to establish a benchmark against which to identify and assess changes at the regional level. Because RSCs are durable substructures with an important geographical component, they have both internal structures and external boundaries that can be used to monitor continuity and change and to distinguish significant change from less important events. Three possible evolutions are open for an RSC: maintenance of the status quo, external transformation (expansion or contraction of the boundary) and internal transformation (changes in polarity, social construction and anarchic structure) (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 53).

External actors can penetrate the regional security complex. External penetration is the process by which external actors, who are not part of a regional security complex, gain influence or presence within that complex. It often happens through political, economic or military means. External actors can influence the security dynamics of a regional security complex without becoming an integral part of it. For example, major powers outside the region may support specific states, mediate conflicts or deploy military assets. External penetration can strengthen one or more actors in the region, affecting the balance of power and dynamics between actors. It can create tensions or rivalries, especially if several external actors compete for influence in the same region. A classic example is how the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War influenced different regions such as the Middle East and Southeast Asia through alliances, arms exports and military interventions (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, pp. 4, 15–16, 46, 49).

#### **4.2 The Essential Structure**

Four factors are essential for the formation of a regional security complex. First, a border separating it from other regions. Second, polarity, or the variable that determines the distribution of power between the actors that make up the complex and determines which of them are the strongest (there are three types of complexes due to polarity, standard, centralized, large-capacity). Third, social construction manifested in the creation of relations of friendship or enmity between the entities that make up the complex. Fourth, an anarchic

internal structure, such as two or more autonomous entities interacting with each other (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, pp. 53–58).

#### 4.2.1 Boundary

It is important to start by drawing clear distinctions between what constitutes the regional level and what constitutes the levels on either side of it. The regionalist approach features a distinct level of analysis located between the global and the local. Units must have a fairly high degree of independent actor quality. Regions must be composed of geographically clustered sets of such units, and these clusters must be embedded in a larger system, which has a structure of its own (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 27). Buzan and Weaver (2003:41) stress that security regions form subsystems in which most of the security interaction is internal. Most often the borders between regions are geographically determined, zones of weak interaction. Or, they are occupied by an insulator that faces both ways, bearing the burden of this difficult position but not strong enough to unify its two worlds into one (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 41).

#### **External penetration**

A regional security complex can go through external transformation if the outer boundary expands or contracts, most probably as a result of two security complexes merging. When the outer boundary expands or contracts, changing the membership of the RSC and most probably transforming its essential structure ((Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 53). This is monitored by looking at the intensity of interregional security dynamics, which should act as early stages to change. Low intensity of interregional dynamics means no change in the boundaries of RSC is likely. Where interregional security dynamics are fairly thick, intense, and increasing, external transformations become more likely (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 67). Linking the regional security dynamics to the global power competition, is blurring the lines of the outer boundary. Even with penetration, the regional level retains its security interdependence unless overlay occurs where external powers completely dominate the region. The main problem with overlay is to determine the boundary between it and mere heavy penetration of an RSC by great powers. The key to the distinction is that outside powers, rather than the interests and interactions of the local states, must shape the main security dynamics of the region. Normally, this will mean that great powers have substantial military forces based in the region. Overlay is easiest to see when it has been imposed by force, by the invasion and occupation of a region by outside powers. More problematic is the semi-voluntary acceptance

of overlay, when local states agree to subordinate themselves to a significant degree to an outside hegemon, and accept the stationing of its forces on their territory (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 63).

#### 4.2.2 Polarity

The main element of security politics is the relationship among the regional powers inside the region. Their relations set the terms for the minor powers and for the penetrations of the RSC by global powers. Polarity covers the distribution of power among the units (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, pp. 53–55). It varies from uni- to multipolar. Unipolar standard RSC means the region consists of only one regional power. In contrast, a centred RSC is dominated by a single actor, either by a great power or a superpower. The global power will dominate the region, which means the security dynamics are suppressed, and its actions are globally oriented. A centred RSC may also be integrated by institutions rather than by a single power and dominate from a centre located (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, pp. 49, 55–56). In a great power RSC, the polarity of a region is defined by more than one global level power. Great power RSCs are hybrids of the global and regional levels, affecting the global security and may cause spillover effects in neighbouring regions. These complexes can be analysed in the same way but since their dynamics involve global level powers, their impact is indeed part of the global level security dynamics. Where two or more great powers share a regional RSC, the internal dynamics of that RSC, will be a significant factor in global level security dynamics. The second difference from standard RSCs arises from the spillover effects in consequence of the presence of great powers (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, pp. 59–60).

#### **External penetration**

The security dynamics within the region can undergo internal transformation. Either the power polarity or the dominant patterns of amity/ enmity change within the context of the existing outer boundary (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 53). The potential for internal transformation can be monitored by checking material conditions for possible changes of polarity (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 67). The stronger states, being more internally cohesive, tend to find most of their threats coming from outside their borders. The weaker states are fragile and internally divided, and are more vulnerable to most types of outside threat (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 22). For the global powers, the regional level is crucial in shaping both the options for, and consequences of, projecting their influences and rivalries into the rest of the system (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 47). The links of the overarching pattern of

distribution of power among the global powers to the regional dynamics of RSCs is the mechanism of penetration. External powers penetrate through a balance-of-power logic and work naturally to encourage the local rivals to call in outside help, and by this mechanism the local patterns of rivalry become linked to the global ones (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 46).

#### 4.2.3 Social construction

RSCs are defined by durable patterns of amity and enmity taking the form of subglobal, geographically coherent patterns of security interdependence (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 45). These patterns of amity and enmity are influenced by various background factors such as history, culture, religion, or geography (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 50). Standard RSCs may be conflict formations, security regimes, or security communities, in which the region is defined by a pattern of rivalries, balances, alliances and or concerts and friendships (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 55). The idea of social structures of anarchy is based on what kind of role - enemy, rival, friend - dominates the system, and how deeply internalised these roles are - by coercion, by interest and by belief in legitimacy (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, pp. 50–51).

