



Master thesis

Victor Boysen

Arctic providence?

A neoclassical realist study of America's renewed foreign policy interest in the Arctic

Supervisor: Uffe Jakobsen

Submitted on: 31 May 2020

Name of department: Department of Political Science

Author(s): Victor Boysen

Title and subtitle: Arctic providence? A neoclassical realist study of America's renewed foreign policy interest in the Arctic

Supervisor: Uffe Jakobsen

Submitted on: 31 May 2020

Number of characters: 191,991

Abstract

President Trump's proposal to purchase Greenland in the summer of 2019 caused a great political stir in Greenland, Denmark, and, to some degree, also within the United States (US) itself. Despite its unconventional character, though, the proposal reflected more than a sudden impulse. Greenland and the broader Arctic region has, since 2018, taken a prominent position on the political agenda in Washington; more so than in the preceding decades, at least, where the US approached the Arctic with considerable restraint and disengagement.

The ambition of this paper is to examine and, ultimately, explain this policy change. What has driven America's renewed interest in the Arctic, and why did it start to materialise in 2018? To do so, the paper conducts a process tracing case-study of America's contemporary Arctic policy informed by the neoclassical realist theory of international politics.

The paper finds that America's Arctic invigoration has been informed by two diverse balance-of-power logics vis-à-vis Russia and China. The US seeks to balance against (1) China across the world, including in the Arctic, because China's catch-up on America's primacy endangers the American-led world order as such, and (2) Russia specifically in the Arctic, because Russia's potent Arctic force posture poses a rising threat to America's regional and national security interests. The American policy change started to materialise in 2018 rather than sooner or later, because Russia, but also China's, Arctic presence started to accelerate at around this time, and because the international system by then presented clear evidence that Russia and China are prepared to disrupt vital American interests; in the Arctic and beyond. This prompted the US to replace its posture of Arctic disinclination with a more spirited and self-assertive approach.

These findings have largely been derived from public primary sources, including in particular American Arctic strategies and statements. The analysis would have been more robust, if more candid empirical data points such as interviews with critical American decision-makers had been accessible. The existing literature on the American policy change is scarce, though, and the paper might therefore still provide a relevant starting point for further discussion and research on the issue.

Acknowledgements

Composing this master thesis has been the most rewarding, educating, and exciting academic experience of my life. The process has been demanding at times, indeed, but also fun and intriguing. I hope this has left a positive mark on the thesis. I would like to thank Uffe Jakobsen for supervising the project and Anders Wivel for useful insights into Kenneth Waltz' momentous balance-of-power universe. I would also like to thank my thesis cluster at the University of Copenhagen, my teachers and fellow students at Columbia University, Andreas Østhagen, Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen, Mads Qvist Frederiksen, and Rebecca Pincus for inspiring conversations on the Arctic and American foreign policy. A warm thanks also to my parents, sister, and aunt for their unqualified encouragement throughout the thesis process and to my uncle Michael, who has nurtured my aspirations since forever and provided valuable support to both this and former academic endeavours. Last, and most importantly, a heartfelt thanks to my beloved girlfriend, who has put up with my month-long chatter about thesis-related issues and cheered me on in moments of self-doubt. All inaccuracies are, of course, entirely on me.

Contents

Abstract	1
Acknowledgements	2
1 Introduction	7
1.1 <i>Research question</i>	8
1.2 <i>Place in literature</i>	12
1.3 <i>Thesis structure</i>	13
2 Theory	14
2.1 <i>Neoclassical realist aptitude</i>	14
2.1.1 <i>Analytical procedure</i>	17
2.2 <i>Baseline assumptions</i>	17
2.2.1 <i>Explanatory logic</i>	18
2.2.2 <i>Analytical applicability</i>	20
2.3 <i>A neoclassical realist model</i>	21
2.3.1 <i>Structural modifiers</i>	22
2.3.2 <i>Leader images</i>	24
2.3.3 <i>Explanatory model</i>	26
2.4 <i>Analytical expectations</i>	27
3 Methods	29
3.1 <i>Variables and research design</i>	29
3.2 <i>A process tracing analysis</i>	30
3.2.1 <i>Methodological merits</i>	32
3.2.2 <i>Research criteria</i>	35
3.3 <i>Sources</i>	36
4 Analysis	39
4.1 <i>The US in the Arctic</i>	39
4.1.1 <i>Phase 1: Cold War fervour</i>	39

4.1.2 Phase 2: Post-Cold War disengagement.....	40
4.1.3 Phase 3: The recent invigoration.....	41
4.1.4 Summary: The Arctic (re)turn.....	42
4.2 Baseline analysis	43
4.2.1 The distribution of power.....	44
4.2.2 Systemic inducement	47
4.2.3 Balancing, but when?	49
4.2.4 Summary: Systemic findings.....	51
4.3 NCR: The systemic level.....	52
4.3.1 The Unipolar Moment	53
4.3.2 It's the geography, stupid.....	54
4.3.3 The Crimean juncture	60
4.3.4 Made in China 2025.....	61
4.3.5 Balancing becomes superior.....	63
4.3.6 Summary: Systemic modifications.....	65
4.4 NCR: Intra-state level	67
4.4.1 Climate disparity.....	67
4.4.2 The Jacksonian Turn	68
4.4.3 Ideational causality?	70
4.4.4 Summary: Intra-state equivocality	74
5 Discussion	75
5.1 NCR: Added value?	75
5.1.1 Systemic prominence	77
5.1.2 Intra-state innovation?	78
5.2 Methodological diligence	81
5.2.1 Measurement validity	81
5.2.2 Data sufficiency	82
5.2.3 Inferential potential.....	83
6 Conclusion	85
6.1 Why Arctic invigoration?.....	85
6.2 Limitations and blind spots	87
6.3 Contribution to the field	88

Bibliography	91
Appendix A	103
<i>A.1 Interview guide for interview with member of the American FPE.....</i>	<i>103</i>
<i>A.2 Transcript: Interview with anonymised member of the American FPE.....</i>	<i>104</i>
Appendix B	113
<i>B.1 GDP growth: the US and Russia, 1993-2018.....</i>	<i>113</i>
<i>B.2 Growth in military expenditures: the US and Russia, 1994-2018.</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>B.3 Total population: the US and Russia, 1993-2018.....</i>	<i>115</i>
<i>B.4 Total population: the US and China, 1993-2018.....</i>	<i>116</i>

List of illustrations

Figures

1.1	Definitions of the Arctic region	10
1.2	Demarcation of the Arctic	11
2.1	Waltzian model of state behaviour	20
2.2	Levels and procedure of analysis	25
2.3	Explanatory model	26
4.1	America's power advantage over Russia and China	44
4.2	US and China GDP growth	45
4.3	US and China growth in military expenditures	46
4.4	Baseline explanation of America's Arctic invigoration	49
4.5	America's power advantage over China	50
4.6	Russia's Arctic military infrastructure	57
4.7	NCR-explanation of America's Arctic invigoration	58
B.1	US and Russia GDP growth	113
B.2	US and Russia growth in military expenditures	114
B.3	US and Russia population growth	115
B.4	US and China population growth	116

Tables

4.1	America's clarity and strategic environment	66
-----	---	----

1 Introduction

“There is a lot of learning needed in Washington D.C. about what it means to be an Arctic nation. We are way behind the curve on this one”.

Civil servant for the U.S. Congress to Henriksen and Rahbek-Clemmensen (2017: 14).

The United States (US) has, in principle, been an Arctic nation since its purchase of Alaska from the Russian Empire in 1867 (O’Rourke et al. 2020: 20). In practice, though, and as reflected in the above quote, the American people¹ and its political representatives have struggled to appreciate its Arctic legacy (Huebert 2009: 2). Greenland was central to America’s national defense during the Cold War (Rasmussen 2016: 27). The Arctic has, in general, figured as an afterthought in the history of American foreign policy, however, and in contrast to other Arctic nations such as Russia and Canada, the region has not been central to the recurrent shaping of America’s national identity (Allen et al. 2017: 8; O’Rourke et al. 2020: 5). This has invited scholars of the Arctic to characterise the US as the ‘reluctant’ Arctic power (Huebert 2009: 2).

America’s Arctic disengagement seemed in particular to prevail in the post-Cold War period (Olesen 2018: 70). Here, the US profoundly downscaled its military presence in the region; several military sites were closed, for instance, and America’s icebreaker fleet was depleted (Huebert 2009: 19–20; Pincus 2013: 154). This might be about to change, however. Various speeches, strategies, and initiatives presented by the Trump administration suggest that the US has begun to approach the Arctic with rising fervour (Pincus 2019b).

The first notable testaments to this rising American interest in the Arctic materialised in 2018 (Conley 2019). In August 2018, for instance, the US 2nd Fleet, which is responsible for operations in the North Atlantic, was reactivated (US Navy 2019). In February 2019, the US Congress mandated funds for the first new American heavy icebreaker in 40 years (Uljua 2020). A few months later, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo gave an unusually aggressive speech at the

¹ “America” will refer to “the United States” in this paper. Accordingly, “the American people” refers to “the people of the United States” and so on for similar linguistic derivatives.

Arctic Council, which not only pointed to a more active, but also a more confrontational Arctic policy (State 2019). In the wake of Pompeo's speech, the US State Department announced plans to re-establish a permanent diplomatic mission in Nuuk (Naalakkersuisut 2019a).

To the broader public, President Trump's proposal to purchase Greenland last summer presumably presented the most conspicuous embodiment of America's revitalised Arctic interest (Baker and Haberman 2019). The proposal "provoked amusement", a foreign affairs commentator at The Guardian noted, "but it was mostly a nervous laughter", for what if President Trump was serious after all (Tisdall 2019)? And, more broadly, had the course now been set for a spiralling great power scramble for the Arctic after years of peaceful cooperation and 'Arctic exceptionalism' (Boulègue 2019: 4)?

1.1 Research question

The ambition of this paper is to illuminate, and ultimately explain, America's renewed interest in the Arctic. To do so, the paper will revolve around the following research question:

Why has the US exhibited a rising foreign policy interest in the Arctic since 2018, and why did the policy change start to materialise at this particular time?

The research question thereby pertains both to the principal driver(s) of the American policy change and to its particular timing. While these two aspects presumably are closely related, the analysis will carefully attempt to explain them both.

Inspired by Christopher Hill (2015: 4)'s definition of foreign policy as such, the paper defines American foreign policy as the sum of official external relations conducted by the US in international relations. Following from its research question, the paper will, in particular, focus on America's foreign policy toward the Arctic². I operationalise this as the sum of American actions, capabilities, statements, strategies, and relations in and with regards to the Arctic. This includes everything from the recurring Arctic strategies by the Department of Defense (DoD) and the US Coast Guard (USCG) over America's icebreaker fleet to the US-Greenlandic exchange

² I will use "America's Arctic policy" synonymously with "America's foreign policy toward the Arctic" henceforth.

student program (O'Rourke et al. 2020). To limit the scope of the analysis, and guided by its neoclassical realist underpinning, the paper will attribute some of these components more analytical significance than others, however. I will unfold this point in the methods chapter.

I will divide America's contemporary Arctic policy into three phases spanning (1) the Cold War, (2) the post-cold War period, and (3) the invigoration since 2018. The paper will centre on the two latter phases, including in particular the years leading up to the policy change in 2018. As outlined above, America's posture of Arctic reluctance was prominent in the post-Cold War phase, which arguably lasted until the recent invigoration. To elucidate how America's Arctic policy since 2018 represents an empirical turn, it is therefore relevant to relate this recent revitalised phase to the previous and more restrained post-Cold War phase. Since the American policy change materialised between these two phases, moreover, I assume that its principal driver(s) originate in post-Cold War societal changes; whether in America's systemic surroundings, within its domestic political structure, or elsewhere. As such, it seems well-grounded to focus on the time period from the end of the Cold War until today.

The spatial demarcation of the Arctic is contested in the Arctic literature (Knecht and Keil 2013: 179). Rather than the narrow Arctic Circle-definition, this paper will use the more extensive definition devised by the 2004 Arctic Human Development Report (Young and Einarsson 2004: 17–18). I prefer this definition, because it allows the analysis to investigate empirical conditions in Low Arctic areas that transcend the Arctic Circle-boundary. As visualised below, these areas include Southern Greenland, Iceland, and the maritime gap between Greenland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom (GIUK). As will be elaborated in the analysis, America's Arctic invigoration has, among other things, included a more prominent presence in these particular areas (Gramer 2020; Kyzer 2019). Recent American strategies have necessitated a more vigilant Arctic policy with reference to the strategic importance of these areas as well, including in particular the GIUK-gap (DoD 2019b: 3). It seems relevant, therefore, to utilise a spatial definition of the Arctic that allows these areas to feature in the analysis.

Figure 1.1

Definitions of the Arctic region. From the Arctic Centre (n.d.).

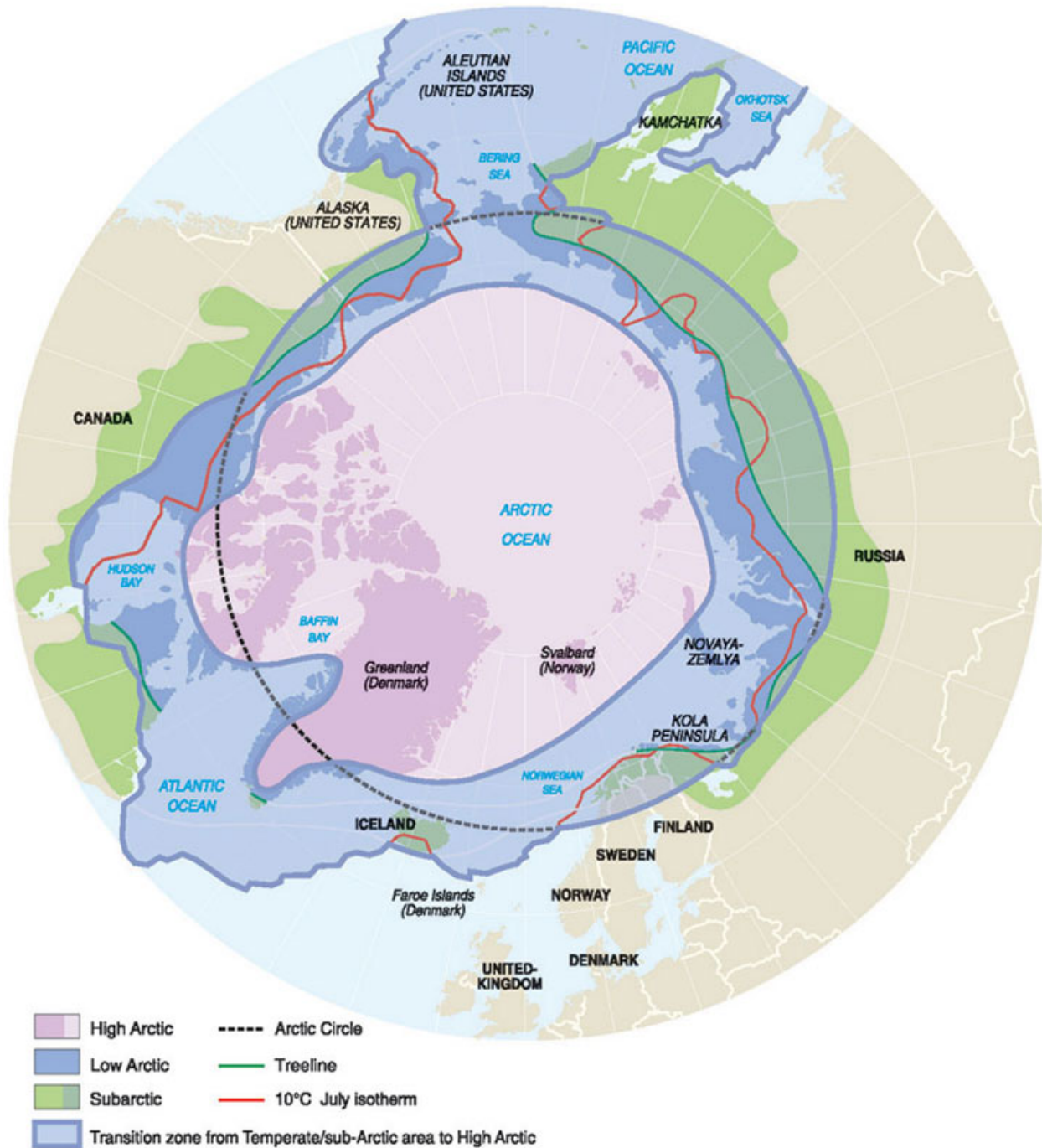


Figure 1.2

Demarcations of the Arctic by the Arctic Council Working Groups (Young & Einarsson 2004: 18). This paper rests on the AHDR-definition.



1.2 Place in literature

America's Arctic policy has been vividly examined by scholars of American foreign policy and of Arctic relations as such. Most research in the late 2000s and early 2010s focused on America's pronounced Arctic disinclination in the post-Cold War period and discussed whether President Bush's 2009 Arctic directive pointed to a more spirited American approach (Cohen 2010; Huebert 2009; Konyshev and Sergunin 2012; Pincus 2013). Some advanced that the directive embodied that the Arctic retains considerable military-strategic importance for Washington, and that the era of American reluctance was coming to an end (Knecht and Keil 2013: 189; Konyshev and Sergunin 2012: 37). Others argued that the American approach only had invigorated on paper (Huebert 2009: 5). In the following years, scholars increasingly came to recognise that President Obama did not translate Bush's directive into an invigorated American Arctic policy, however (Lidegaard 2016: 33; Pincus 2013: 150–51).

In recent years, much scholarly attention has turned to the rising capability-gap between the US and Russia-China, whose interest and investments in the Arctic have ascended throughout the last decade (Conley and Melino 2019; Hamre and Conley 2017; Pincus 2019a; Tingstad et al. 2018). Recent statements and initiatives from the Trump administration, including those outlined in the introducing section, have invited scholars to now examine the contours of a revitalised Arctic approach (Conley 2019; Østhagen 2019; Pincus 2019b; Rahbek-Clemmensen 2020; Sørensen 2019; Weitz 2019). And while some, especially neoliberal institutionalists, for years have highlighted that the Arctic institutional framework has managed to facilitate peaceful cooperation between the Arctic nations despite political tensions in other theatres, most, including in particular realist, scholars interpret America's renewed Arctic interest against the backdrop of mounting great power competition in the region (Huebert 2019; Knecht and Keil 2013: 185–86; Pezard et al. 2018; Sørensen 2019). By virtue of its neoclassical realist starting point, this paper places itself within this latter *realpolitik*-informed literature.

Scholars are yet to provide thorough investigations of the American policy change, though. This presumably relates to its recent manifestation; while the first testaments to the revitalised Arctic approach transpired in 2018, several did not materialise until last year. As such, this paper might help fill a notable gap in the existing literature on America's Arctic policy. I will evaluate the paper's practical potential to do so in the methods and discussion chapters.

1.3 Thesis structure

The paper is divided into six chapters, this one included. In the forthcoming theory chapter, I will outline how and why I employ the neoclassical realist research paradigm to examine the research question. To do so, I will explicate why this framework is particularly well-suited to illuminate America's Arctic invigoration and specify which particular tools in the neoclassical realist toolbox I will use how. I will also introduce Kenneth Waltz' balance-of-power theory, which will inform the structural baseline in my neoclassical realist framework.

In chapter 3 on methods, I will present the process tracing case-study design of the analysis and discuss its merits vis-à-vis other methodological procedures. The context-specific nature of neoclassical realism makes it more compatible with qualitative than statistical research designs (Ripsman et al. 2016: 108–9). My preference for a process tracing-informed case-study should be interpreted against this backdrop and in light of my research question, which calls for an in-depth study of the case-specific circumstances that have shaped America's recent Arctic policy.

My analysis will follow in chapter 4. This chapter falls in three sections. First, I will document the testaments to America's rising Arctic interest since 2018 and demarcate this revitalised approach from America's Arctic policy during and, in particular, after the Cold War. I will then seek to explain the recent invigoration; first through a parsimonious Waltzian baseline analysis and then, if necessary, by introducing the neoclassical realist nuances at the systemic and domestic levels. This analytical procedure will have been specified in the theory chapter.

I will discuss the results of the analysis in chapter 5. Here, I will first discuss how and why the theoretical innovations of neoclassical realism allowed for a more convincing explanation of the research question than the one suggested by its Waltzian baseline. I will then evaluate the validity and inferential potential of my study. What insights can be derived from the analysis given, for instance, its intensive case-study design and confined access to candid data points?

Finally, in chapter 6, I will conclude on my inquiry and outline potential avenues for future research on the issue.

2 Theory

Several International Relations (IR-)theories could inform an analysis on America's renewed interest in the Arctic: from rationalist and materialistic systemic-level approaches over ideational bottom-up theories to critical post-positivist perspectives and everything in-between (Smith 2013: 4–5). I will begin this theory chapter by explicating why I find the neoclassical realist research program particularly well-suited to illuminate the research question of this paper. Hereafter, I will introduce Kenneth Waltz' balance-of-power theory, which will inform the structural baseline in my neoclassical realist framework, and then specify what particular neoclassical realist nuances at the systemic and domestic levels I will introduce in the analysis. Finally, and following from this, I will present the explanatory model which will guide the proceedings of my analysis and outline the analytical expectations of the neoclassical realist framework and its Waltzian baseline.

2.1 Neoclassical realist aptitude

Neoclassical realist scholars are united by an overall aspiration to integrate unit-level and psychological factors into the neorealist environment-based and materialistic analysis of international politics (Rose 1998: 146). The neoclassical realist framework utilised in this paper will primarily be based on the seminal work of Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, including not least their *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (2016). This publication will, aside from guiding the theoretical foundation of the paper, inform its methodological ambition to illuminate the research question through a process tracing-informed case-study (Ripsman et al. 2016: 131–32). The analytical agendas of other neoclassical realist scholars will also be encompassed, including in particular Mouritzen and Wivel's *Explaining Foreign Policy: International Diplomacy and the Russo-Georgian War* (2012), which provides useful hands-on inspiration on how a neoclassical realist analysis can be conducted in practice.

Neoclassical realism has been preferred to other IR-theories, because its multi-dimensional framework provides a thorough lens through which America's Arctic conduct can be examined and understood (Taliaferro et al. 2009: 21). Neoclassical realism starts from the realpolitik assumptions of Waltzian neorealism, but incorporates central insights from innenpolitik and constructivist theories (Ripsman et al. 2016: 139). As such, it strives to bridge the persistent

agency-structure and material-ideational divides in the IR-literature (Wivel 2017: 18). Rather than giving exclusive attention to top-down pressure from America's external environment or bottom-up forces within the American political system, a neoclassical realist analysis will be able to identify developments in both arenas and relate these to the recent variance in America's Arctic policy (Lobell 2009: 43). Also, neoclassical realism will allow for an analysis that includes materialistic variables such as the relative distribution of capabilities between the US, Russia, and China as well as ideational factors such as the political beliefs of central American decision-makers (Ripsman et al. 2016: 158). This makes neoclassical realism a compelling framework that can inject great explanatory power into the analysis and, presumably, generate a more comprehensive answer to the research question than more unconditional theories would be able to (Schweller 1997: 927).

This is not to say that other IR-theories are unfit to illuminate America's Arctic invigoration whatsoever. For instance, a Moravcsik-inspired analysis would be well-suited to identify relevant dynamics at the domestic explanatory level, including that central societal groups and individuals such as US Senators Lisa Murkowski and Angus King have exerted a persistent pressure on recurrent American administrations to pursue a more spirited Arctic policy (Moravcsik 1997: 515–18; King 2019). This might indeed help explain the recent policy change, yet various American Arctic strategies indicate that Russia and China's increasingly self-assertive conduct across the world has been central to America's renewed interest in the region as well (DoD 2019b; USCG 2019). A bottom-up perspective would be largely unable to account for such environment-based conditions, and its explanatory power would thus be confined.

A top-down IR-framework would be better able to capture relevant developments at the systemic explanatory level. For instance, one might expect an analysis informed by Wendtian constructivism to deduce that the interaction patterns between the US and Russia since the 2014 Crimean crisis have institutionalised an increasingly conflictual US-Russian identity and, as such, militarised America's perception of Russia's intentions in the Arctic (Wendt 1992: 406–7). A such perspective would largely disregard domestic politics in its explanation of the research question, however. This seems ill-advised, since we cannot *a priori* reject the potential salience of forces within America's political structure on its Arctic conduct. President Trump's unconventional proposal to purchase Greenland last summer suggests, for instance, that the

particularities of the American foreign policy executive (FPE) might indeed have informed the style and shape of the American policy change (Baker and Haberman 2019; State 2019).

The explanatory potential of the neoclassical realist framework is, as outlined above, not restrained by these cross-cutting empirical impulses. I therefore believe that a neoclassical realist analysis holds great promise in providing a convincing explanation of my research question and, as such, in contributing to the existing literature on America's Arctic policy. Since scholars are yet to thoroughly investigate the policy change, most studies, regardless of their theoretical starting point, could expand our current knowledge of its features (Pincus 2019b). Thanks to its sophisticated understanding of the interplay between materialistic and ideational forces at the systemic and domestic levels, neoclassical realism seems particularly well-suited to generate new and valuable insights on the issue, however (Rose 1998: 150–51).

This analytical open-mindedness exposes neoclassical realism to a critique of theoretical eclecticism and ad-hoc inclusion of various unrelated intervening variables, which could apply to this paper as well (Walt 2002: 211). While legitimate, this critique is not impossible to mitigate. Rather than an eclectic theory, I hold that neoclassical realism is a realist theory which privileges realist premises and variables (Ripsman et al. 2016: 164). It integrates factors from other paradigms; but in a systematic way that builds upon central insights from structural and classical realism (Rose 1998: 146). I will seek to offset the ad-hoc criticism, moreover, by formulating a well-defined set of intervening variables prior to the analysis and qualify their expected impact on America's Arctic policy (Ripsman et al. 2016: 60). The ad-hoc critics do point to a valid challenge of using a wide-embracing analytical framework, but the theoretical development within neoclassical realism from the initial Type I and II conceptions to the more recent and systematic Type III framework should, in general, assuage their concern (ibid.: 31).

It is also worth mentioning that neoclassical realism invites the researcher to look for simple answers at the systemic level before engaging in more intricate inquiries at the domestic level (Taliaferro et al. 2009: 19). The cardinal neoclassical realist claim to analytical relevance is that states do not respond as mechanically to the constraints and opportunities produced by the international system as proposed by structural realism, since unit-level variables are able to condition how states translate these stimuli into external conduct in practice (Lobell 2009: 44). While the neoclassical realist framework thereby allows for a considerable degree of contextual

sensitivity, it does so only in light of explanatory needs (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 28). The analysis presented in this paper does not have to proceed along multi-dimensional lines at all costs, therefore, which is compelling from a research economy perspective (ibid.: 26).

2.1.1 Analytical procedure

The analysis will, following from the above, at first explore to what degree a parsimonious structural realist analysis is able to explain America's Arctic invigoration (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 25). Waltz' balance-of-power theory will inform this structural baseline. Should the Waltzian baseline fail to provide a convincing explanation of the research question, its parsimonious assumptions will be relaxed to make room for the neoclassical realist nuances at the systemic and domestic levels (Ripsman et al. 2016: 25, 40). This analytical procedure reflects a Keohane-inspired approach to parsimony as a question of stages rather than of either-or (Rose 1998: 166). The value added of the neoclassical realist framework, then, will depend on its ability to add explanatory power to the analysis and provide a more compelling answer to the research question than its Waltzian baseline is able to (Ripsman et al. 2016: 114).

While this procedure includes an element of theory testing, the principal ambition of the paper is to "consume" the neoclassical realist framework to provide as convincing an explanation to the research question as possible (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 22). The Waltzian baseline will, in effect, operate as the systemic-level independent variable in this neoclassical realist analysis (Ripsman et al. 2016: 114). Rather than two autonomous and competing theories, therefore, I regard neoclassical realism as the chief theoretical framework of the analysis in which Waltz' balance-of-power theory fills an integral baseline function (ibid.: 114).

2.2 Baseline assumptions

The central argument of structural realism is that the anarchic and conflictual nature of the international system is pushing states to adopt security and, ultimately, survival as their principal foreign policy objective (Wivel 2017: 11). Structural realists offer at least two conflicting logics on how states try to reach this objective (ibid.: 11). Defensive realists advance that states predominantly pursue restrained behaviour, since this is the safest path to security in the anarchic self-help system (Lobell 2010: 3). Power expansion is unproductive as it risks provoking security dilemmas and pre-emptive wars (Waltz 1979: 126). States seek to balance

rather than maximise power, therefore (ibid.: 127). Offensive realists, in contrast, believe that states do seek to maximise power, since powerful states are also more secure (Wivel 2017: 13). As John Mearsheimer noted in his renowned “Better to Be Godzilla than Bambi”-article, the “mightier a state is, the less likely it is that another state will attack it” (Mearsheimer 2005: 47).

The structural baseline of this paper will be derived from Waltz’ balance-of-power theory, which largely came to inform the defensive school of realist thought (Lobell 2010: 11). This decision is, following from the above, by no means trivial, since a Waltzian baseline comes with a particular set of analytical expectations that differ from those of other structural realists (Wivel 2017: 12). I will return to the particular implications of using a Waltzian baseline vis-à-vis other structural realist frameworks when discussing my analytical findings in chapter 5.

Waltz has been preferred to other structural realists for two reasons. First, his theoretical assumptions are rather parsimonious and thus resource-effective to establish (Lobell 2010: 13). This is encouraging from a research economy point-of-view. Second, Waltz has informed the implicit or explicit baseline of several other neoclassical realist inquiries (Ripsman et al. 2016: 117). By utilising a Waltzian baseline as well, this paper is therefore able to draw practical and theoretical inspiration from various existing neoclassical realist studies, including for instance Mouritzen and Wivel (2012)’s before-mentioned study on the Russo-Georgian war.

2.2.1 Explanatory logic

Rather than explaining “why state X made a certain move last Tuesday”, Waltz strives to investigate systemic outcomes over time (Waltz 1979: 121–22). His theory subsequently begins with assumptions about the international system (Taliaferro 2009: 206). A system is composed of two principal elements: a structure and a set of units that interact within this structure (Waltz 1979: 79). Nation states are the dominant units in the current post-Westphalian international system, and its structure has three principal characteristics or ‘tiers’ (ibid.: 91, 100–101). First, in contrast to a domestic political system, the international structure is anarchic; “none is entitled to command; none is required to obey” (ibid.: 88). This precipitates a self-help environment in which states must take care of themselves (ibid.: 109). Informed by the above, and by Mouritzen and Wivel (2012: 29), this paper defines anarchy as the lack of a world authority with monopoly on the legitimate use of force.

Second, since states have to look out for themselves, they must remain functionally undifferentiated (Waltz 1979: 97). These two characteristics of the international system are constant (ibid.: 100-101). The units within the system, then, are distinguished only by their greater or lesser capacity to perform the same core set of tasks (ibid.: 97). This third tier, i.e. the relative distribution of capabilities among states, constitutes the principal causal variable in Waltz' balance-of-power theory (Ripsman et al. 2016: 38). The structure acts as a constraining and disposing force on state behaviour, and states are expected to respond to changes in the relative distribution of power (Waltz 1979: 69, 97). These changes are chiefly propelled by differential military and economic growth rates, which then constitute the principal driving force of international politics (Ripsman et al. 2016: 17).

Waltz operationalises the relative distribution of power in terms of polarity, which follows from the number of great powers in the international system (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 31). Waltz reviews several indicators for aggregate power to demarcate a great from a small power, including military strength, population and territory size, natural resource endowments, and economic capability (Waltz 1979: 131). A state must excel on all these indicators to constitute a great power (ibid.: 131). If a state manages to achieve overwhelming relative power vis-à-vis all other states, and becomes the world hegemon, it will strive to maintain an asymmetric distribution of power and keep the world 'off balance', since this will maximise its security (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 32). For instance, if high-growth Contender X presents a mounting challenge to the primacy of medium-growth Hegemon Y, we would expect Hegemon Y to balance against Contender X in a largely automated manner (Ripsman et al. 2016: 17). Hegemon Y could do so either by increasing its own capabilities (internal balancing) or by entering/enhancing a military alliance (external balancing) (Wohlforth 2002: 100).

Power politics do not necessarily translate into military politics, however (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 31). States may use "economic means for military and political ends; and military and political means for the achievement of economic interests" (Waltz 1979: 94). While balancing might centre on military means, therefore, it could also include diplomatic and economic initiatives aimed at strengthening one's relative power position in the system (Wivel 2017: 12).