#### **External penetration**

Penetration occurs when outside powers make security alignments with states within an RSC, linking the local patterns of rivalry to the global ones, and potentially foster new alliances or exacerbate tensions with others (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 46). External powers can reshape the social construction of security dynamics by introducing a new pattern of amity and enmity (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 53). The social dynamics are rooted in regional history, culture, religion and geography, meaning external penetration may influence but not wholly redefine these dynamics (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 50). This is monitored by checking material conditions for possible changes (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 67).

#### 4.2.4 Anarchic structure

An anarchic structure consists of the presence of at least two actors involved in international relations that pursue their independent policies and interact with each other. They create relationships that influence each other (Sadurski, 2024, p. 6). The anarchic structure also shapes the global security order, as regional security complexes function as sublevels within the global system (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 40). According to Buzan and Weaver, these complexes can both reinforce and dampen global power relations, depending on the nature of

regional relations (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 53). This lack of overarching authority leads to a system where security dynamics are created through interstate relations. Relations are often characterised by proximity, meaning that neighbours tend to be the main security threats and allies, and that security issues spread more quickly between neighbouring states. Pressures of local geographical proximity generate more security interaction among neighbours than among states located in different areas (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, pp. 45–46).

### **External penetration**

Regional patterns of conflict shape the lines of intervention by global level powers. The expectation is that outside powers will be drawn into a region along the lines of rivalry existing within it. In this way, regional patterns of rivalry may line up with, and be reinforced by, global power ones, even though the global power patterns may have had little or nothing to do with the formation of the regional pattern. This could mean changes to the anarchic structure, because of regional integration. In this way, penetration does not remove the anarchic structure but introduces complexities by linking the regional to the global (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 53).

### **4.3 Analytical Framework**

How I use the theory has been inspired by Evgeny F. Troitskiy's article "Central Asian Regional Security Complex: The Impact of Russian and US Policies" (2015). Troitskiy aims to reveal the impact made by the Russian and US policies on the Central Asian regional security complex in the 1990s and 2000s. It traces the evolution of post-Soviet Central Asia from a proto-complex to a fully fledged RSC, analysing major security trends and discovering the consolidation of the RSC's boundary, polarity, social construction and anarchic structure (Troitskiy, 2015, p. 2). These elements will help describe the external and internal security dynamics in the Arctic regional security complex during the two different time frames identified in the method chapter. I have used the theoretical concept to consistently analyse the findings. The essential structure of RSCT guides the construction of the analytical framework to be able to see how the Arctic regional security complexes looked during the different time periods.

To be able to analyse the data, I identified questions that would guide me to find the right material, together with certain criteria. To construct the questions, I rely on the dimensions from RSCT, and how external penetration is being explained through the essential structure.

To define regional boundaries, the key actors must be identified, and how they perceive and maintain the borders of the region. This helps assess actors’ external relations and regional perceptions. To assess the internal dynamics in the region, the balance-of-power between the actors must be identified as well as their presence in Arctic security matters, if it is military, diplomatic, or economical. It gives an overview of which actors are the strongest. The patterns of amity and enmity also must be identified in order to assess the internal dynamics. It provides insights of the level of conflict or cooperation. Lastly, the anarchic structure is essential for identification, which means the security threats and challenges must be identified between the actors in the region. Assessing these dimensions over time allows comparison of shifting security dynamics, before and after China’s observer status in 2013, directly linking to the research question.

**Table 1.** *Identified questions as the analytical framework*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Criteria</b>
<b>Boundary</b>	What actors are most important in the region?	Border definitions, border surveillance, territorial claims, regional perception
	How do the actors define the border and the perception of the region?	
<b>Polarity</b>	What is the balance of power between the actors?	Military resources, economic influence, political influence, commitment to security
	How present are the actors in security related questions within the region?	
<b>Social Construction</b>	What is the pattern of amity and enmity between actors?	Alliances, conflicts, cooperation, relational patterns
<b>Anarchic structure</b>	What security threats or challenges exist in the region?	Military threats, economic challenges, environmental threats, response strategies

# 5. The Arctic Security Dynamics

*This chapter is analysing the collected material and is divided through the lens of Regional Security Complex Theory. It is divided into four sections. The first one is showing a description of the security dynamics between 2001-2013 before China became an observer state. The second one illustrates the period between 2013-2024 when China was an observer state in the Arctic Council. The third section contains a comparative description of the two different time frames, to describe the changing Arctic Security dynamics over time. Finally, a table is illustrating a summary of the security dynamics.*

## 5.1 The Security Dynamics Between 2001-2013

### 5.1.1 Boundary

#### **How do the actors define the regional boundary?**

The actors define the region as the Arctic Ocean, surrounded by sovereign states. The borders of the Arctic region are referred to as the area north of the Arctic circle and the eight arctic states international bodies. This definition was accepted by all the countries when establishing the Arctic Council in 1996. The observer states have accepted the same definition (Utrikesdepartementet, 2011, p. 11). The countries are drawing a distinction between what is global and what is regional. The eight arctic states are the US, Canada, Russia, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, and Sweden (Government of Canada, 2009, pp. 34–35; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Norway, 2009, p. 51; Alþingi, 2011, p. 4; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011, p. 54; Utrikesdepartementet, 2011, p. 11; Prime Minister’s Office, 2013, pp. 19–20; The White House, 2013, p. 4). Several external actors were accepted as observer states in the Council, among these were non-arctic states (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011-2012:84). The non-arctic states that were accepted: Spain; Republic of Korea; Republic of Singapore, Republic of India; People’s Republic of China; Japan; and Italian Republic (Arctic Council Secretariat, 2023, p. 12). During this period, the Arctic is clearly defined as a region consisting of the eight Arctic states, with a boundary geographically north of the Arctic Circle. This is a traditional “regional boundary” in RSCT terms. The presence of new actors marks an increase in external penetration, but not an immediate transformation of the border. The Arctic states retain a high degree of autonomy by requiring observer states to respect international law and Arctic Council rules. This limits global power projection in the region and prevents “overlay”, to hinder external actors from dominating security dynamics.