States that disregard the systemic imperative to balance power risk being defeated and, ultimately, eliminated (Waltz 1979: 118). The international system consequently socialises

states over time to emulate the successful balancing behaviour of other states regardless of unit-level particularities (ibid.: 128). Domestic politics will, as such, be disregarded in the Waltzian baseline analysis (Ripsman 2009: 175). Waltz in fact denounces ‘reductionist’ theories that “infer the condition of international politics from the internal composition of states” (Waltz 1979: 64). While neoclassical realism does locate causal properties at both the structural and domestic levels, this paper rejects that the research paradigm succumbs to this reductionist critique per se (Taliaferro et al. 2009: 22). I will elaborate this in the forthcoming section 2.3.

2.2.2 Analytical applicability

Waltz’ defiance to integrate first- and second-image factors into his framework makes it largely incapable of accounting for the specificities of America’s Arctic invigoration (Wivel 2017: 11). Rather than particular foreign policies, his structural concepts are contrived to “explain some big, important, and enduring patterns” in the international system (Waltz 1979: 70). One can still derive a generic externally driven model of state behaviour from his principal premises, however, which would look like the following (Ripsman et al. 2016: 18–19):

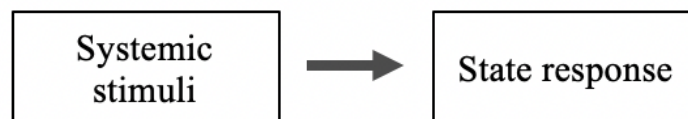


Figure 2.1

A Waltzian model of state behaviour

Waltz has insistently rejected the rational actor assumption (Mearsheimer 2009: 241). We cannot infer from the above model, therefore, how the pressures and possibilities generated by the current features of the international system will translate into America’s actual behaviour in the Arctic (Waltz 1979: 122). What Waltz’ framework *can* help illuminate is the systemic stimuli that the US must react to and from that describe “the range of likely outcomes of the actions and interactions of states” in the Arctic (ibid.: 71). I will return to this point in section 2.5.

2.3 A neoclassical realist model

Neoclassical realism agrees with several of Waltz' premises (Taliaferro et al. 2009: 19). The anarchic feature of the international system compels states to pursue similar patterns of self-help behaviour to secure themselves (ibid.: 25). States do this by balancing against stronger, or rising, powers through internal or external means (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 31). As such, neoclassical realism shares with Waltzian neorealism an environment-based ontology that privileges the relative distribution of power between the world's great powers as the predominant independent variable in the analysis of state behaviour (ibid.: 29).

Russia and China are considered the most willing and capable challengers of the American-led world order by various IR-scholars (Bekkevold 2019; Kanet 2018; Krickovic 2017; Walt 2018: 32). This contention is, first of all, based on Russia and China's notable military capabilities and increasingly self-assertive display on the global stage (Brooks and Wohlforth 2016: 17–18). Russia and China will, accordingly, be regarded as the most defining great powers of the international system alongside the US in this paper. As such, the relative distribution of power between these three states will constitute the principal independent variable; both in the Waltzian baseline analysis, and when the neoclassical realist nuances are introduced.

The neoclassical realist refinement of Waltzian neorealism is twofold. First, neoclassical realism declares that a more intricate understanding of the international system than the one conceived by Waltz' balance-of-power theory is required to forcefully explain state behaviour (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 25). This has given rise to the introduction of structural modifiers such as geography and technology, which can amplify or assuage the systemic incentive to balance power (Ripsman et al. 2016: 39). This is not a unique neoclassical realist innovation, however; structural modifiers are included in several structural realist frameworks as well, including for instance Stephen Walt's balance-of-threat theory (Lobell 2010: 8, 14).

The second refinement is therefore the most central and unique theoretical innovation in the neoclassical realist program: intervening variables at the domestic level are able to condition if, when, and how states translate systemic stimuli into external behaviour (Ripsman 2009: 176). For instance, state leaders might fail to decode the systemic imperative to balance power, or they might be unable to extract the domestic resources required to pursue balancing because of strong opposition in the domestic political arena (Ripsman et al. 2016: 33).

Waltz acknowledges that his balance-of-power theory is unable to predict how states in effect will respond to systemic stimuli (Ripsman et al. 2016: 39). To do so, “a theory would have to show how the different internal structures of states affect their external politics and actions”, and Waltz refuses to do so out of reductionist concerns (Waltz 1979: 122–23). Neoclassical realists object to this analytical inhibition, since domestic and systemic forces are perceived to interact to produce state behaviour (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 40). Thus, we can only truly explain international politics if we marry the insights of structural realism to a more contextual approach that appreciates the importance of domestic politics (Ripsman et al. 2016: 88).

Neoclassical realism formulates a such framework without falling prey to Waltz’ reductionist critique (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 41). Rather than inferring states’ behaviour from their internal attributes, the neoclassical realist agenda invites the researcher to examine when and how these internal attributes shape states’ responses to the behavioural incentives produced by anarchy and the relative distribution of power (Taliaferro et al. 2009: 21). While state action first and foremost is informed by the systemic imperative to balance power, in other words, domestic forces are often able to impact its practical style and timing (ibid.: 37).

2.3.1 Structural modifiers

To harness the neoclassical realist merits as efficaciously as possible, the analysis will build on its insights at both the systemic and domestic levels. Out of resource concerns, and to narrow its scope, the analysis will focus only on a few intervening forces, though: the degree of clarity and the nature of America’s strategic environment as structural modifiers and the political beliefs of the American FPE as an intra-state intervening variable (Ripsman et al. 2016: 56, 59).

I operationalise clarity as the degree to which (1) threats are readily discernible to the American FPE and (2) the optimal policy option stands out (Ripsman et al. 2016: 46). First, for a threat to be discernible, an adversary must express clear intentions to challenge vital American interests, i.e. its hegemony and security (ibid.: 46). The adversary must also possess the capabilities to do so in practice (ibid.: 46). Second, while the international system rewards some behaviours and punishes others, it does not always provide clear guidance on the optimal policy option in a given situation (ibid.: 48). For instance, while China has experienced higher economic growth than the US for several years and thus represents a rising threat to America’s primacy, there has still been room for institutionalist doves and containing hawks to debate the

optimal response within the American political structure (Walt 2018: 25). With more clarity, the US is expected to honour the systemic incentive to balance power (Ripsman et al. 2016: 49). With less clarity, the US is more inclined to pursue a unique solution in possible disregard for the systemic stimuli based on its unit-level particularities (ibid.: 50).

While clarity pertains to the transparency of the information presented to the American FPE, the nature of America's strategic environment relates to the contents of this information (Ripsman et al. 2016: 52). The more imminent a threat, the more restrictive is America's strategic environment and vice versa (ibid.: 52). I operationalise imminence as a function of the relative power and geographic proximity of the adversary (ibid.: 53). Since power is difficult to project over long distances, a nearby threat is more imminent than a distant threat all else being equal (Wohlforth 2002: 102). This feature is less determinant for a world hegemon like the US, whose sphere of interest is global for all practical purposes (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 39). Still, I expect the US to be more responsive to foreign balancing-like endeavours in the Arctic due to its geographic proximity to American territory than in more distant theatres such as the South China Sea (Ripsman et al. 2016: 53).

As such, geopolitics will be carefully included in the analysis. This sets the neoclassical realist nuances further apart from its Waltzian baseline, since geopolitics is omitted from the latter. Waltz's balance-of-power theory is, as explained above, systemic in nature, and the geographic proximity of a rising contender is therefore not expected to condition America's incentive to balance against this contender (Lobell 2010: 14). In contrast to other neoclassical realist frameworks, such as the one provided by Mouritzen and Wivel (2012: 33–39), geopolitics will be analytically located at the systemic rather than at the inter-state level in this paper.

The more restrictive America's strategic environment, the likelier is the American FPE to honour its balancing imperative, since other foreign policy options are then less able to redress the incoming threat (Ripsman et al. 2016: 52). A more permissive strategic environment leaves a larger American external action space, by contrast, which makes more room for ideology and other domestic-political 'luxury' to shape America's conduct on the global stage (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 41).

2.3.2 Leader images

The American FPE will, as reflected above, take a significant role when the neoclassical realist nuances are introduced in the analysis. The American FPE is a Janus-faced configuration that exists at the intersection of the international system and its domestic political structure (Taliaferro et al. 2009: 43). It largely has a monopoly on intelligence about foreign countries and, as such, constitutes a critical actor for how the US translates incoming stimuli into external behaviour (Hermann and Hagan 1998: 128). If the American FPE misinterprets the systemic pressures, for instance, it might promote a foreign policy that deviates from Waltz' balancing expectations (Ripsman et al. 2016: 60). The cognitive capacity of the American FPE is limited by its human credentials, and so it might simply misunderstand the intentions of a contender (Jervis 1976: 215). Misperceptions can also result from a systematic bias in the political images of the FPE, however (Ripsman et al. 2016: 20). A hawkishly inclined American FPE might perceive the actions of an adversary through a more confrontational lens than a more dovish FPE, for instance (McDermott 2002: 46). As such, the political beliefs of the American FPE might have exerted notable influence on America's Arctic conduct in recent time.

I have preferred to focus on leader images before other domestic-level intervening variables for two reasons. First, and most importantly, several recent Arctic statements and speeches suggest that the particularities of the American FPE are worth looking into when trying to understand America's renewed Arctic interest. This includes, in particular, President Trump's proposal to purchase Greenland and Mike Pompeo's Rovaniemi speech (Conley 2019). The self-assertive and unconventional character of these manifestations greatly contrasts the more restrained and cooperative tone reflected in similar proposals and speeches by the Obama FPE (Humpert 2019c). Second, and following from this, existing research on the issue, however scarce, indicates that the nationalist-hawkish credentials of the Trump administration might have catapulted the confrontational style that has become increasingly prevalent in America's approach to the Arctic (Pincus 2019b). It seems relevant, therefore, to investigate whether the ideological heritage of the Trump FPE, and the ideational differences between the Trump and Obama FPEs, can help explain the recent policy change, including in particular its timing.

I operationalise leader images as the political beliefs and values of the American FPE (Hermann and Hagan 1998: 126). State leaders, like all other individuals, subconsciously utilise a range of different heuristic strategies to reduce complex tasks into simpler mental procedures

(McDermott 2002: 30–31). One such strategy is to evaluate new information against the backdrop of one's pre-existing understanding of the world (ibid.: 35). This understanding precipitates a distinctive set of beliefs and values, which are invoked in the foreign policy decision-making process (ibid.: 35). Like other top-down IR-scholars, Waltz marginalises the importance of these knowledge structures in the analysis of international politics (Byman and Pollack 2001: 109). This is unfortunate, this paper contends, since the belief systems of the American FPE might hold decisive influence on its perceptions of incoming stimuli and, as such, on America's foreign policy in the Arctic and beyond (Hermann and Hagan 1998: 128).

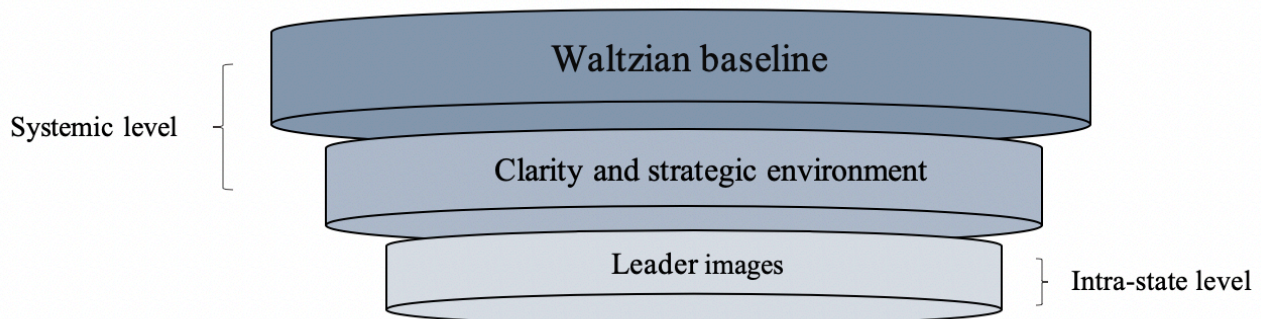


Figure 2.2

Levels and procedure of analysis

To limit its scope, the analysis will centre on the political beliefs of the American president. The analysis will also include statements and speeches by other senior members of the FPE, including in particular the secretary of state and the US ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark. I will assume that these reflect the overall beliefs of the president, however, and regard them as manifestations of the official position of the incumbent FPE as such. Out of resource concerns, I will not include the past experiences and personal attributes of the American FPE in the leader image-variable (Hermann and Hagan 1998: 126–27). Doing so might have generated valuable insights, however, considering for instance the apparent convergence between President Trump's past experiences from the real estate industry and his proposal to purchase Greenland, which, in his own words, would be “essentially a large real

estate deal” (Pengelly 2019). I will return to this point when presenting avenues for future research on the issue in the concluding chapter.

Neoclassical realism would expect the political beliefs of the American FPE to be most influential on short-term foreign policy making, because other societal actors are better able to help define and devise the policy solutions as time increases (Ripsman et al. 2016: 91). One might argue that America’s renewed interest in the Arctic reflects a longer-term shift from a strategy of Arctic reluctance to one of more spirited engagement. Under such conditions, unit-level variables better suited for medium-to-long term time frames, such as the character of America’s political institutions and its state-society relations, should be privileged (ibid.: 92-93). As will be elaborated in the analysis, however, this paper contends that America’s Arctic invigoration has materialised within the last two years in a rather prompt way that deviates significantly from the Arctic approach pursued by the Obama FPE. Rather than engulfed by other societal forces, therefore, the ideational differences between the Trump and Obama FPEs might indeed have shaped this short or short-to-medium term policy change (ibid.: 83).

2.3.3 Explanatory model

Informed by the framework introduced by Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016: 34), and following from the assumptions and decisions introduced above, the analysis of America’s renewed interest in the Arctic presented in this paper will revolve around the following model:

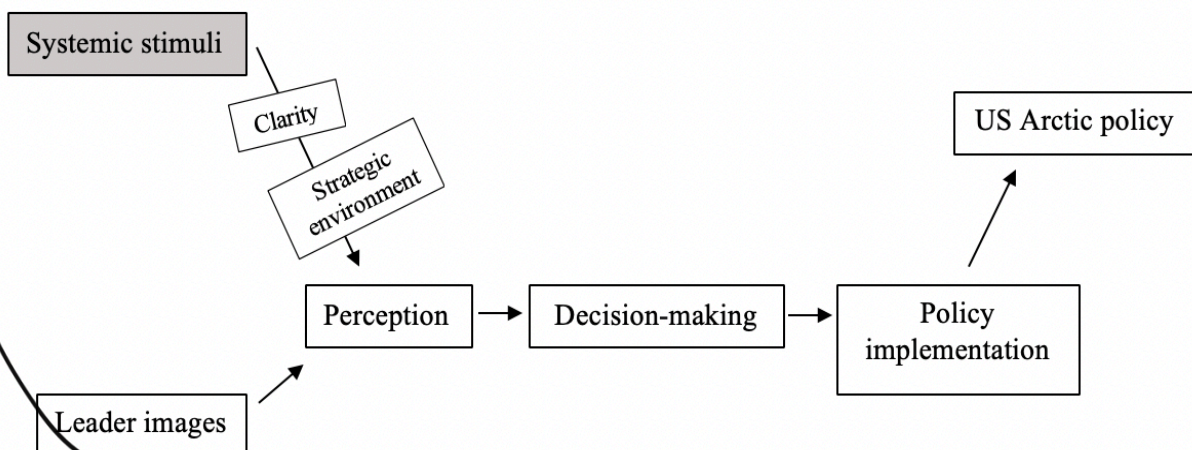


Figure 2.3

A neoclassical realist model of America’s foreign policy in the Arctic

2.4 Analytical expectations

The Waltzian baseline analysis will centre on the systemic conditions under which the US has to navigate in the Arctic (Waltz 1979: 99). How does the US perform on the indicators for aggregate power compared to Russia and China? And what do the relative growth rates on these indicators look like? These conditions impose certain constraints and opportunities on America's behaviour in the Arctic and beyond (ibid.: 69). And while Waltz would be unwilling to prescribe "just how, and how effectively" the US will respond to these stimuli, they delimit the range of expected American responses (ibid.: 71). If the empirical evidence suggests that Russia and China present a rising threat to America's hegemony, for instance, the baseline institutes a probabilistic expectation that the US will seek to balance against Russia and China's power across the global stage, including in the Arctic (Waltz 2000: 28).

The US could do so through military, political, and economic internal or external means or through a combination of all the above (Waltz 1979: 118). While it would not transcend Waltz' framework if the US disregarded these stimuli, doing so would be counterintuitive from a Waltzian viewpoint (ibid.: 122). The system induces the US to maintain its power advantage over Russia and China, since this is the most effective means to safeguard American security. All else being equal, the Waltzian baseline therefore expects America's Arctic invigoration to reflect balancing against Russia and/or China's rising power in the international system.

The neoclassical realist analysis shares this principal behavioural expectation (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 28). It relaxes Waltz' purported causality, however, by propounding that America's systemic stimuli are filtered through intervening forces at the systemic and domestic levels (Rose 1998: 146). More information than the distribution of power and the relative growth rates between the US, Russia, and China is required to qualify the causal mechanism that links America's systemic stimuli to its behaviour in the Arctic, therefore (ibid.: 166).

Sound clarity and a restrictive strategic environment is expected to reinforce America's incentive to balance against Russia and China's power in the Arctic and beyond (Ripsman et al. 2016: 56). Low clarity and a more permissive environment will make room for intra-state particularities such as the political beliefs of the American FPE to distort this balancing incentive (ibid.: 52). America's recent balancing-like Arctic invigoration suggests that Russia and China do pose an imminent threat to American security, and that the international system

has managed to clearly present this threat to the American FPE. The American policy response might, in particular, trace back to 2018, moreover, because its strategic environment had become particularly restrictive at this time, and/or following from an improved degree of clarity on Russia and China's preparedness to disrupt the American-led world order.

3 Methods

The analysis of America's Arctic invigoration will be conducted through an in-depth case-study informed by the process tracing method. I approach process tracing as one particular subtype of case-study set apart from other subtypes, such as ethnographic case-studies, by its distinct aspiration to illuminate the causal mechanism that connects a purported X to a particular Y (Gerring 2004: 342, 348). I therefore regard these as two intertwined elements of my methodological procedure. The ambition of this methods chapter is to introduce and discuss the features of my process tracing case-study analysis. To do so, I will first define the cardinal variables of the analysis and specify its case-study setting. I will then elaborate how I intend to use the process tracing method and its case-study design and explain why this procedure is particularly well-suited to help generate a convincing explanation of my research question. Here, I will also outline which research criteria I will focus on to evaluate the robustness of my findings. I will finally present the sources used in the analysis and review its explanatory potential in light of, for instance, its limited access to candid empirical data points.

3.1 Variables and research design

America's foreign policy in the Arctic will constitute the dependent variable Y in the analysis. I have derived this variable directly from the empirical puzzle that has animated this study: Why has the US, after years of Arctic disinclination, exhibited a rising interest in the region since 2018 (Pincus 2019b)? The neoclassical realist framework derives its principal analytical expectations from America's relative share of power vis-à-vis Russia and China (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 28). The analysis will, accordingly, focus on "hard" materialistic power-related components of America's Arctic policy such as its icebreaker fleet and Arctic military facilities.

Since power politics, as outlined in the theory chapter, do not translate into military politics per se, however, the analysis will also include "soft" aspects of America's Arctic policy that seem related to balance-of-power endeavours, including for instance its political-economic relations with Greenland (Waltz 1979: 94). Linguistic manifestations of America's (non-)balancing intentions in the Arctic such as speeches and strategies will also be encompassed. America's Arctic strategies have been frequently updated during the past decade, and it is therefore both

possible and relevant to assess to what degree their textual development has been informed by changes in America's systemic surroundings and/or leader images.

As noted in the introduction, the analysis will centre on America's Arctic policy from the end of the Cold War until today, including in particular the years leading up to the policy change in 2018. While the analysis will include temporal variation, therefore, no variation along spatial lines will be encompassed (Andersen et al. 2012: 86). As such, the analysis constitutes a *Type 1* case-study following John Gerring's seminal terminology (Gerring 2004: 343).

Informed by its neoclassical realist underpinning, the relative distribution of power between the US, Russia, and China, and the systemic stimuli produced by this distribution, will constitute the principal independent variable X in the analysis (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 29). The analysis will focus on three indicators for aggregate power to estimate this relative power distribution in practice: GDP, military spending, and population size (Waltz 1979: 131). I will assess both the nominal scores and the relative growth rates of these three indicators.

When the neoclassical realist nuances are introduced, the degree of clarity and the nature of America's strategic environment will be included as behavioural modifiers at the systemic level of analysis, moreover, while the political beliefs of the American FPE will be included as a domestic-level intervening variable (Ripsman et al. 2016: 56, 59). I have elaborated my understanding and practical operationalisation of these variables in section 2.3 and visualised their relationship to each other and to the independent and dependent variables in figure 2.3.

3.2 A process tracing analysis

The ambition of this paper is to explain a particularly interesting outcome of a particular case, i.e. America's renewed interest in the Arctic (Beach and Pedersen 2012: 243). The analysis will, accordingly, start from this outcome and move backwards in an attempt to identify its potential causes (Mahoney and Goertz 2006: 230). This procedure reflects a cause-of-effects approach to explanation, which is characteristic for qualitative studies as such (ibid.: 230).

Process tracing will be employed to illuminate the theorised causal mechanism that links the relative distribution of power between the US, Russia, and China (X) to America's Arctic invigoration (Y) (Collier 2011: 824). A particular set of expectations can be derived from the

neoclassical realist framework and its Waltzian baseline on the properties of this causal mechanism as presented in section 2.5. The process tracing analysis will evaluate whether these expectations match the sequence of events and processes that seem to connect America's systemic stimuli to its Arctic policy in practice (Bennett 2008: 705). Put differently, the process tracing method will help me investigate to what degree a selection of empirical data points vindicate the hypothesised relationship between America's revitalised Arctic interest and the independent and intervening variables identified by the neoclassical realist framework and its Waltzian baseline (Beach and Pedersen 2012: 236).

The analysis will, at first, seek to document the purported variance in the dependent variable (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 50). What has characterised America's Arctic policy ante and, in particular, post 2018? To put the policy change into perspective, I will compartmentalise America's contemporary Arctic policy into three consecutive phases spanning (1) the spirited Arctic posture during the Cold War, (2) the Arctic disinclination in the aftermath of the Cold War, and (3) the post-2018 revitalisation. I will, as previously outlined, in particular focus on the differences between the latter two phases to document how the recent development in America's Arctic statements and activities point to an increasingly spirited approach.

I will then use the process tracing method to account for this policy change, first through the parsimonious Waltzian baseline analysis. Does America's Arctic invigoration co-vary with changes in the relative distribution of power? And do the selected empirical data points substantiate that these changes have, in fact, informed the American policy change? Do recent American speeches necessitate a more vigilant Arctic posture with reference to mounting great power competition with Russia and China, for instance?

If the empirical evidence only somewhat vindicates the Waltzian expectations, the analysis will introduce the neoclassical realist nuances and evaluate these along similar lines (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 28). How has America's strategic environment and clarity developed since the Cold War? What political beliefs have prevailed in the Trump and Obama FPEs? And does the empirical material uphold that these variables have, in fact, conditioned the causal relationship between America's systemic stimuli and its Arctic policy? Can we connect the timing of the recent invigoration to changes in America's clarity and strategic environment, for instance?

My approach to process tracing will to some degree parallel the congruence method, which invites the researcher to examine to what degree a theorised co-variance between causes (X) and outcome (Y) can be verified in a particular case, but without tracing the effective causal process that leads from X to Y (George and Bennett 2005: 181). This will, in particular, be true for the baseline analysis, since Waltz' probabilistic top-down framework allows only for a few generic expectations about the causal relationship between America's systemic stimuli and its Arctic behaviour (ibid.: 203). This complicates the attempt to conduct a fine-tuned process tracing analysis (Beach and Pedersen 2012: 246–47). The process tracing proceedings will be more prevalent, then, when the neoclassical realist nuances are introduced, since more case-specific observable expectations can be derived from the neoclassical realist framework as outlined in section 2.5. Here, the process tracing method will in particular animate the analysis to move beyond covariation alone as a source of causal inference and qualify how Waltz' theorised causality operates in practice (George and Bennett 2005: 224).

3.2.1 Methodological merits

The process tracing case-study design is well-suited to guide the proceedings of the analysis for three reasons. First, it is engineered to capture causal mechanisms in action (Bennett and Checkel 2014: 9). As such, it presents a fruitful methodological technique to unravel the complex and highly case-specific causal mechanism that links America's Arctic invigoration to its causes (George and Bennett 2005: 149). Second, it is apt for investigations into documentary data points such as speeches and strategies (Beach and Pedersen 2012: 247). As will be elaborated in section 3.3, the analysis presented in this paper rests on sources of this exact character, and I therefore expect the process tracing method to be well-able to extract relevant information from the available empirical data points.

Third, the process tracing case-study design underpins the neoclassical realist aspiration to qualify how Waltz' purported causality between systemic stimuli and state action works in practice (Rose 1998: 146). As outlined above, a process tracing-informed case-study invites the researcher to do just that by examining how, in particular, a purported X is connected to a particular Y (Goertz and Mahoney 2012: 104). If my research question had exhibited a more quantifiable or post-positivist scope, a statistical or discursive research design might have been more appropriate (Andersen et al. 2012: 72–73). Under the current circumstances, however, a

process tracing case-study constitutes a particularly promising procedure that corresponds well to the research question, data material, and theoretical starting point of the paper.

The process tracing case-study design, like all other methodological approaches, does not come without limitations, however. While it animates a comprehensive inquiry with great explanatory potential, this also makes it a demanding procedure that requires a considerable amount of time and data (George and Bennett 2005: 223). This methodological challenge is further exacerbated by the ambition of this paper to examine America's Arctic policy, since behavioural considerations are particularly sensitive, and data thus difficult to retrieve, in the realm of foreign policy (Hill 2015: 24).

The process tracing method will allow only for a provisional explanation of the research question, moreover (Bennett 2008: 719). The analysis may, for instance, find that President Trump's Jacksonian sentiments have somehow propelled America's Arctic invigoration (Mead 2002: 291). A such explanation would be called into question, if further analysis at a finer degree of detail document that other and less prominent members of the American FPE have been far more influential in setting the policy change in motion. Rather than a conclusive account of America's renewed Arctic interest, therefore, I aspire to conduct a cogent analysis that suggests how we might understand the policy change given the time, data, and spatial boundaries at my disposal (Ripsman et al. 2016: 137).

In addition, the small-N credentials of the analysis confine its generalisability (Andersen 2012: 105). I do not assume that an in-depth investigation of America's contemporary Arctic policy will produce advanced insights on America's grand foreign policy strategy, for instance, let alone the Arctic policies of other countries (King et al. 1994: 28). Yet, as reflected in the research question, the paper aspires to illuminate 'only' the drivers and timing of America's Arctic invigoration. Empirical depth *is* preferred to breadth, and a process tracing-informed Type 1 case-study therefore constitutes a well-grounded design for the analysis (Gerring 2004: 347).

Scholars should, in general, be careful not to evaluate case-studies against the assumptions of statistical methods (Mahoney and Goertz 2006: 228). Though both paradigms share a principal epistemological aspiration to arrive at valid inference based on empirical research, they are informed by diverse methodological logics (George and Bennett 2005: 6; King et al. 1994: 6–7). Large-N studies often aspire to make generalisations about non-scrutinised units, therefore,

while case-studies such as this tend to restrict the scope of their argument to mitigate the risk of causal heterogeneity, i.e. misrepresent central causal relationships as the population size expands (Mahoney and Goertz 2006: 237–38). Rather than descriptive or causal inference, this paper accordingly strives for inference about the hypothesised causal mechanism that links America's systemic stimuli to its Arctic policy and nothing further (Beach and Pedersen 2012: 239). Does the empirical evidence match the theorised expectations in this particular case?

The process tracing case-study design entails a risk of causal overdetermination, moreover (Bennett 2008: 708). I might overestimate the impact of the particular variables included in my analytical framework, that is, and unintentionally look for empirical evidence that vindicates their hypothesised impact on America's Arctic policy (Bennett and Checkel 2014: 22). While I cannot obliterate my foreknowledge, I will attempt to mitigate its potential implications by evaluating the empirical findings of the analysis with alternative explanations in mind and make explicit arguments on how and why particular pieces of evidence match the theoretical expectations (ibid.: 24-25).

In addition, I will use counterfactuals to evaluate to what degree the included independent and intervening variables in fact are necessary to explain the research question (Collier 2011: 825). If a mental-analytical experiment suggests that the US would have invoked a balancing-like Arctic posture in 2018 regardless of the ideational credentials of the incumbent FPE, for instance, the leader image-variable would seem of limited significance (George and Bennett 2005: 190–91). This procedure is inspired by the ambition advanced by several process tracing methodologists to test the uniqueness and certitude of particular pieces of evidence (Bennett 2008: 706). While I will evaluate the importance of most included data points, I will refrain from assessing their uniqueness, though. As previously noted, the paper aspires to consume rather than test theory, and it is therefore not of outmost importance to establish whether a particular piece of evidence can be accounted for *only* by the neoclassical realist framework, or if another IR-theory could provide an explanation as well (Beach and Pedersen 2012: 248–49).

Other methods and research designs could also have been utilised, of course. A more inductive approach, with stronger resemblance to a historical explanation, would animate an open-minded analysis receptive to empirical impulses that transcend the neoclassical realist expectations (Andersen et al. 2012: 73). This might produce a convincing explanation of the

research question with firm allegiance to real-life conditions, yet gathering and processing data for a such analysis would be onerous and prone to ad-hoc criticism, since no a priori expectations would be able to guide its proceedings (Miles and Huberman 1994: 17).

A larger-N statistical analysis would be well-suited to relate the relative distribution of power to the Arctic policies of a wider group of countries, moreover (George and Bennett 2005: 224). Informed by the effects-of-causes approach to explanation, a such analysis could, for instance, assess the average effect of Russia and China's mounting presence in the Arctic on the annual spending on Arctic capabilities by all other Arctic states (Mahoney and Goertz 2006: 230–31). Statistical methods are not designed to observe mechanisms within particular cases, however, and would therefore be ill-suited to guide an investigation into the specificities of America's Arctic invigoration (Goertz and Mahoney 2012: 101). The process tracing case-study design seems to hold great promise in guiding a context-sensitive and thorough, yet also coherent and theoretically informed analysis on the recent policy change, by contrast.

3.2.2 Research criteria

Though suitable, there is no guarantee that the process tracing case-study design will generate robust and credible findings. Various research criteria could help evaluate this (Andersen 2012). Out of research concerns, I will focus on two, which I find particularly relevant for the merits of this paper: measurement validity and internal validity (Bryman 2012: 47). Though measurement validity is mostly discussed in quantitative research, it is essential to most verstehen-driven inquiries, which, like this study, have explanation as their principal objective (Mahoney and Goertz 2006: 245). If I fail to investigate what I intend to investigate, that is, and for instance mis-conceptualise one of the cardinal variables of the study, my findings might misrepresent the empirical reality as it is (Andersen 2012: 100). This would discredit the study's purported explanation of America's Arctic invigoration and its contribution to the broader IR-literature as such. I will, accordingly, evaluate how my conceptual definitions and operationalisations may have impacted the findings of the analysis in the discussion chapter.

The internal validity relates to the authenticity of a purported causal relationship (Andersen 2012: 104). While internal validity also largely has been developed in the quantitative research tradition, it is therefore highly relevant to evaluate the findings of the analysis against this criterium as well (Bryman 2012: 389). I will do so throughout the analysis. First, I will evaluate

the internal validity of Waltz' theorised causal relationship between the relative distribution of power (X) and America's renewed Arctic interest (Y). My conceptualisation of strong internal validity rests on four parameters: correlation, a correct timely order, the absence of spuriousity, and a cogent theoretical explanation of the purported causality (Andersen 2012: 104–5).

I will then assess the internal validity of the neoclassical realist findings along the same lines. Can we be sure that the political beliefs of the incumbent FPE have influenced the causal mechanism that links America's systemic stimuli to its Arctic invigoration, for instance? Do the variables correlate, and does the neoclassical realist framework provide a cogent explanation of the observed impact? If the internal validity of the neoclassical realist causal refinements is strong, it substantiates that its nuances are able to qualify Waltz' theorised explanation of the American policy change and, as such, that they add explanatory power to the analysis.

3.3 Sources

The analysis will strive to derive its findings from primary sources such as speeches and statements by the American FPE and official government documents (George and Bennett 2005: 6). Primary sources are preferred to secondary sources, i.e. the reading of those primary sources by journalists and other scholars, because they will allow for more unspoiled insights into the rationales that have informed America's Arctic invigoration (Ripsman et al. 2016: 133).