### **How do the actors perceive the region?**

The US, Finland, and Denmark are some of the countries that perceives the arctic as peaceful and cooperative, not threatened by conflicts (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011, p. 13; Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs., 2011, pp. 19, 60; Prime Minister's Office, 2013, p. 14; The White House, 2013, p. 7). An external transformation is likely because of the openness from the Arctic countries of globalising the region. Russia sees the region as having economic potential and new transport routes and becoming a major energy reserve and transport channel for Europe (The Russian Federation Government, 2013, pp. 4-6,8). Canada, however, is very careful with its sovereignty. Canada has a registration of vessels that enter the Canadian maritime territory to make it harder for other actors and strengthen the Canadian territory (Government of Canada, 2009, p. 2,7, 9). On the other hand, Iceland thinks the Arctic should not be limited to a geographical definition, but rather be viewed as an extensive area when it comes to ecological, economic, political and security matters (Alþingi, 2011, p. 1). The Arctic countries have bilateral connections with the EU and NATO, since numerous countries within the Arctic region are members of these cooperations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Norway, 2009, p. 52; Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs., 2011, p. 70; Prime Minister's Office, 2013, pp. 46-47). Linking the regional to the global might blur the lines of the outer boundary. Although the region is becoming more globally interconnected through the Arctic Council, its external borders remain clear and delineated. Interregional dynamics are sparse and low intensity, suggesting a low likelihood of an external transformation.

#### **5.1.2 Polarity**

### **How present are the actors in security related questions within the region?**

Russia has the biggest military capacity in the Arctic region. They have the largest undiscovered petroleum deposits in the region, the longest Arctic coastline, the largest continental shelf, and extensive plans for the establishment of new infrastructure along its coast (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs., 2011, p. 12; The Russian Federation Government, 2013, p. 8). The most important objective of Russia's arctic policy is to safeguard access to energy resources and secure as much control and influence in the region as possible. Russia supports combat and mobilization readiness at a sufficient level to solve problems to prevent power politics and aggressions toward Russia. Russia will ensure strategic deterrence, and if there will be an armed conflict, Russia will repel aggression and

cease hostilities on terms that meet the interest of Russia (The Russian Federation Government, 2013, p. 7,10).

Canada has the largest land and sea area after Russia. The reason behind Canada's big interest in the Arctic is its sovereign part of the nation with the history of the indigenous people in the area. They want to have a strong presence, and they perceive themselves as stewards of the region. Canada has the capacity to protect and patrol the land, the sea, and the air in its own territory. They are putting more boots on the Arctic tundra. The significant investments of capabilities are a way to send a message that Canada does not want others to act in their archipelago. Canada has invested a lot in the Arctic region, with new capabilities on land and army training and reserve force responsible for military presence (Government of Canada, 2009, pp. 8–10).

The Arctic policy of the US is progressing, albeit from a rather modest starting-point (Utrikesdepartementet, 2011, p. 10). The USA has limited presence but a strategic interest through Alaska. They want to intensify the focus on arctic issues. The US is using multilateral diplomatic influence through other actors to achieve its ends. Their Arctic Policy says: “Our highest priority is to protect the American people, our sovereign territory and rights, natural resources and interests of the United States” (The White House, 2013, p. 4,6).

Nordic countries are more defensive but have strong interests. However, Norway has invested heavily in the northern regions and the country strives to be on the front line in all issues concerning the Arctic region. Economic cooperation with Russia plays an important role in Norway's Arctic policy. Norway has also strengthened its armed forces to be able to exercise in the High North (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs., 2011, p. 54). Denmark sends out markers to increase military presence in the Arctic and continue to use the area as training facilities for their military. The key task is related to securing their sovereignty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011, p. 21).

### **What is the balance of power between the actors?**

Russia has a clear dominance in the region, with its extensive military capabilities, energy extraction, with its long Arctic coastline, and a strong military presence. Economically, Russia also controls much of the energy sector in the region, strengthening its influence (The Russian Federation Government, 2013, p. 8). Although the United States is a global power, its

presence is limited. The US indirectly balanced against Russia through diplomacy and multilateral cooperation, but did not have the same foothold as Russia in the Arctic (The White House, 2013, p. 5,7,9,11). Canada is strongly nationally oriented and has a clear role as a regional intermediate actor but lacks major influence on the balance of power (Government of Canada, 2009, p. 3). The Nordic countries have a minor role in the balance of power, except Norway. Norway balances Russia's influence through its cooperation with NATO and the US (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009:52). Security dynamics in the Arctic during this period is moderately penetrated by global powers, primarily through the Russia-US relationship, but also through cooperation with EU and NATO. The bipolar dynamic shaped the region's security climate.

### 5.1.3 Social construction

#### **What is the pattern of amity and enmity between actors?**

##### Amity

The primary forum for cooperation is the Arctic Council. Even though several countries want to strengthen the cooperation within the Council, it does not assess security questions. The Nordic countries mainly cooperate through the Nordic Council (Prime Minister's Office, 2013, p. 14). Norway and Russia have developed a strong neighbourly relationship since 1990, and they cooperate through various practical domains (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Norway, 2009, p. 7,54). Russia also wants to keep a mutual beneficial Russian presence, with both economic and scientific activities, on the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard. Russia also wants to bolster bilateral and regional relations between the Russian Federation and the Arctic states (The Russian Federation Government, 2013, p. 8).

The interaction with outside actors is not intense. Numerous of the Arctic states are however very open to intensifying interaction with outside actors which might influence the already existing relations. The states want to build agreements and promote cooperation with other states and stakeholders on issues relating to the national interests of the Arctic states.

Enhancing cooperation between the authorities in the region and internationally is central to the assessment and prevention of security threats (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Norway, 2009, p. 7). Finland also puts emphasis on external relations (Prime Minister's Office, 2013, p. 14). The US and other Arctic nations should seek to work with other states and entities to advance common objectives in the arctic region in a manner that protects Arctic states national interests and resources (The White House, 2013, p. 11). Mostly the Nordic countries

cooperate with the EU, but in an environmental and scientific context (Prime Minister's Office, 2013, pp. 46–47). Norway and Denmark cooperate with NATO when it comes to military capacities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Norway, 2009, pp. 69–70; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011, p. 20). However, these external actors have not had a major impact on traditional security matters, however, they might help influence the economic, environmental or scientific dimension.