Some primary sources are readily available for public inquiry. This includes the Arctic strategies by the DoD (2013, 2016b, 2019b) and the USCG (2013, 2019), President Obama's National Arctic Strategy (2013), National Defense Strategies from the Trump and Obama Administrations (2012b, 2018), respective speeches by Secretaries of State John Kerry and Mike Pompeo at the Arctic Council (2015, 2019) and a recent briefing by a senior State Department official on "the Administration's Arctic Strategy" (State 2020). It also includes political manifesto-like publications by Presidents Trump (2015) and Obama (2006). These texts will constitute the most essential data points in the analysis.

I will approach the texts as remnants of the political context in which they were produced (Elklit and Jensen 2012: 124). How did John Kerry factor Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea into his speech at the Arctic Council in 2015? What does this suggest about America's Arctic thinking at this time? What does Donald Trump's *Time to Get Tough: Make America Great Again!* (2015)

reveal about his fundamental understanding of the world, and how does this relate to America's current approach to the Arctic? The texts will provide valuable evidence on the embodiments of America's Arctic invigoration and reflect considerations that might have informed the policy change. While I also intend to use them to illuminate America's actual actions in the Arctic, I will investigate secondary sources for this purpose as well, since the primary texts might have misrepresented reality to accommodate certain political ends (Elklit and Jensen 2012: 125). These secondary sources will include existing research on America's Arctic policy, newspaper articles, and the background paper on Arctic affairs issued by the Congressional Research Service to members of the US Congress (O'Rourke et al. 2020).

My preference for the above-mentioned sources reflects a functional source approach, where data points are included based on their ability to help illuminate the research question (Elklit and Jensen 2012: 122). To fully comprehend the causal mechanism that links America's systemic stimuli to its Arctic policy, though, I would need access to more candid information about the real-time considerations on America's Arctic conduct both before and after the recent policy change (Ripsman et al. 2016: 133). Interviews with members of the American FPE could provide such information (Beach and Pedersen 2012: 247). Elite interviews are often inaccessible to students of foreign policy, however, and while I have reached out to several both former and current members of the American FPE, they have been largely unwilling to contribute to my research project³ (Harrits et al. 2012: 150).

I have managed to conduct one elite interview with a former high-ranking employee at the DoD, though. This interview will constitute a central empirical data point alongside the primary texts⁴. The interview person has been working under both Presidents Trump and Obama and has, as such, been able to contribute with valuable knowledge of Arctic considerations across changing American FPEs. When conducting the interview, I sought to utilise my existing understanding and theorised expectations to formulate precise and relevant questions, yet in an open and unprejudiced manner (Harrits et al. 2012: 147). I strived for the semi-structured

³ These include ministers and ambassadors as well as medium to high-ranking staffers at the DoD, State Department, and American Embassy to the Kingdom of Denmark.

⁴ The interview person has wished to remain anonymous. I have attached the interview transcript along with my interview guide in Appendix A.

interview ideal type, because this allows for a theoretically guided conversation that is still receptive to empirical revelations (ibid.: 149). This also increases the replicability of the interview compared to a more unstructured procedure (ibid.: 149).

The process tracing analysis will struggle to present unmistakable evidence that vindicates or incriminates the theoretical expectations, nonetheless. Doing so would require a remarkable insight into America's contemporary Arctic policy, which the available data points do not allow for. Instead of concluding that America's exhausted systemic conditions by 2018 definitely compelled the US to appreciate the Arctic as an area of great power competition at this time, therefore, I strive to arrive at an inferential position, where the paper can suggest, based on a careful process tracing analysis, that this is *likely* to have informed the policy change.

4 Analysis

In this analysis chapter, I will examine America's renewed Arctic interest against the theoretical and methodological backdrop outlined in the two preceding chapters. To do so, I will first compartmentalise America's Arctic policy into three consecutive phases spanning (1) the Cold War, (2) the post-Cold War period, and (3) the invigoration since 2018. I will, in particular, focus on the latter two phases to establish that the post-2018 phase presents an empirical turn compared to the previous phase of Arctic disinclination that followed from the end of the Cold War. I will then seek to explain the driver and timing of the transition to this invigorated post-2018 phase, first through a parsimonious baseline analysis informed by Waltz' balance-of-power theory. If this analysis fails to provide a convincing explanation of the policy change, I will introduce my selected neoclassical realist nuances, i.e. America's strategic environment, clarity, and leader images. Doing so, I assume, will generate a more intricate understanding of the causal mechanism that links America's systemic stimuli to its Arctic policy and, as such, allow for a more convincing explanation of the research question.

4.1 The US in the Arctic

As noted in the introduction, Greenland played a central role in American foreign policy during the Cold War (Allen et al. 2017: 15). The US was allowed to establish a military presence on Greenland in April 1941 following from the wilful display of the then Danish ambassador to the US, Henrik Kauffmann (Rasmussen 2016: 27). The American FPE came to appreciate Greenland as a theatre of great strategic importance during its subsequent involvement in World War II, and its Arctic attentiveness was further consolidated in the following era of Cold War-competition with the Soviet Union (Dodds and Nuttall 2018: 140; Huebert 2009: 2).

4.1.1 Phase 1: Cold War fervour

Alaska shared a long maritime border with the north-eastern part of the Soviet Union, and the shortest route for a Soviet attack on the American mainland went through the Arctic (and still does) (Tingstad et al. 2018: 2). This animated the US to expand its presence in the Arctic in the Cold War-period, including in particular on Greenland, where multiple new American military and scientific sites had been established by the late 1950s (Dodds and Nuttall 2018: 145). These

sites became essential to America's national defense and nuclear deterrence throughout the Cold War (Henriksen and Rahbek-Clemmensen 2017: 5). Large parts of the American air force, including the momentous B-36 strategic bombers, were operated from the new Thule Air Base in the early Cold War-period, for instance, and the Thule radar was critical to America's Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS) from the early 1960s (Rasmussen 2016: 28).

4.1.2 Phase 2: Post-Cold War disengagement

America's presence and interest in the Arctic waned in the 1990s against the backdrop of the end of the Cold War (Tamnes 2017: 17). The US downscaled its submarine force, icebreaking capabilities, and military personnel stationed in the Arctic substantially (O'Rourke et al. 2020: 44; Pincus 2013: 154). Several military sites were closed, including for instance the naval base on Adak in Alaska, and the Thule radar was perceived with less fervour in Washington, since the Soviet resignation made an early warning system in the Arctic less imperative (Henriksen and Rahbek-Clemmensen 2017: 19; Huebert 2009: 19).

America's Arctic disengagement in the post-Cold War period is perhaps best encapsulated by a fact sheet accompanying President Clinton's 1994 directive on Arctic and Antarctic policy, which noted that the "United States *has been* an Arctic nation" (my emphasis) (Huebert 2009: 3; Knecht and Keil 2013: 189). This was a remarkable phrasing from a nation which, by virtue of Alaska, encompasses territory well inside of the Arctic Circle (Huebert 2009: 3–4). The Arctic disinclination prevailed in the following years, nonetheless (Conley 2019). In 2006, the US largely abandoned its presence at the Keflavik base in Iceland, for instance, including its F-15s, helicopters, and more than 1,200 military personnel (Hamre and Conley 2017: 52).

President Bush reconfirmed America's Arctic credentials by highlighting that the "United States *is* an Arctic Nation" (my emphasis) in a 2009 Arctic directive (White House 2009: 2). This directive represented the first official adjustment to America's Arctic policy since Clinton's 1994 document and embodied, to some, the first indication of a revitalised American Arctic policy (Knecht and Keil 2013: 190). The 2009 directive largely mirrored the contents of the 1994 document, however, and was not translated into a particularly more spirited Arctic approach by the Obama administration (Conley 2019; Huebert 2009: 2).

In 2011, the US 2nd Fleet, which as previously noted is responsible for the North Atlantic, was deactivated (Rahbek-Clemmensen 2020: 6). The US was the last Arctic coastal state to formulate an Arctic strategy in 2013 (Henriksen and Rahbek-Clemmensen 2017: 7). America's icebreaker fleet was not upgraded and thus remained historically weak throughout the Obama presidency (Allen et al. 2017: 21). His administration appreciated the Arctic as an alarming showcase of the environmental and human ramifications of global warming, yet the region remained largely detached from the general foreign policy and national security agenda in Washington (Conley and Melino 2019: 2–3). In an interview with Henriksen and Rahbek-Clemmensen (2017: 8) in 2016, a former American diplomat tellingly stated that “most people, even in foreign policy circles, do not recognize Greenland's importance”.

4.1.3 Phase 3: The recent invigoration

The US has approached the Arctic with rising fervour since 2018 (Pincus 2019b). The US 2nd Fleet was re-established in August 2018, for instance, and the US Air Force announced plans to invest more than 50 million USD in military installations at the Keflavik Airport in June 2019 (Kyzer 2019; US Navy 2019). In February 2019, the US Congress mandated 655 million USD to construct the first new American heavy icebreaker in 40 years, and President Trump's budget proposal for 2021 includes an additional 555 million USD for a second new heavy icebreaker (Conley 2019; Uljua 2020).

The US has sought to strengthen its diplomatic-economic ties with Greenland as well. President Trump's 2021 budget proposal allocates around half a million USD to establish America's first permanent diplomatic outpost in Nuuk since 1953 (Gramer 2020). The US government decided to allocate more than 12 million USD for civilian and energy-related projects in Greenland in April this year (Naalakkersuisut 2020). Moreover, central members of the Trump FPE, including not least the US ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark, Carla Sands, have followed a particularly enthusiastic travel scheme in Greenland and other Arctic areas since 2018 (Naalakkersuisut 2019b; Sands 2019c; Sermitsiaq 2018; US Air Force 2019).

The US has also bolstered its Arctic force posture within the framework of NATO, including through more regional exercises and strengthened intelligence-sharing (Hamre and Conley 2017: 54). The US made a forceful contribution to NATO's Trident Juncture exercise in October 2018, for instance, which took place in the North Atlantic and represented the largest NATO-

exercise since 2002 (Rahbek-Clemmensen 2020: 13). In relation to its participation in the exercise, the *Harry Truman* aircraft carrier became America's first surface vessel to enter the Arctic Ocean in 30 years (Humpert 2019d).

Various recent statements and speeches by the American FPE have reiterated this increasingly spirited, attentive, and prioritised American Arctic policy (Pincus 2019b). This includes President Trump's proposal to purchase Greenland, several interviews and op-eds by Carla Sands in both Danish and Greenlandic newspapers, and Mike Pompeo's 2019 Rovaniemi speech (Okke 2020; Sands 2019a, 2020; State 2019; Tisdall 2019). By virtue of its strong critique of China and Russia's conduct and intentions in the Arctic, Pompeo's speech suggested that America's Arctic policy not only has become more spirited within the last few years, but also increasingly confrontational and self-assertive (Koivurova 2019: 5; Pincus 2019b).

This combination of an invigorated and more confrontational Arctic posture is prevalent in the 2019 Arctic strategies by the DoD and USCG as well (DoD 2019b; USCG 2019). Both strategies reconfirm the Arctic's strategic importance to American security and necessitate a more self-assertive Arctic approach with reference to America's mounting competition with Russia and China in the region and beyond (DoD 2019b: 4; USCG 2019: 4).

4.1.4 Summary: The Arctic (re)turn

The above compartmentalisation provides a useful historical background against which America's renewed Arctic interest should be apprehended. The exact demarcation of the three phases is not definite, however. Some aspects of America's Arctic invigoration may, for one thing, originate in pre-2018 decisions. As my interview person from the DoD points out, for instance, America's resurgent interest in the Keflavik base and "the changes in the NATO command structure, which led to the return of the North Atlantic Fleet" started "under the Obama administration". As suggested above, though, it seems that most notable testaments to the policy change have both been mandated and materialised within the last two years.

Also, the main trends represented in the three phases are well-grounded. America's Arctic policy from 2018 until today is decidedly more spirited, attentive, and prioritised, and at the same time more confrontational and self-assertive, than from the end of the Cold War until 2018 (Østhagen 2019; Weitz 2019). America's recent focus on sound US-Greenlandic relations,

a potent Arctic military posture, and regional great power competition bears notable resemblance to its Arctic policy during the Cold War, moreover (Tingstad et al. 2018: 2).

Several scholars interpreted this Cold War-posture in light of America's bipolar rivalry with the Soviet Union (Konyshev and Sergunin 2012: 36; Tamnes 2017: 17). The question is, then, if America's rising interest in the Arctic since 2018 has been informed by similar realpolitik concerns in light of the distribution of power between the great powers of today? I will now examine this question and, as such, seek to explain the driver and timing of America's Arctic invigoration through the Waltzian baseline in my neoclassical realist framework.

4.2 Baseline analysis

The Waltzian baseline expects the US to seek to keep the world 'off balance' to safeguard its global primacy (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 32). Maintaining a distinct power advantage over Russia and China, its two cardinal great power adversaries, therefore drives America's external behaviour as such. America's hegemony was largely uncontested in the aftermath of the Cold War, and it could therefore afford a negligible Arctic posture at this time (Walt 2018: 24–25). If Russia or China, or both, have caught-up on America's primacy since then, however, America's incentive to balance against their power, in the Arctic and elsewhere, would have become more commanding. This might explain America's more spirited Arctic posture since 2018.

To evaluate the strength of this explanation, I will now assess the development in the relative distribution of power between the US, Russia, and China from the end of the Cold War until 2018⁵. I will, as outlined in the methods chapter, focus on GDP, population size, and military spending to estimate this relative power distribution in practice. Since differential growth rates propel changes in the relative distribution of power in Waltz' framework, Russia and/or China's growth rates will have to surpass those of the US within this period to support the baseline's theorised causal relationship between America's diminishing hegemonic supremacy and its balancing-like Arctic posture since 2018 (Waltz 1979: 69).

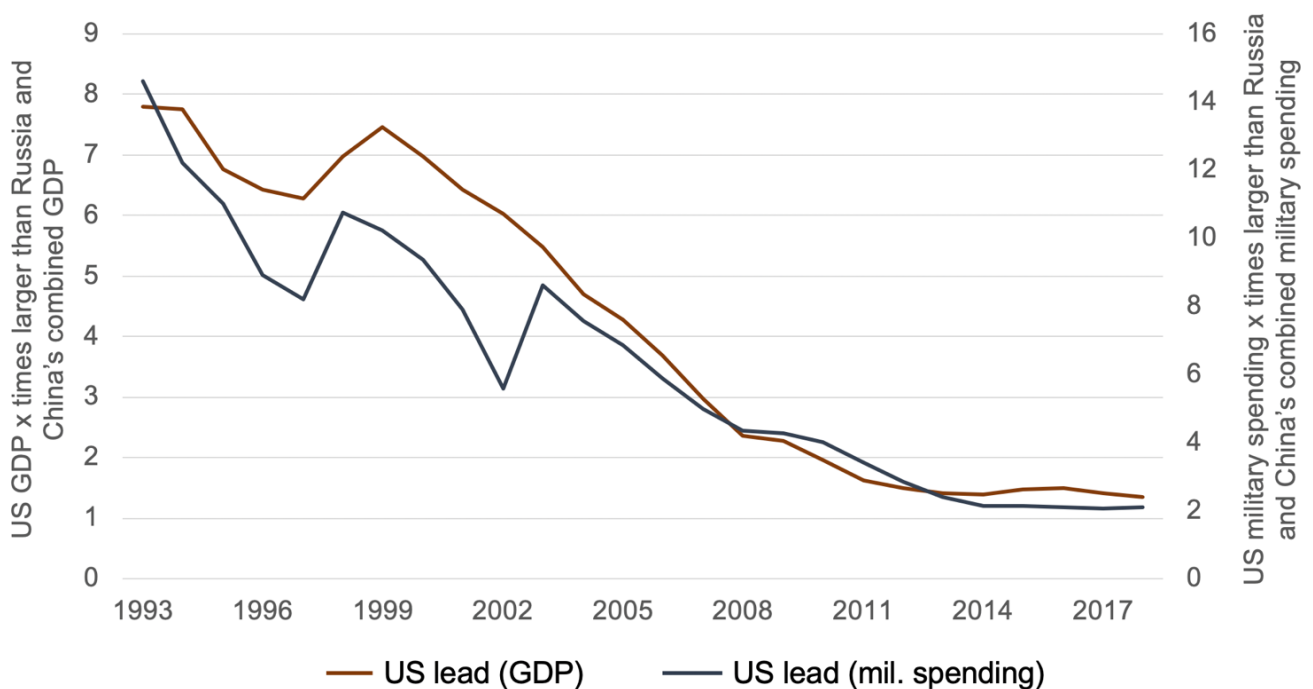
⁵ My data is derived from the World Bank, whose latest numbers on the three selected power indicators are from 2018. The reported numbers for Russia and China might have a larger margin of uncertainty than the American numbers by virtue of the secretive credentials of the non-democratic regimes in these two states (Martinez 2019). I do not expect this to disrupt the overall trend in the relative distribution of power, however.

4.2.1 The distribution of power

The US found itself in an unrivalled hegemonic position in the aftermath of the Cold War (Walt 2018: 24). Its military spending exceeded that of the next thirty largest countries combined in 1990 (ibid.: 24). In 1993, when the Russian Federation superseded the Soviet Union, America's military expenditures were more than 14 times larger than those of Russia and China combined (blue line below) (World Bank 2019c). America's GDP exceeded Russia and China's combined ditto by almost 8 times (orange line below) (World Bank 2019a). America's population almost doubled that of Russia, yet China out-populated the US by more than 4 times (World Bank 2019d). By virtue of its military and economic superiority, this did not obstruct America's exceptional primacy in the post-Cold War period, however (Waltz 2000: 24). While Waltz' balance-of-power framework would expect Russia and China to seek to restore this thoroughly disrupted power balance, there was no systemic pressure on the US to increase its balancing posture vis-à-vis Russia and China in the Arctic or elsewhere at this time, therefore (ibid.: 29).

Figure 4.1

America's economic and military advantage over Russia and China, 1993-2018. Based on data from the World Bank (2019a, 2019c).



As illustrated above, though, ~~Russia and China have caught up on America's global primacy since the end of the Cold War. In 2018, Russia and China's combined military spending was 15 times higher than its 1993-level (World Bank 2019c). America's military spending 'only' doubled during this period (ibid.). Hence, while America's military expenditures are still superior, the disparity has diminished significantly: In 2018, America's military spending was 'only' two times larger than Russia and China's combined ditto (blue line) (ibid.). America's economic lead has decreased as well; Russia and China's combined GDP had almost levelled that of the US in 2018 (orange line) (World Bank 2019a). Meanwhile, the relative population gap between the US and Russia-China has remained somewhat stable (World Bank 2019d).~~

America's diminishing power advantage has, in particular, been propelled by China, whose growth rates in both economic and military terms have profoundly surpassed those of the US. China's GDP expanded on average by an annual 9,5 percent from 1993 to 2018 compared to America's 2,5 percent (World Bank 2019b). America's population growth has slightly surpassed that of China, yet China's military spending has on average climbed 13,2 percent each year during this period compared to America's 3,9 percent (World Bank 2019c, 2019d).

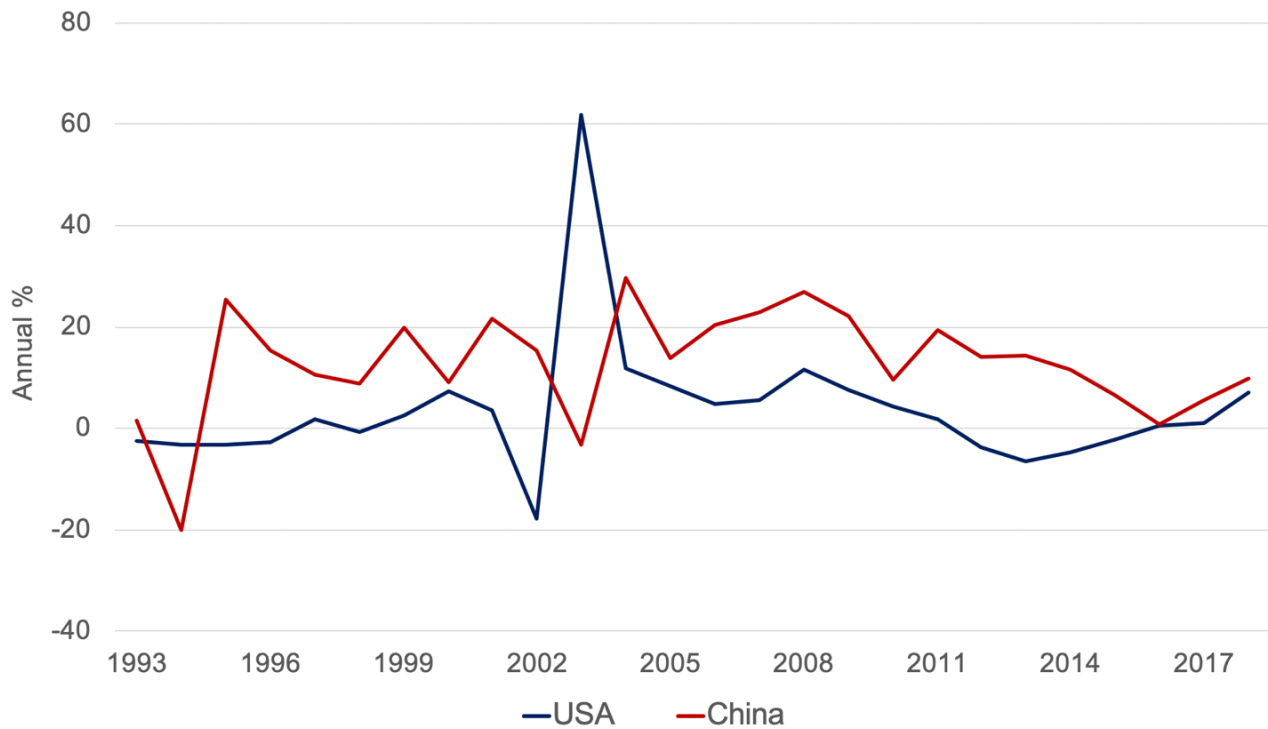
Figure 4.2

US and China GDP growth, 1993-2018. Based on data from the World Bank (2019b).



Figure 4.3

US and China growth in military expenditures, 1993-2018. Based on data from the World Bank (2019c).



While America still holds a considerable power advantage over China, the disparity is less pronounced today than it was in the wake of the Cold War, therefore. And though the future robustness of America's hegemony is a contested topic in the IR-literature, several economists and financial institutions project that China will become the world's largest economy within the coming decade(s) (PwC 2017; Zilber 2019). China's relative share of power in the international system is ascending, in other words, and more could be coming.

Russia's power catch-up has been more moderate. Russia's military spending has increased more vigorously than America's ditto with an annual average growth of 11,7 percent from 1993 to 2018 compared to America's 3,9 percent (World Bank 2019c). America's GDP and population growth has exceeded that of Russia in the same period, however (World Bank 2019d, 2019a)⁶. As such, America's capabilities are still greatly superior to those of Russia, and Russia's growth

⁶ See Appendix B for more graphs.

rates do not substantiate that it will be able to challenge America's primacy anytime soon. America's systemic incentive to balance against Russia is not overly imminent, therefore.

4.2.2 Systemic inducement

Still, the reported development in the distribution of power supports the baseline's theorised explanation of America's Arctic invigoration. America's power advantage over Russia and China has diminished since the end of the Cold War. This has mostly been propelled by China's significant power catch-up. The anarchic self-help system has, accordingly, increased pressure on the US to balance against China's power across the world, including in the Arctic, to safeguard its hegemony and security. America's revitalised Arctic posture since 2018 reflects that it has honoured this inducement. Since Russia's power catch-up has been modest, moreover, Waltz' systemic balance-of-power logic expects America's recent conduct in the Arctic and beyond to have been informed more by China's relative capabilities than by those of Russia. America's renewed interest in the Arctic has first and foremost been driven by its ambition to balance against China's rising power in the international system, in other words.

America's balancing-like Arctic posture has comprised a combination of military, diplomatic, and economic internal and external means as suggested in section 4.1. The internal means include new Arctic icebreakers, the diplomatic mission in Nuuk, and its financial investments in Greenland. The external means include America's strong commitment to the Trident Juncture exercise and other joint NATO-activities in the Arctic. The US has, in addition, increasingly urged its Arctic NATO-allies to expand their capabilities in the region (Hamre and Conley 2017: 53). For instance, the US has expressed rising concern with Denmark's scant air surveillance in the North Eastern part of Greenland, where Russian fighter jets are largely able to navigate undetected, and with its limited maritime domain awareness in the GIUK-gap, which is "a strategic corridor for naval operations between the Arctic and the North Atlantic" in the words of the DoD 2019 Arctic strategy (DoD 2019b: 3; Politiken 2019; Turnowsky 2019).

As noted in the methods chapter, Waltz' parsimonious assumptions confine the number of case-specific expectations that can be derived from his balance-of-power framework (George and Bennett 2005: 203). As such, the co-variance between China's notable power catch-up on the one hand and America's renewed interest in the Arctic on the other provides the most critical piece of evidence to substantiate the baseline's hypothesised explanation of the policy change.

Various recent speeches and strategies reiterate that America's revitalised Arctic posture has been informed by rising great power competition with China. This includes Mike Pompeo's Rovaniemi speech and the USCG and DoD 2019 Arctic strategies (DoD 2019b; State 2019; USCG 2019). According to the latter, for instance, a more self-assertive American Arctic policy is warranted, because "there is a risk that its [China's] predatory economic behavior globally may be repeated in the Arctic" (DoD 2019b: 6).

The Waltzian baseline would expect China's mounting capabilities to inform America's conduct in the Arctic and beyond regardless of these official accounts of the policy change. They are not as necessary to validate the baseline's theorised causality as the observed variance in the relative distribution of power, therefore. Still, the documents consolidate that Washington to a high degree stages America's current Arctic policy in light of China's rising threat to America's supremacy. As such, they substantiate that this has indeed been central to the policy change.

Russia takes a prominent position in the several recent Arctic statements and strategies as well. A senior State Department official emphasised that the US has "concerns about Russia's military buildup in the Arctic" at an Arctic policy briefing in April 2020, for instance, and Carla Sands highlighted at *Folk & Sikkerhed's* security policy conference in November last year that "[a]s China and Russia increasingly seek to exploit and militarize the region, the US recognizes that we must do more" (Sands 2019c; State 2020). In fact, Russia and China seem equally important in most, if not all, official accounts of America's Arctic policy since 2018. This is somewhat surprising from a Waltzian perspective, since China presents a far more notable threat to America's primacy than Russia. America's power advantage over Russia remains remarkable, so why necessitate a more vigilant Arctic policy with patent reference to Russia?

Russia has, as mentioned above, caught-up on America's power on some indicators, including in particular military spending (World Bank 2019c). America's systemic incentive to balance against Russia is therefore somewhat more prominent now than in the immediate wake of the Cold War. While not entirely unintelligible, therefore, it is still puzzling from a systemic capability-perspective that Russia is so prevalent in recent Arctic documents. This suggests that the American policy change also may have been driven by behavioural concerns that transcend Waltz' focus on systemic capabilities. The neoclassical nuances might, as such, help produce a more intuitive and compelling explanation of Russia's apparent empirical significance.

4.2.3 *Balancing, but when?*

The Waltzian baseline is able to provide a coherent and rather convincing explanation of the first aspect of the research question, nonetheless. The anarchic self-help system compels the US to balance against rising contenders across the world, since this is the most effective way to safeguard America's hegemony and security. China's notable catch-up on America's primacy in recent time (X) accordingly constitutes the chief driver of its Arctic invigoration (Y).



Figure 4.4

Baseline explanation of America's rising interest in the Arctic.

The internal validity of this causal relationship seems robust (Andersen 2012: 104). China's relative power increase has, as previously documented, co-varied with America's renewed Arctic interest. The timely sequence between the two variables corresponds to the theorised expectation as well: America's power advantage over China started to diminish well before its renewed interest in the Arctic materialised. The reverse causal effect would have required China to catch-up on America's primacy *after* the timely embodiment of America's Arctic invigoration. It seems unlikely, moreover, that an exogenous variable Z has catapulted the variance in both the relative distribution of power and America's Arctic policy (ibid.: 104).

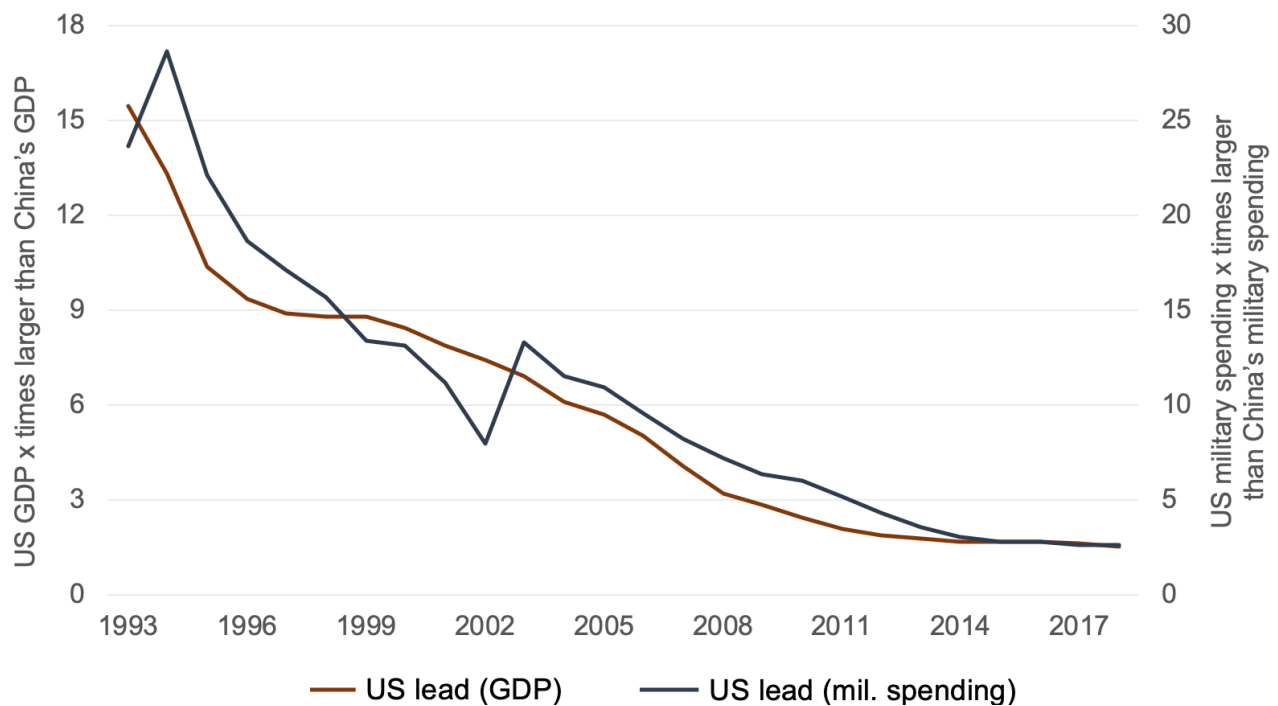
The Waltzian baseline is able to account for the timing of America's Arctic invigoration as well, but only somewhat. As illustrated below, America's aggregate power advantage over China alone had diminished more in 2018 than in, for instance, 1998 (World Bank 2019b, 2019c). America's balancing imperative is thus more commanding now than then. This helps explain why America's interest in the Arctic has ascended in recent time rather than two decades ago.

The baseline cannot infer from Waltz' balance-of-power framework exactly when we would expect the US to respond to China's growing capabilities, however. Waltz suggests, in light of

his aspiration to explain recurring patterns of international outcomes, that we evaluate the explanatory power of his theory “in the 15-year interval” (Waltz 1979: 125). 15 years is a long time in the world of foreign policy, however, and it seems relevant to specify why the US appreciated its balancing imperative in 2018 rather than in 2005 or 2015, by when China’s capabilities also presented a more potent threat to America’s primacy than by the end of the Cold War. To this paper, at least, this timely difference is not trifling, given its ambition to explain (1) the principal driver and (2) the particular timing of America’s Arctic invigoration.

Figure 4.5

America’s economic and military advantage over China, 1993-2018. Based on data from the World Bank (2019a, 2019c).



As depicted above, the power disparity between America and China had, in fact, almost diminished as much in 2014 as in 2018. America’s military expenditures were 3,0 times larger than China’s ditto in 2014; the number had decreased to 2,6 in 2018 (World Bank 2019c). In 2014, America’s GDP was 1,7 times larger than that of China; four years later, the number was 1,5 (World Bank 2019a). Indeed, this development further reduced America’s power

advantage. The chasm between China and America's relative growth rates was minimal in this period, however; especially when considering the development in the preceding years.