### Enmity

The arctic countries have expressed possible conflict over access to arctic oil and gas. The most clear conflict during this period is between Canada and Russia, who want national control over the northeast passage and the northwest passage. The US wants them to be designated international transit routes and as such be regulated as international waters. The US and Canada are involved in a dispute over the northwest passage and a part of the Beaufort Sea which is estimated to hold vast oil deposits. The US considers the northwest passage as an international strait, whereas Canada considers the route its internal waters. The disagreement between them is however well-managed, and does not pose any sovereign or defence issues. The conflict is considered as low-intensity, and it is mostly handled through diplomatic relations. Canada and Denmark have a dispute over Hans Island. Both countries claim it as their own territory but have not escalated into a conflict (Government of Canada, 2009, p. 13).

The overall security policy climate in the arctic is very much dependent on the relationship between Russia and the US. In recent years, dialogue and cooperation have improved as a result of a joint attempt to build a new agenda (Utrikesdepartementet, 2011, p. 14). It is fair to say that the region mostly consists of agreements, cooperation and friendly relationships, where tensions and disputes are solved through diplomatic solutions. From the RSCT lens, the region can be identified with alliances and friendships rather than conflict and escalation, with minor interregional cooperations.

#### 5.1.4 Anarchic structure

##### **What security threats or challenges exist in the region?**

Despite significant challenges, arctic cooperation is characterised by low level of conflict and broad consensus. The countries address issues about increasing interaction from outside the region but more related to sovereignty insecurities, specifically from Canada (Government of

Canada, 2009, pp. 1–3). The growing international importance of the region has led to an increasing preparedness on behalf of the arctic states to guard their sovereign interests, without having led to militarisation (Alpingi, 2011, p. 10; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011, p. 49). For example, Sweden claims the current security policy challenges are not of military nature (Utrikesdepartementet, 2011, p. 14). Canada highlights especially the increasing accessibility and economic and strategic interests in the arctic, the opening and rapid development of the arctic region presents very real challenges. The country expresses a concern regarding principal problems with respect to the environment, including climate change with its consequences, the environmental impacts caused by increased shipping and exploitation of natural resources. It is of importance to increase the security policy in the region due to increased shipping and human activity, which increases risk of serious environmental accidents in the Arctic Ocean (Government of Canada, 2009, p. 5,8,33). Climate change and the environmental impact it has on the Arctic region is a dangerous challenge for humanity (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011, p. 49). The Arctic Council is the central institution for co-operation, but without mandate to deal with security issues. The absence of a common security structure in several disputes, reflects the anarchic structure of the regional security complex theory.

## 5.2 The Security Dynamics Between 2013-2024

### 5.2.1 Boundary

#### **How do the actors define the regional boundary?**

The Arctic region is characterised by the fact that it consists of an ocean (the Arctic Ocean) surrounded by sovereign states (Utrikesdepartementet, 2020, pp. 6–7). The Arctic boundaries are defined under UNCLOS and the Arctic Council. The common political definition since 1996, when the Arctic Council was established, is that the Arctic comprises the areas north of the Arctic Circle and the associated eight Arctic states. The states are: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Canada, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States (Department of Defence, 2019, p. 2; Utrikesdepartementet, 2020, p. 14,23). In addition to the already accepted observer states, Switzerland is the latest and only accepted non-arctic state during this period (Arctic Council Secretariat, 2023, p. 12). It is of great importance to the Arctic countries that the non-arctic states must, in their activities in the Arctic region, respect international law and the status of the eight arctic states and behave in a sustainable and peaceful manner (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020, p. 2,22; Alpingi, 2021, p. 11). However, external actors

seek to renegotiate their status. The US highlights that China has claimed itself as a “near-Arctic state” and at the same time expresses support over international law but acts selectively, especially when it comes to questions that China finds as their core interests. However, the United States doesn't recognize any such status which is indicating increasing tensions between global and regional actors (Department of Defence, 2019, p. 3,5). Therefore, the Arctic states still have regional autonomy in the region, by referring to legal frameworks.

### **How do the actors perceive the region ?**

The US highlights that the Arctic serves as an avenue for power projection to Europe and is vital to the defence of the Atlantic sea lines of communication between North America and Europe. This power competition and aggression is spanning between two key regions of ongoing competition, the Indo-Pacific, and Europe (Department of Defence, 2019, pp. 5–6, 2024, p. 2). This increases the likelihood of an external transformation of the security complex's borders.

Russia highlights that they want to preserve the region as peaceful and stable. Russia wants to intensify the development of the Northern Sea Route as a global competitive national transport communication for the Russian Federation (Devyatkin, 2023). Through the lens of RSCT, the boundaries between regional and global dynamics are blurred, increasing the risk of external actors shaping the region's security structures. The interregional dynamics in the region is fairly thick, since non-arctic countries have been accredited observers to the Arctic Council. There are also spillover effects from other regions to the Arctic, simultaneously as power projection between the global powers are rising. However, the eight Arctic states remain as the main actors, with continued focus on maintaining regional autonomy through cooperation and international law.

### **5.2.2 Polarity**

#### **How present are the actors in security related questions within the region?**

Russia is the largest arctic nation by landmass, population, and military presence above the arctic circle (Department of Defence, 2019, p. 4). There is a high level of military activity in the region, especially from Russia's nuclear deterrence and retaliation capabilities (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016, p. 14). They own about 40 icebreakers and an extensive system of deepwater ports and other facilities in the region. Russia has gradually strengthened

its presence by creating new Arctic units and establishing new military bases (Department of Defence, 2019, p. 4).

China's interest in the Arctic is to influence as a rising global power, through partnerships with arctic countries and a presence in the region to pursue its economic interests and political influence. China does not currently have a permanent Arctic military presence (Department of Defence, 2019, pp. 4–5; Utrikesdepartementet, 2020, p. 23), but have doubled its investments, with a focus on critical mineral extraction, expanded its scientific or military applications to create a foothold in the Arctic (The White House, 2022, p. 6; Norwegian Intelligence Service, 2024, p. 15). The operational presence include China's ice breaking vessels and civilian research efforts, which could support a strengthened, future Chinese military presence in the Arctic Ocean (Department of Defence, 2019, p. 4; Norwegian Intelligence Service, 2021, p. 71). People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) vessels have also demonstrated the capability and intent to operate in and around the arctic region through exercises alongside the Russian navy over the past several years (Department of Defence, 2024, p. 3). Finland highlights that China's presence might cause tensions between the great powers in the region (Finnish Government, 2021, p. 18)

The US is building Arctic awareness and enhancing arctic operations, while also strengthening the rules-based-order in the arctic (Department of Defence, 2019, p. 2). They aim to deter threats to the US Homeland and its allies to secure interests in the Arctic. In order to do so, they increase presence through investments and training, exercising both civil and military capabilities. They are also keen to procure additional icebreakers (The White House, 2022, pp. 7–8), and plan to reach at least eight icebreakers with both civil and military capabilities (Department of Defence, 2024, p. 13). The US is pushing its Arctic allies to increase and strengthen their arctic military capabilities to act as a counterweight against Russia and China (Danish Defence Intelligence Service, 2020, p. 13). In fact, the military presence and activity of the Nordic countries has increased. Several states have reacted by increasing their contributions to security and defence in the north and by more pointed policy development. Sweden has for example strengthened its military capability to act in the northern parts (Utrikesdepartementet, 2020, p. 24).

### **What is the balance of power between the actors?**

Russia balances its military presence and enhanced capabilities. However, its dominance is challenged by the growing interests and activity of the United States and China. The US is a regional and global power. It has global perspectives on security issues and a military with global reach (Danish Defence Intelligence Service, 2020, p. 15,24). With its global military reach and strategic focus on balancing against Russia and China, the US has a strong role in the balance of power (Department of Defence, 2019, p. 2). The US raises concerns about Russia regarding its arctic capabilities. They have the potential to hold the US, as well as allies and partner territory, at risk. China also has the potential to change the dynamics and stability in the region (Department of Defence, 2024, p. 3). Through economic investments and strategic partnerships, China is beginning to influence the balance of power in the region (Norwegian Intelligence Service, 2024, p. 10,13).

The great powers have intensified their focus on the Arctic and developments in the region are characterized by increasingly tense relations between the US, China, and Russia. Emerging security games, involving Russia, the US, and China, shifts the military strategic balance and increases military activity (Danish Defence Intelligence Service, 2020, pp. 12–13). From a RSCT lens, the balance of power is multipolar between Russia with its upper hand and a growing presence of both the US and China.

#### 5.2.3 Social construction

### **What is the pattern of amity and enmity between actors?**

#### Amity

The Arctic countries want to ensure cooperation continues even though the arctic environment is changing (Danish Defence Intelligence Service, 2020, p. 13). They also want to cooperate with like-minded countries and the EU and act together about challenges and possibilities regarding the increased Chinese influence (Utrikesdepartementet, 2020, p. 23). Russia is reliant on China for financing energy export infrastructure in the Arctic. This has led to military cooperation between them. In 2022 and 2023, PLAN and Russian navy ships operated together in international waters off the coast of Alaska. The Russian foreign minister referred to the PRC as Russia's priority partner in the Arctic in April 2019 (Department of Defence, 2022, p. 142). China has made agreements to build strategic relations in the region. China is pursuing investments in infrastructure and natural resources, including in the territory of NATO allies (Department of Defence, 2024, p. 3). The US together with Canada is

enhancing its cooperation through NORAD. They will enhance exercises and existing capabilities to be able to detect and track certain threats from and through portions of the Arctic (Department of Defence, 2024, p. 11). Although development in the Arctic region is based on continued cooperation between the coastal states' stronger military presence creates unintended clashes and escalation (Danish Defence Intelligence Service, 2020, p. 13).

### Enmity

The growing interest of the arctic is creating opportunities for closer cooperation, but also means competing interests may emerge. In addition to being a cooperative partner to Russia, China is also a rival. Russia is thus aware of China's ambitions and growing interests in the Arctic. Russia seeks to restrict China's footprint in the Arctic, but at the same time depends on larger Chinese involvement. Even though Russia has to rely on China, they do not want China to have more power than Russia in the region (Danish Defence Intelligence Service, 2020, p. 18). Russia and China's cooperation have triggered the other states in the region to raise their security and military concerns in the region. Tensions between Russia and Canada are increasing. Russia has reportedly threatened to use force against vessels that fail to abide by Russian regulations (Department of Defence, 2019, p. 4). Relations between the US and Russia are very unstable due to Russia's military build-up. Russia's increased militarisation in the Arctic is perceived as a direct security challenge by the US and NATO. Overall, the relationship between Russia and the Western states is very unstable, in particular between Norway and Russia. Military cooperation between Norway and Russia has been suspended because of Russia's actions globally (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016, p. 14,29). For Russia, the break with the west unsettles its long-standing arctic policy, a central tenet of which has been cooperation with other arctic states in order to maintain low tensions and facilitate foreign investment. The preconditions for successful development of the region as a future resource base have come under heavy pressure (Devyatkin, 2023). The increased importance of the region has also led to more tensions between the great powers, growing competition and increased access brings safety and security challenges. China's intentions in the region are questioned by other powers, particularly the major infrastructure projects where China's commercial and strategic interests overlap (Udenrigsministeriet, 2022, p. 5).