Still, America's diminishing power advantage did not translate into a balancing response in the Arctic before 2018. In fact, as elaborated in section 4.1, reconciliation and retrenchment characterised America's Arctic policy more than balancing at the apex of China's relative power increase from 1993 to 2014. For instance, the US allowed China to become a permanent observer to the Arctic Council in 2013 (Conley and Melino 2019: 2). Was it exclusively because of "friction" that the US refrained from balancing against China's rising power in the Arctic at this time but did so in 2018? Or does this suggest that other factors, at the systemic and/or domestic levels, have shaped the American policy change as well, and that the transmission belt between systemic stimuli and state behaviour is not as mechanic as suggested by Waltz? Also, why did China's power catch-up prompt an American response in the Arctic in 2018 and not first in 2022? The US sustained an Arctic status quo-posture from 2014 to 2018 in spite of its diminished power advantage, so why could the Arctic invigoration not wait four more years?

It is unsurprising that the Waltzian baseline is unable to account for the precise timing of America's balancing response, considering that Waltz is concerned with international politics rather than particular foreign policies (Waltz 1979: 121). This paper seeks to explain the latter, however, and it therefore seems imperative to complement the baseline's generic account of the timing of America's Arctic invigoration with a more context-sensitive explanation. The ambition to answer both aspects of my research question would miscarry, I believe, if the paper concluded that America's interest in the Arctic has elevated since 2018, because China's relative power increase started to disrupt America's global primacy up to 15 years ago.

4.2.4 Summary: Systemic findings

The Waltzian baseline expected America's renewed interest in the Arctic to reflect balancing in light of mounting great power competition with Russia and/or China. The empirical material substantiates this expectation: China's relative capabilities have, in particular, ascended in recent time, which has compelled the US to balance against China's power across the world, including in the Arctic, to safeguard its global primacy. The baseline is, as such, able to provide a rather convincing explanation of the principal driver of America's Arctic invigoration.

The baseline is struggling to account for the second aspect of the research question regarding timing, however. China's relative power has ascended continuously since the end of the Cold War. Why did this translate into American balancing in the Arctic in 2018 rather than sooner or later? The baseline is also somewhat puzzled by Russia's prominent position in most recent American Arctic documents considering that Russia's relative power catch-up has been modest.

While the Waltzian baseline provides a coherent explanation of the first aspect of the research question, then, it still leaves unanswered questions behind. In the pursuit of a more elaborate analysis and explanation, I will therefore now introduce three neoclassical realist nuances at the systemic and domestic levels: clarity, strategic environment, and leader images.

4.3 NCR: The systemic level

The Waltzian baseline constitutes the initial systemic-level analysis in my neoclassical realist framework as explained in the theory chapter. The remaining analysis should be perceived as a perpetuation of the above examination, therefore, in which Waltz' parsimonious assumptions are relaxed to make room for intervening forces at the systemic and domestic levels, rather than an autonomous analysis. While the forthcoming sections 4.3 and 4.4 are framed as the 'NCR'-sections of the analysis, in other words, the above section 4.2 constitutes an integral part of the neoclassical realist investigation as well.

At the outset, neoclassical realism arrives at the same principal explanation of America's renewed Arctic interest as the Waltzian baseline (Ripsman et al. 2016: 19). The anarchic feature of the international system compels the US to balance against China's rising power in the Arctic and elsewhere to keep the world 'off balance' and maximise American security (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 32). America's mounting internal and external balancing in the Arctic since 2018 reflects that the American FPE has abided by this incentive. Thanks to its more intricate understanding of the international system and inclusion of intra-state level insights, the neoclassical realist framework might still be able to refine the baseline's explanation of America's Arctic invigoration, however. For instance, the neoclassical realist nuances might help clarify to what degree Russia, despite its modest catch-up on America's primacy, has informed the policy change as well as suggested by various empirical data points, and also why it started to materialise in 2018 rather than sooner or later.

I will now introduce America's degree of clarity and the nature of its strategic environment as possible behavioural modifiers at the systemic level. As elaborated in the theory chapter, clarity relates to two parameters in this paper: (1) Is the threat presented by Russia and China's capabilities readily discernible to the American FPE? And (2) does the optimal policy response stand out (Ripsman et al. 2016: 46)? Strategic environment relates to the imminence of this threat, which is a function of: (1) Russia and China's relative power vis-à-vis the US and (2) the geographic proximity of the Russian and Chinese threat to American territory (ibid.: 52-53).

Assessing these questions will qualify the causal mechanism that links America's systemic stimuli to its Arctic policy in practice, I assume, and as such produce a comprehensive understanding of the recent policy change. I will now briefly establish America's degree of clarity and the nature of its strategic environment in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War and hereafter examine whether the following development in these variables can help refine the Waltzian baseline's explanation of the research question.

4.3.1 The Unipolar Moment

In addition to America's supreme hegemonic position in the aftermath of the Cold War, Russia and China did not present a proximate threat to American security at this time. China purchased its first icebreaker, *Xue Long 1*, from Ukraine in 1994 and began its Arctic research activities shortly afterwards (Humpert 2019a; Mariia 2019: 95). China's external activities were concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region, however, and its Arctic presence remained negligible (Zhao 1997: 114). Russia's Arctic engagement was trifling as well; the Yeltsin government was more concerned with holding the federation together and managing its distinct socio-economic challenges than sustaining a robust Arctic force posture (Boulègue 2019: 4; Sleivyte 2010: 13).

As such, America's strategic environment was highly permissive at this time: Russia and China's capabilities were inadequate to thoroughly challenge America's primacy, and they were located in theatres far away from American territory. This allowed intra-state particularities to shape America's foreign policy making; ideology and other democratic 'luxury' could be afforded, because even a tenuous presence in the Arctic and elsewhere did not jeopardise America's primacy and security (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012: 41-42). This helps explain why the US engaged in overseas conflicts in Iraq-Kuwait and Serbia-Kosovo during this time, where the political costs of American passivity were deemed considerable within the domestic political

arena, while it disentangled from the Arctic, which was considered a less commanding political priority in light of the demise of the Soviet threat (Sestanovich 2014: 262–65).

The international system presented considerable evidence that American security was not menaced by Russia and China at this time, moreover. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1993 encapsulated its faltering capabilities since the Cold War-apex (Mastanduno 2019: 483). And while parts of the Russian FPE sought to perpetuate Russia's revisionist intentions, President Yeltsin remained largely committed to Mikhail Gorbachev's reconciliatory foreign policy approach⁷ (Shevtsova 2007: 4). In a 1992 speech to the UN Security Council, Yeltsin for instance stated that the "abyss" between the US and Russia "must be bridged" (AP News 1992).

China's foreign policy ambitions were less transparent by virtue of Deng Xiaoping's "24-character strategy", which implied a low Chinese profile in international affairs in order to boost domestic economic development (Fravel 2012; Zhao 1997: 114–15). It was not obvious to the American FPE whether China bolstered its capabilities to challenge America's hegemony, therefore, or if its modernisation was informed by more noble intentions (Mastanduno 2019: 487). The international system also failed to provide clear guidance on how the American FPE should manage the post-Cold War transition to a unipolar world order. It was vividly discussed in the Clinton administration whether to reduce America's global force posture and socialise Russia and China into the American-led world order, for instance, or whether to sustain a prominent American presence across the world to consolidate its supremacy (Sestanovich 2014: 263–64). This diminished the degree of clarity presented to the American FPE.

On the overall, the American FPE was readily able to discern its exceptional power advantage over Russia and China at this time, however, and given the permissive character of America's strategic environment, it was no longer imminent to sustain a potent force posture in the Arctic.

4.3.2 It's the geography, stupid

Since then, China has become a more imminent threat to American security following from its relative power increase as previously outlined. This has made America's strategic environment increasingly restrictive and, as such, induced the American FPE to balance against China's

⁷ This was particularly true for Yeltsin's first term as president from 1991-1996 (Smith 2020: 31).

power in Arctic and elsewhere, since other policy responses have become less able to redress the Chinese threat (Ripsman et al. 2016: 52). The international system has presented clear evidence on this development, moreover. The American FPE has, like all other human beings with an internet connection, been able to retrieve statistics on China's improving economic and military capabilities. As such, it has been readily discernible to the American FPE that China is now more able to challenge America's primacy than two or three decades ago. This resonates with the Waltzian baseline's explanation for why the US has balanced against China's power in the Arctic in recent time rather than in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War.

In addition, China and Russia's presence in and attentiveness to the Arctic has ascended since the Cold War-ending (Boulègue 2019: 7; Sørensen 2019: 3). This has further exhausted America's strategic environment, since more Chinese and, in particular, Russian capabilities have become concentrated close to American territory. Even for the world hegemon, adversary build-up in one's own "backyard" is alarming, and America's incentive to invoke a balancing-like Arctic posture has therefore become more commanding against this backdrop. This also helps explain why Russia takes a central position in various recent American Arctic documents. Russia's mounting presence specifically in the Arctic has made Russia a more imminent threat to American security than its aggregate capabilities in general suggest and seem, as such, to have informed America's renewed interest in the Arctic as well.

Russia's Arctic build-up includes a decisive overhaul of its Northern Fleet; the (re)opening and renovation of several Arctic military bases; an expanded icebreaker fleet; new Arctic command centres; more and larger regional military exercises; and a strong engagement in several Arctic energy sites, including in particular the LNG-megaproject on the Yamal peninsula (Klimenko 2016: 46; Konyshov et al. 2017: 117–18; Laruelle 2014: 261–62).

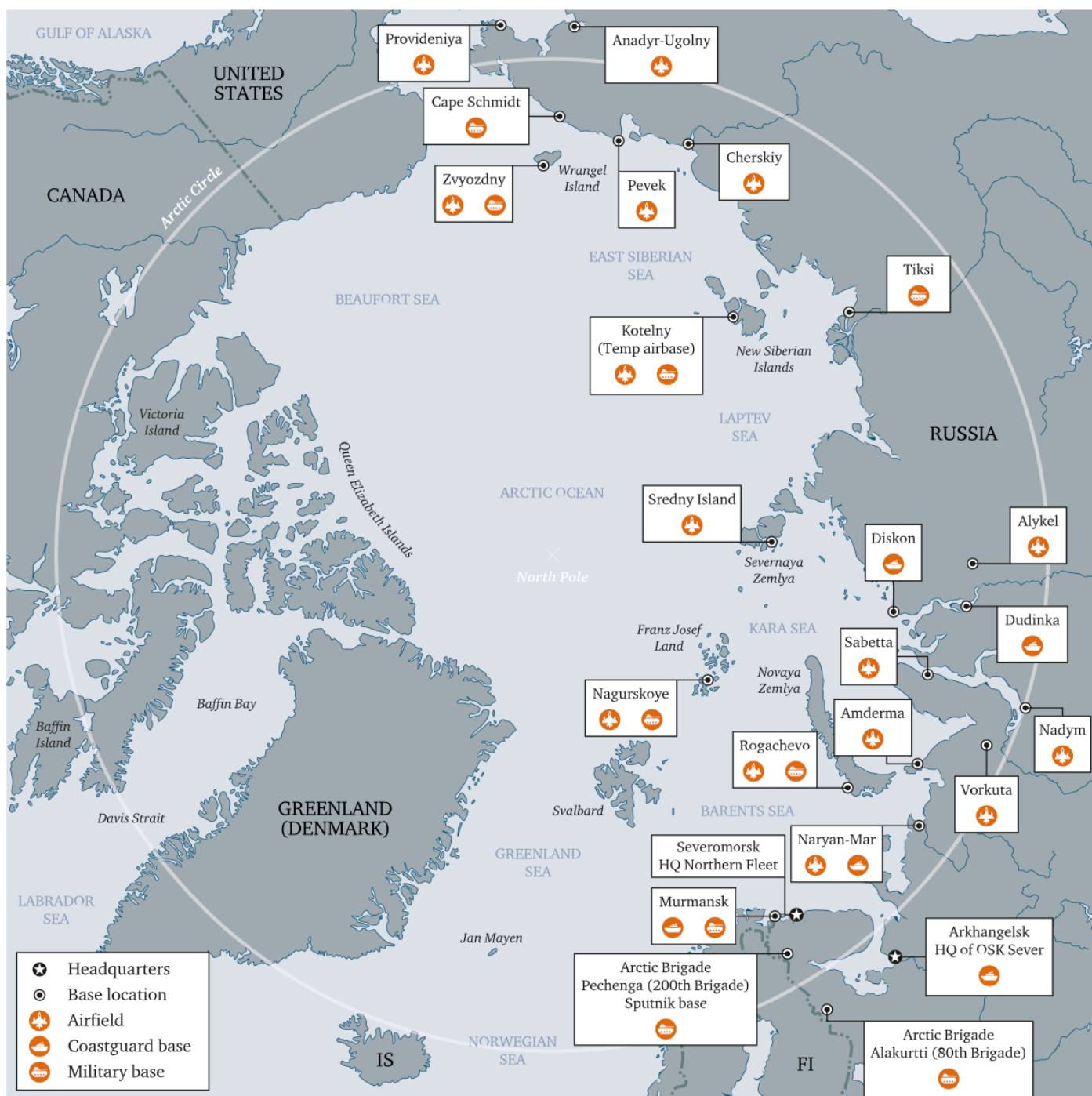
China's growing presence in the Arctic has, in particular, been guided by its so-called "science diplomacy" (Chen 2012: 362). This includes multiple Arctic scientific expeditions, a more capable icebreaker fleet, and permanent research facilities on Svalbard and Iceland (Perreault 2016: 422). China has also expanded its political-economic ties with the Nordic Arctic states, including through bilateral trade agreements, investments, and high-level state visits (Bertelsen et al. 2016: 446). After three failed attempts in the late 2000s and early 2010s, China managed to become an Arctic Council observer state in 2013, moreover (Lim 2018: 2).

Various American strategies and speeches necessitate a more vigilant Arctic policy with reference; not only to Russia and China's capabilities as such, but to their mounting presence in the Arctic in particular. This includes the USCG and DoD 2019 Arctic strategies, the latter of which highlights that Russia and China are "pursuing activities and capabilities in the Arctic that may present risks to the homeland" (DoD 2019b: 6; USCG 2019: 4). It also includes Mike Pompeo's Rovaniemi speech and Carla Sands' address at *Folk & Sikkerhed's* 2019 security policy conference, where she raised concern over Russia's "aggressive and provocative behaviour in the Arctic" and its new Nagurskoye Air Base (Sands 2019c). Nagurskoye is Russia's most northern military facility (see below figure) and enables Russian fighter jets to reach America's Thule Air Base with the help of re-fuelling tankers (Boulègue 2019: 36). As such, Nagurskoye has considerably elevated the proximity of the Russian threat to America's national security.

These are all significant pieces of evidence that substantiate that Russia and China's build-up particularly in the Arctic has been important to the American policy change. Russia and China's respective Arctic postures seem to constitute two dissimilar threats, though. Russia is primarily presented as a threat to American security with reference to its rising force posture in the Arctic. China is articulated as a capable threat by virtue of its elevated Arctic presence as well, but also because of its mounting ability to disrupt the American-led world order as such. This difference is, for instance, reflected in Carla Sands' speech at the 2019 *Future Greenland Conference* in Nuuk, in which she noted that "Russia is rapidly militarizing the Arctic" and that China, on top of that, aspires to disrupt the foundations of the liberal world order (Sands 2019b). Similarly, the USCG 2019 Arctic strategy highlights that China "continues to expand its influence and seeks to gain strategic advantage around the world", while Russia, a few sentences later, is presented as a rising threat with particular reference to its Arctic build-up (USCG 2019: 10). At the Arctic policy briefing in April 2020, the senior State Department official reiterated that while "[w]e've seen an enhanced ops tempo of the Russian military in the Arctic", China constitutes "a bit of a different challenge" (State 2020).

Figure 4.6

Russia's Arctic military infrastructure.
Based on Boulègue (2019: 15).



This might reflect that Russia's current force posture in the Arctic is significant, while China's presence still revolves around potential dual use scientific, financial, and diplomatic facilities (Kopra 2020). It also indicates that America's Arctic invigoration has been informed by two diverse balance-of-power logics, however. The US is balancing against China in the Arctic and elsewhere, because China's aggregate power catch-up has been remarkable in the post-Cold War period. China's growing presence specifically in the Arctic has spiralled the American sense of danger and transformed the Arctic into a theatre of global great power competition. While the American FPE has been compelled to check China's power across the world in the first place, therefore, China's mounting investments in the Arctic has increased pressure on the US to translate its systemic competition with China into balancing in this particular theatre as well.