#### 5.2.4 Anarchic structure

##### **What security threats or challenges exist in the region?**

The landscape of security and defence issues in the arctic have changed significantly in recent years because of shifts in international relations (Alþingi, 2021, p. 20). Canada highlights mainly the risk of an accessible Arctic and the militarisation that comes with it (Government of Canada, 2019, p. 74). Changes in the security policy situation have contributed to increasing strategic importance of the arctic region and exacerbated tensions. China's global goals and efforts to play a greater role in the arctic may create conflicts of interest, particularly between great powers, and heighten tensions in the region (Finnish Government, 2021, p. 18). China's efforts to build up arctic knowledge and capabilities for arctic operations will be a concerted effort between civilian and military actors, where civilian research results can also be used by the military (Danish Defence Intelligence Service, 2020, p. 20). Another security threat to the region could be the new shipping route between China and Europe via the North Pole, together with a commercial and economic purpose the route can also have a security-political dimension (Finnish Government, 2021, p. 18). China is attempting to gain a role in the arctic in ways that may undermine international rules and norms, and there is a risk that its economic behaviour globally may be repeated in the Arctic. China together with Russia are challenging the rules-based order in the arctic. Their growing alignment in the region is concerning. China and Russia pose discrete and different challenges in their respective theatres, but both are also pursuing activities and capabilities in the Arctic that may present risks to the region (Department of Defence, 2019, p. 6). A more complex set of actors entering the scene increases the risk of misunderstandings, accidents, and escalation of conflicts (Norwegian Intelligence Service, 2024, p. 10). These dynamics, as well as the growing cooperation between Russia and China, have the potential to alter the Arctic's stability and threat picture (Department of Defence, 2024, pp. 4–5).

### 5.3 A Comparative Description of the Regional Security Dynamics in the Arctic

#### 5.3.1 Boundary

##### **How do the actors define the regional boundary?**

During both of the time periods the region is being identified as the northern part of the pole circle with the eight arctic states. The outer boundary has remained stable over time. External penetration was identified as low during the first period, even though the Council accepted several non-arctic states. The non-arctic states accepted the international definition of the outer boundary without renegotiating their status. While in the second period, China is

challenging the defined boundaries to strengthen its influence by claiming themselves as “a near arctic state”. This is an indication of increased interregional security dynamics. The eight arctic states have also managed to keep a high degree of autonomy by controlling which states can be members of the Council. However, regional autonomy has also been challenged by China's claims. According to Buzan and Weaver, interregional security dynamics means the boundaries can be reshaped, which is clearer during the second period.

### **How do the actors perceive the region?**

There is a particular change in the perception of the boundary of the complex, where the arctic states were very open and optimistic about globalising the region and extending the boundaries to achieve an external transformation. The interregional security dynamics were primarily limited and the majority of the security related interaction occurred internally between the arctic states. This changed to thick interregional security dynamics because actors in the region saw the region as a way for power projection, which increased the likelihood of external transformation of the boundaries of the security complex. External penetration is intensifying with increasing global interests and military presence. Boundaries are beginning to blur between regional and global security dynamics, increasing the risk of an external transformation. The region's autonomy is threatened by potential “overlay”, but the Arctic states still retain some control through international legal regimes and national defence measures. The increasing security dynamics between global and regional actors signal an ongoing shift that could change the region's security dynamics.

#### **5.3.2 Polarity**

### **How present are the actors in security related questions within the region?**

The Arctic has undergone a clear internal transition of the power polarity. Russia had the biggest military presence and operational activity during the first timeframe, and remained dominated through the second period as well. However, several other actors have increased their presence in the region. The US and China increased their presence drastically. The Nordic countries also strengthened their presence during the second timeframe compared to the first period. A clear example is Sweden, who did not have any military presence before 2013 but did establish a presence during the later time period. The biggest change is that China, a non-arctic state, is present in the Arctic region between 2014 and onwards. China's involvement has introduced a new dimension of external penetration. As a result, the presence of the Arctic states has become more globalised and complex, with external actors (such as

China) engaging in security issues in new ways and a clearer polarity between Russia, the US, and China.

### **What is the balance of power between the actors?**

The pattern of polarity during the first timeframe can be described as unipolar, with Russia as the dominant actor, while the United States, Canada and the Nordic countries acted as secondary powers. The limited presence of the United States and Russia's strong military and economic grip contributed to a balance of power in which Russia had the upper hand. These dynamics changed and the balance of power evolved into a more multipolar one, with Russia still holding a strong upper hand, but with a growing presence of both the US and China. The US strengthened its military role, while China used economical means to increase its influence. The transformation was characterised by external penetration from global powers seeking influence. This shift is characterised by increased external penetration from China. The Nordic countries played an increasingly important role as balancing and supporting actors to the United States and NATO. External penetration has diminished the Arctic's traditional autonomy, linking its regional security dynamics to broader global rivalries. The Arctic is now a key site for power projection by Russia, the US, and China. This has led to a blurring of regional and global security boundaries. This introduces greater instability and a higher risk of confrontation. The Arctic's evolving security dynamics exemplify the external penetration mechanism in RSCT, where global rivalries increasingly shape the security agendas and alignments of regional actors. It is possible to describe the changes as internal because of the shift of balance of power together with more global powers in the area.

### 5.3.3 Social construction

#### **What is the pattern of amity and enmity between actors?**

The Arctic RSC went through a significant change between the two time periods, where it was primarily described as a cooperative region to a contested space. The region before 2013 was mostly characterised with cooperation, especially within the Arctic council and through bilateral agreements. The rise of external penetration from China and through its alignment with Russia, redefined amity and enmity patterns. During the first time period, the disputes were local with low-intensity, reflecting a stable security regime. Enmity intensified due to China-Russia tensions. The dispute between Canada and Russia about the northwest passage has increased due to Russian threats, while China and Russia are cooperating. Russia's threats have also created new enemies. External factors increasingly influenced the Arctic social

construction, linking it to border global power struggles and introducing new rivalries and alliances. The tensions have not only increased between the global powers in the region, it has also intensified between the smaller Nordic states and Russia. Since China's presence makes Russia more powerful, the weaker states have reacted. Norway and Russia's long cooperation have changed into rising tensions instead. China's influence has also led to increasing Chinese investments and agreements with the smaller arctic countries. Together with polarity, these two dimensions have undergone internal transformation described by the RSCT. New alliances and increased amount of conflict with an uncertain balance of power.

#### 5.3.4 Anarchic structure

##### **What security threats or challenges exist in the region?**

The first timeframe was dominated by a low conflict level and a strong regional cooperative will. The primary security challenges were about sovereignty, especially from Canada. Climate change and increased shipping are also concerning challenges from the eight Arctic states. There is a consensus that security related questions are supposed to be handled through diplomacy. This anarchic structure changed into an RSC with geopolitical tensions and more active actors. China and Russia's cooperation and China's increased economic presence have increased the security political challenges. The US, among other states, highlights this development. It symbolises a more complex environment compared to between 2001-2013. This change between the descriptions of the two different time periods of the Arctic RSC underscores a shift of how external actors can amplify tensions within an RSC. The increased economic and strategic importance of the Arctic region by primarily non-arctic states, but also from Arctic states, did not remove the anarchic structure, but created complex security dynamics, linking the region to global issues and creating new challenges. (See Table 2.)

**Table 2.** *An illustration of the security dynamics in the Arctic region. The table provides an overview of how the Arctic security dynamics differ and change over time.*

Dimension	Time period 1: 2001–2013	Time period 2: 2014–2024
<b>Boundary</b>	Clearly defined boundaries based on geographical and legal frameworks	Boundaries remain but increased likelihood of external transformation because of global connections
<b>Polarity</b>	Bipolar structure with Russia as the dominant actor with balancing actors	Multipolar structure with Russia, USA, and China emerged as key actors with Nordic countries as important supporting players
<b>Social construction</b>	Cooperative regime, low-intensity	Amity persisted, but was influenced. Enmity intensified to a contested space
<b>Anarchic structure</b>	A local anarchic structure with security dynamics mainly driven by geographical proximity and regional actors	External penetration introduced new complexities and linking regional dynamics to global rivalries

## 6. Conclusion

*The thesis employs a comparative descriptive method to analyse how China's strategic interests have influenced the Arctic's security dynamics. The study is focusing on two distinct periods: between 2001-2013, which represents the period prior to China's acceptance as an observer state in the Arctic Council; and between 2013-2024, which is after China's observer status. The analysis is grounded in Regional Security Complex Theory and explores four key dimensions: boundary, polarity, social construction, and anarchic structure.*

The analysis shows how the Arctic region changes between the two time periods over time. Descriptions of the Arctic region of the two time periods are very different from each other and show a possible change. Arctic borders have moved from being geographically and politically demarcated to becoming global points of interaction, challenging the former monopoly of Arctic states on the region's affairs. The outer boundary has not changed because of more observer states, but China's power and influence is blurring the lines of the boundary of the Arctic complex. The internal dynamics within the region differ the most between the two time periods. Russia is remaining as the most dominant and important player in the Arctic region through the time periods, but becomes dependent on actors outside the region, in particular China. China increased its presence in the region after being accepted as an observer state in the Arctic Council. The US changed its approach towards the Arctic region and increased its presence. The region went from being a unipolar/ bipolar region to a multipolar region where great power rivalries, directly connected to global power plays shaping security dynamics. The social construction in the Arctic differs from illustrating a peaceful and cooperative zone, to a region where conflicts and tensions between regional and global actors have become more prominent. China's and Russia's increased economic and military cooperation has created discomfort between the other Arctic states. Throughout the RSCT, China can be described as the main cause of disrupting the internal dynamics and worsened the relationship between the states within the region, in particular between the US and Russia. However, Russia independently has also been the cause of destabilising the relationship with the US but also with the other states in the region. The anarchic structure remains throughout the time periods, and there is no possibility that outside actors can remove it. However, the security dynamics has gone from being regionally limited to more complex and strongly integrated with global security dynamics. Through the lens of RSCT, it is

possible to describe the change as mostly internal, coming from both China and Russia. Their power is coming from different perspectives. China as an outsider imagines becoming an insider, while Russia strives to be the most powerful actor in the Arctic region. These two countries are perceived by the other actors as the most important threats and challenges. The external changes from the RSCT are less comprehensive, and it is mainly described as coming from China. China's claims of being a near-arctic state is challenging the legal definitions of the region and creates tensions. The region keeps its autonomy through the legal frameworks, however, and external transformation is described as likely.

Finally, the study describes how the security dynamics in the Arctic region have changed since China became an observer state in the Arctic Council in 2013. China's entry can be described as a catalyst for change, blurring the lines between regional and global security. While Russia retains a central role, the region's increased economic and strategic importance for external actors has created new tensions and risks of escalation. The study helps to show how RSCT can be applied to analyse regions influenced by global forces.

## 7. Discussion

*This chapter discusses the results of the study in a broader context, beyond the research question. The results are discussed in relation to previous research and how the research has filled the outlined gap. Finally, the chapter will finish with methodological considerations and further research.*

In this study, I have investigated how China's strategic interests in the Arctic region have influenced its security dynamics since China became an observer state in 2013. I have analysed this through the lens of Regional Security Complex Theory. To answer the research question: *How has the Arctic as a security region changed since China started showing strategic interest in the region?* I have in this study used a comparative description method with the purpose to use an established theory to explain two time periods in an empirical case to be able to analyse a change over time. The result describes that the Arctic regional complex has gone through changes between the two time periods. It is showing how external penetration has been described as one of the reasons for the different descriptions of the regions, both through cooperation but also how independent non-arctic states such as China have influenced the dynamics. Also, individual states within the Arctic RSC have had a major impact, such as Russia's military build-up in the Arctic. It is therefore not possible to rule out other explanations of the regional change, since multiple global events during the second time frame might influence the internal dynamics between the actors in the region. However, it is fair to say that the Arctic states descriptions of the essential structure of an Arctic complex through the eyes of regional security complex theory, relies heavily on China and its presence. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that China did not have any impact at all, because the analysis shows that it has. The regional changes have been described through RSCT as mainly internal, where polarity and social construction had changed the most throughout the periods. The region has not gone through an external state, which means the boundary has not changed. However, it is likely to do so in the future because several arctic states perceive the region as an opportunity for power projection which can trigger external transformation.

The increased presence of external actors and the militarisation of the Arctic is described by the theory to create misunderstandings and escalation. This increases the risk of the previously peaceful zone becoming a site of conflict. Even though China has not been able to change the outer boundary, removed the arctic structure or overlaid the region through

military force, the analysis shows how the majority of the Arctic states describe China's influence together with its observer status, as a significant reason for the changing dynamics in the Arctic. The analysis also shows that external penetrations have not been the only cause of external or internal changes in the Arctic RSCT. Russia's military build-up and how they changed from promoting cooperation with Arctic states, to focusing on outside actors is also a major factor.

While many studies focus on hard security issues such as militarisation, economic security as highlighted by Lanteigne (2020) and Kobzeva & Todorov (2023) are under-researched. This study is filling this gap. Even though China's presence mainly involves its economic power, with limited military capability in the Arctic region, it is still perceived by the Arctic states as a major threat to the Arctic security. This is showing signs of a link between economic and security implications, and how non-traditional elements such as economic security is one of the main elements identified in the analysis of the changing security dynamics in the Arctic region.

The use of RSCT shows how regional security complexes can be reshaped by global forces, but also how it can change internally between the actors inside the RSCT. Since several of the Arctic states highlight that China is a threat in the Arctic region with mainly economic strength, it has also been able to show how economic investments can be a security risk. It also shows a clear presence without a heavy military presence. Compared to Russia, which has been described as the major military power in the region, the RSCT has been useful to identify non-traditional elements to the security dimension. However, it has been hard to describe to what extent the Arctic region has gone through changes through external penetration from China. The theory is mainly relying on military dimensions such as military invasion or occupation of territory to be able to describe whether a region has been overlaid or not. This means that the theory says the region has not been overlaid by China, since the polarity in the region from China is mainly through economic leverage and not of military nature. On the other hand, the findings of the Arctic states strategy express China and its presence as a major security concern, even though their presence is limited to economic investments. Which means external states can be perceived as threats by being an economic power. The analysis can therefore also describe how outside actors can use other elements to gain a foothold in a region further away, which challenges the traditional view of overlay in a RSCT.

The theory has also allowed me to identify a detailed description of how external actors can influence the internal dynamics such as military build-ups, conflict or cooperation and the individual states changing national strategies in the region. This is filling a gap in current research where there is a lack of the dynamics that have changed since China became an observer state. This study also contributes to the research by only applying regional security complex theory to the arctic region, since it has rarely been done. The security dynamics in the region is described as very complex in this study, because external actors are involved in the region, especially such a big power as China. That is also the reason for why this region is unique and how this study contributes to the research. China is described as a major threat in the Arctic region, even though it is not an arctic state and does not have a geographical proximity to the other Arctic states or a vast military presence such as Russia.

Illustrating the uniqueness of the Arctic region, this study also complements previous research. Eiterjord among others claim that China has been able to territorialise through technology and science both physically and discursively. Continuing on this track, Pedersen (2024) highlights the symbolic role of foreign research stations in shaping perceptions of sovereignty and regional governance, underscoring the multifaceted nature of non-arctic actors' influence in the region. This is showing signs of how countries can penetrate a region or another country by using soft power mechanisms instead of hard power. There is also a connection between previous research of how China's investments, primarily in the Nordic smaller countries, aligns with the description of semi-voluntary acceptance of overlay in RSCT. The Nordic countries have accepted Chinese research stations on their territory. This has been argued by previous researchers as being used as dual civil-military use. This case study challenges the theory by introducing non-traditional elements such as economic security and environmental security, along the lines of military aspects. Which means an external power with the global capacity as China has, have the possibility to penetrate a region through soft power mechanism and have the chance to overlay a region through non-traditional elements. This can be a reason for the Arctic state's concern and the threat perception of China, even though they are not geographically close.

Globalisation and technological development are mechanisms countries can now use to influence a region. This study can therefore challenge previous research. Osthaugen argues that the large geographical distances in the Arctic makes it difficult to define the region as a

security region. However, this study is able to show how RSCT can describe how states far away from the region can influence a region without geographical proximity, and instead use other mechanisms such as science and economic investments. It also shows how RSCT can actually be applied to the Arctic region, but also be used to describe a change by comparing different time periods.

The new complex security threats that the Arctic states have described as a major issue to the security in the Arctic region might worsen and be even more complex and interconnected with global rivalries. If China continues developing its military capabilities in the Arctic, it might be a trigger of escalation and cause major security issues between the countries. The Chinese and Russian cooperation is relatively new but has already been described by the Arctic states as a concern. If their relationship gets even deeper, that might also continue to change the security dynamics.

Finally, this study shows that the Arctic countries have to adapt to the new security dynamics and create frameworks for how to handle economic security risks as well as military. With globalisation, science and technological development, comes other threats that are worth establishing risk management for. The countries also have to strengthen its regional autonomy where the connection to global rivalries is limited, in order to have control over the region. It is also necessary to reshape the legal frameworks of what is the arctic region and what is not. This is in order for non-arctic states to not be able to redefine it to its advantage and customise it to the current security landscape in the Arctic region.

## **7.1 Methodological considerations**

The choice of method has been able to describe in depth the security dynamics but also identify changes over time by comparing different timeframes of the case. However, the

method does not exclude other explanations of the outcome, therefore it is hard to assess whether an external actor is the only cause of change in a regional complex by using this method. This does not necessarily have to be an issue, and may rather contribute to opportunities for further research. What may also affect the results is the collection of sources. In this case, it has been hard to find Russian official documents about their Arctic strategy, which can show an imbalance in the result. Some countries had more official documents available than others, for example the US had both a national strategy but also its intelligence service provided in depth insight into the dynamics. It can therefore be an over-representation of American documents compared to other countries, which might have influenced the result.

## **7.2 Future research**

Future research could benefit from distinguishing China's external and internal influence with Russia's internal influence. This allows isolation of the both countries and compares their impact on security dynamics separate from each other. It could also be interesting to compare China's Arctic strategy alongside other non-arctic actors, such as Japan, South Korea, or the EU. This would help contextualise whether China's influence is unique or part of a broader trend of non-Arctic actors reshaping the region. There is also a need for further research on economic security and how it is a new important element countries can use to influence a certain area.

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