The US is also balancing against Russia in the Arctic; not so much by virtue of its power catch-up as such, but because its potent force posture particularly in the Arctic challenges America's regional security interests, including its homeland security and ability to freely navigate the strategically important GIUK-gap. Russia's significance to the American policy change becomes more intelligible, therefore, if geopolitics is allowed to feature in the analysis. This also refines the baseline's explanation of the first aspect of research question: America's rising interest in the Arctic since 2018 has been informed by China's systemic power increase as well as China and Russia's rising presence specifically in the Arctic. Both of these developments have exhausted America's strategic environment, which has made Arctic balancing an increasingly necessary response to safeguard its hegemony and security.

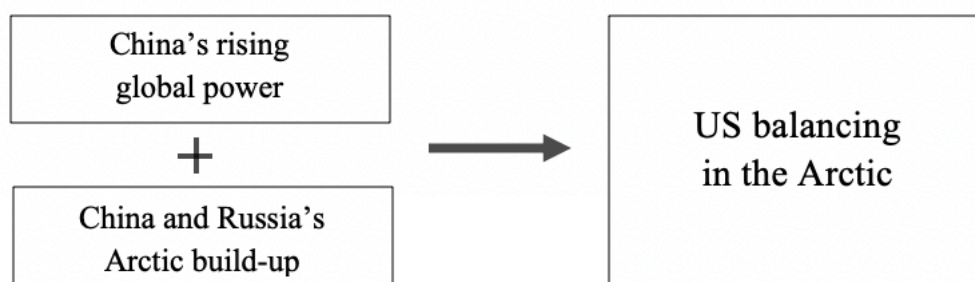


Figure 4.7

NCR-explanation of America's rising interest in the Arctic.

Geopolitics can also help explain the second aspect of the research question regarding timing. China and Russia's Arctic postures have elevated since around the late 1990s and mid-2000s respectively (Hamre and Conley 2017: 47; Mariia 2019). Their presence has, in particular, intensified within the last few years, however (Weitz 2019). Russia's Yamal LNG-plant was completed in December 2017, and several base openings and upgrades were procured around this same time, including the Temp and Nagurskoye Air Bases (Boulègue 2019: 36; Humpert 2019b). The proportions of Russia's 2017 Zapad military exercise, in which its Northern Fleet took a central position, were unseen since the Cold War-era (Conley and Melino 2019: 4). In April 2019, Russia introduced a new Arctic program, moreover, which pointed to various Arctic infrastructure upgrades and an expanded icebreaker fleet (Isachenkov and Titova 2019).

The Arctic was linked to China's BRI in 2017 (Mariia 2019: 96). China published its first Arctic White Paper in 2018, which reiterated its aspiration to include the "Polar Silk Road" in the BRI and crystallised that China perceives itself as an "important stakeholder in Arctic affairs" (Xinhua 2018). China has also stepped up attempts to channel investments into the energy, infrastructure, and mining sectors in Arctic states, including the much-debated 2018 bid by a Chinese company to construct and renovate three Greenlandic airports (Lim 2018: 11).

Though America's aggregate power advantage over China remained practically unchanged from the mid-2010s until 2018, therefore, the Chinese threat became more proximate, and thereby imminent, during this period. As such, the American FPE was under more pressure to translate China's systemic catch-up into Arctic balancing in 2018 than in the preceding years. Russia's potent Arctic force posture had become considerable by 2018, moreover, which reinforced America's incentive to invoke a balancing-like Arctic posture at this time. Combined, Russia and China's Arctic build-up in the late 2010s increased the costs of a sustained American posture of Arctic disinclination, in other words, which also helps explain why the American response materialised in 2018 rather than in the following years. America's balancing incentive had become so commanding in 2018 that it was strongly impelled to pursue a more spirited, prioritised, and self-assertive Arctic policy at around this particular time.

Climate change has, to a large degree, enabled Russia and China's more distinct foothold in the Arctic, since its ramifications have opened the region for more profound human activity than its previous environmental conditions permitted (Henriksen and Rahbek-Clemmensen 2017:

1). For instance, the diminishing Arctic sea ice extent has made the Northern Sea Route (NSR) increasingly navigable, and thus more entrancing, in recent time (Conley 2019). This has made America's strategic environment more sensitive than only a few years ago, when the Arctic sea ice still impeded most large-scale human endeavours in the region (Tingstad et al. 2018: 3).

4.3.3 The Crimean juncture

In addition to a more restrictive strategic environment, America's clarity on Russia and China's preparedness to challenge vital American interests has increased within the past few years. The evidence that Russia is disposed to challenge the American-led world order has been particularly lucid since 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and launched a clandestine offensive in Eastern Ukraine (Buchanan 2016). Since then, Russia has sought to demonstrate its great power credentials and readiness to subdue American interests with renewed fervour in various theatres across the world (Smith 2020: 1–2). This includes a growing number of provocative overflights of NATO territory and Russia's interference with the US presidential election in 2016 (Gardner 2016: 492). It also includes Russia's considerable diplomatic and military support for the al-Assad regime in Syria since 2015 (Casula 2017: 28, 45).

Central American defense strategies published ante and post the Crimean crisis indicate that this improved degree of clarity prompted a more hostile American threat perception of Russia. In the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance, for instance, President Obama announced his much-debated aspiration to “rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region” (DoD 2012b: 2). The evolving strategic landscape allowed the US to reduce its European force posture, the strategy continued, and “build a closer relationship” with Russia (ibid.: 3). The 2015 National Security Strategy was marked by rising realpolitik concerns with Russia's post-Crimean assertiveness, in contrast (White House 2015). The 2015-strategy for instance notes that the US is “enforcing tough sanctions on Russia to impose costs and deter future aggression” (ibid.: i).

The US DoD Arctic strategies suggest that America's aggravated foreign policy outlook on Russia translated into its Arctic policy as well at this time. In the 2013 Arctic strategy, Russia is mentioned once; in a paragraph that prosaically lists the five Arctic coastal states (DoD 2013: 6). Russia is mentioned 25 times in the 2016-strategy, by contrast (DoD 2016b). Some of these mentions reflect a growing American concern with Russia's self-assertive behaviour across the European theatre (ibid.: 10). Consequently, the 2016-strategy states, the DoD “will continue

investments in improved posture and capabilities” in the Arctic and “expand the scope and complexity of Arctic exercises with allies and partners” (ibid.: 10).

As such, the 2016 DoD Arctic strategy also, to some degree, contrasts the 2013 National Arctic Strategy, which highlights climate change, science, and international collaboration as central American priorities (White House 2013: 10). Russia is only mentioned once in the national 2013-strategy; this time in a footnote listing the permanent members of the Arctic Council (ibid.: 4). The strategy does not mention America’s dispute with Russia over jurisdiction along the NSR, moreover (ibid.). This dispute is absent from the 2013 DoD Arctic strategy as well (DoD 2013). An entire paragraph is devoted to the NSR-dispute in the 2016 DoD Arctic strategy, by contrast⁸ (DoD 2016b: 6). This provides a telling piece of evidence on America’s threat perception of Russia before and after Crimea, considering that the dispute has been ongoing for several decades and therefore could have featured in all three documents (Huebert 2009: 17).

Several significant empirical data points substantiate, in other words, that the American FPE appreciated the mounting evidence on Russia’s preparedness to challenge the American-led world order in the post-Crimean period and translated this into a more watchful Arctic policy. When Russia’s military build-up in the Arctic started to accelerate shortly afterwards, it was interpreted against this backdrop, and balancing was therefore presented to the American FPE as a compelling policy response. This further helps explain why America’s balancing-like Arctic posture materialised after rather than before the Crimean crisis, when Russia’s self-assertive credentials were less apparent to the American FPE.

4.3.4 *Made in China 2025*

While China’s anti-Western sentiments in general have been less overt than those of Russia, its preparedness to disrupt America’s unipolar world order has been presented to the American FPE with rising clarity within the past few years as well (Sørensen 2018: 2). This further helps explain why America’s Arctic invigoration materialised in 2018 rather than sooner or later.

China’s confidence on the world stage has risen since the 2013 appointment of President Xi Jinping (Ferdinand 2016: 492). Rather than a Crimea-like moment, where it became crystal

⁸ The paragraph covers the NSR-dispute as well as America’s similar disagreement with Canada over jurisdiction in the Northwest Passage (NWP) (DoD 2016b: 6).

clear that China possesses; not only the capabilities, but also the intention to challenge vital American interests, America's China-related clarity seems to have matured gradually throughout Xi's presidency (ibid.: 493). China was central to the formation of the New Development Bank in 2014, which presented a BRICS-alternative to the American-engineered IMF and the World Bank (Lanteigne 2019: 14). In 2015, China launched the "Made in China 2025"-plan, which established its portentous ambition to become a technological and manufacturing superpower by 2025 (Kania 2019). China has also, in general, hardened its line on the territorial dispute in the South China Sea under President Xi (Morton 2016: 909–10).

China opened its first overseas military facility in Djibouti in August 2017, moreover, and in his seminal address to the National Congress of China's Communist Party a few months later, President Xi announced a "new era" for China centred on a "world-class" military and a more "active role in international affairs" (Lanteigne 2019: 115; Xi 2017: 16, 54). This great power orientation has, in particular, been propelled by China's "one belt, one road"-initiative (BRI), which was introduced by President Xi in 2013, but has since been consolidated and extended considerably (Ferdinand 2016: 949–50). China's aspiration to expand its trade networks into Africa, Asia, Europe, and also, increasingly, the Arctic under the auspices of the BRI has emphasised that China's foreign policy focus now transcend the Asia-Pacific theatre (ibid.: 954).

America's Arctic invigoration might trace back to 2018 rather than the time around 2013, then, because the international system presented more tangible evidence to the American FPE on China's revisionist intentions in 2018 than under Hu Jintao's leadership in 2013, whose foreign policy was more informed by Deng Xiaoping's "24-character strategy" (Lanteigne 2019: 17). This also helps explain why the American policy change did not start to materialise in the following years: China's ability and readiness to disrupt American interests in the Arctic and beyond had become so evident in 2018 that a response much later would have been untimely.

Like with Russia, there is strong evidence that the American FPE translated China's revisionist trajectory into a more alert foreign policy outlook; in general, as in the Arctic. This is, for one thing, reflected in the annual reports by the DoD on "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China". The 2012-report centres on conciliatory aspects of the US-China relationship and, for instance, highlights the 2011 meeting between Presidents Obama and Hu Jintao, in which they committed to "build a cooperative partnership based on

mutual respect“ (DoD 2012a: iv, 12–13). The tone is more wary in the 2016-report, and the 2019-report reflects an increasingly exhausted American threat perception of China, which is prevalent in the 2018 National Defense Strategy as well (DoD 2016a: 95, 2018, 2019a: 1–2).

The 2019 DoD-report on China was the first of its kind to include a section on “China in the Arctic”, moreover (DoD 2019a: 114). This suggests that China’s rising attentiveness to the Arctic, and its more distinct self-confidence on the global stage as such, had come to inform America’s Arctic policy at this time. China took a prominent role in the 2019 USCG and DoD Arctic strategies as well; the latter notes that “China is attempting to gain a role in the Arctic in ways that may undermine international rules and norms” (DoD 2019b: 6). China does not figure in neither the DoD 2013 Arctic strategy nor the USCG ditto, by contrast (DoD 2013; USCG 2013).

Mike Pompeo’s Rovaniemi speech, in which China is mentioned no less than 25 times, constitutes another notable testament to the connection between America’s deteriorated China-outlook and the articulated need for a revitalised Arctic policy. In the speech, Pompeo for instance highlights that “China’s pattern of aggressive behaviour elsewhere [...] should inform what we do” in the Arctic (State 2019). Carla Sands has reiterated this argument on several subsequent occasions, including at the 2019 *Future Greenland Conference*, where she stated that China is “threatening the system of free trade, transparency, and rule of law”, and now “their eyes have turned north” (Sands 2019b).

4.3.5 *Balancing becomes superior*

Since the tangible ramifications of China’s BRI-vision, and the internationalisation of its foreign policy vision as such, became increasingly conspicuous throughout Xi’s presidency, America’s systemic imperative to balance against China’s rising power was presented to the American FPE with more limpidity in 2018 than earlier in President Xi’s tenure (Lanteigne 2019: 14–15). As such, the degree of clarity does not only help explain why the American FPE pursued a balancing-like Arctic posture in 2018 but refrained from doing so in 2013, even though America’s power advantage over China remained stable during this period. It also helps explain why America’s Arctic invigoration started to materialise in 2018 rather than in 2014, 2015, or 2016, when China’s revisionist aspirations were less evident. China’s military expansion in Africa in 2017 and President Xi’s subsequent “great power”-speech might have constituted a

critical juncture in this regard, which crystallised to the American FPE that China possessed the capabilities *and* the will to challenge America's global primacy.

The before-mentioned data material substantiates that America's threat perception of China aggravated around this particular time, which then translated into a more self-assertive Arctic policy. While the 2018 National Defense Strategy, as previously outlined, strongly denounced China's display in Asia and beyond, China takes a peripheral position in the 2015 National Defense Strategy, for instance (DoD 2018: 1; White House 2015). The 2015-strategy has a more cooperative sight than the 2018-version, moreover, and notes that "the scope of our cooperation with China is unprecedented" in its introducing remarks (White House 2015: i). Similarly, and as elaborated above, the focus on China's revisionist intentions is central in the 2019 DoD and USCG Arctic strategies (DoD 2019b: 2; USCG 2019: 4). In the 2016 DoD Arctic strategy, by contrast, China is only mentioned once; in a courtly paragraph that lists all Arctic Council observer states (DoD 2016b: 9). Based on interviews with multiple American civil servants in 2016, Henriksen and Rahbek-Clemmensen (2017: 14) similarly notes that China's Arctic activities did not "ring warning bells" in Washington around this time.

In 2015, moreover, the US assumed the chairmanship of the Arctic Council under the theme "One Arctic", which embodied America's belief "that the entire world shares a responsibility to protect, to respect, to nurture, and to promote the region" (US Embassy 2015). This cooperative outlook greatly contrasts the hawkish tone reflected in Mike Pompeo and Carla Sands' 2019 speeches on the Arctic and China's role herein as outlined above (Sands 2019b, 2019c; State 2019). Sands further emphasised the discrepancy between America's outlook on China in the Arctic now and then, when she denounced China's expansionist intentions and attempt to "promote its anti-freedom values and selfish economic interests" (my translation) in the Arctic in an op-ed in the Danish news outlet *Altinget* in April this year (Sands 2020).

The optimal policy response has been presented to the American FPE with rising clarity as well: considering China's (1) sustained catch-up on America's primacy, (2) growing presence particularly in the Arctic, and (3) mounting revisionist ambitions, other policy options than balancing, including attempts to integrate China into the existing world order, have become less able to redress the Chinese threat. This further helps explain why China's relative power increase translated into Arctic balancing in 2018 rather than earlier in Xi's tenure, when China's

external conduct was less self-confident and more policy options therefore still seemed somewhat viable to the American FPE (Sestanovich 2014: 312–13).

4.3.6 Summary: Systemic modifications

The analytical introduction of America's degree of clarity and the nature of its strategic environment refines the baseline's explanation of the research question in two central ways. First, America's renewed Arctic interest has been informed; not only by its global great power competition with China, but also by China and Russia's recent build-up specifically in the Arctic. Though America's power advantage over Russia remains considerable, Russia has significantly strengthened its Arctic force posture within the past few years, including through new icebreakers and military facilities. This has made Russia a capable threat to America's regional and national security interests. China's Arctic attention has also elevated, which has increased America's pressure to balance against China's systemic power in this particular theatre as well.

Second, America's Arctic invigoration started to materialise in 2018 rather than sooner or later, because China and, in particular, Russia's Arctic presence by then had become considerable. The evidence that Russia and China are prepared to challenge vital American interests in the Arctic and beyond had also become prominent by 2018; propelled for instance by Russia's self-assertive external conduct since its 2014 annexation of Crimea and China's rising self-confidence under President Xi. Balancing was, accordingly, presented to the American FPE as a necessary Arctic policy response in 2018; more so than in the early-to-mid-2010s, for instance, when Russia and China constituted, and also were perceived as, a less imminent threat to American security. Its systemic pressure to pursue balancing had become so commanding in light of this development, moreover, that the American FPE was compelled to invoke a balancing-like Arctic posture at around 2018 rather than sometime in the following years.

	Restrictive strategic environment	Permissive strategic environment
Low clarity		Mid 2000s- mid 2010s Post-Cold War ✕
High clarity		✕ Last few years

Table 4.1

Indicative illustration of America's clarity and strategic environment. Based on Ripsman et al. (2016: 55).

Can we be sure, then, that these two structural modifiers have, in fact, influenced the causal mechanism that links America's systemic stimuli to its Arctic policy? While the empirical data points, as outlined in the methods chapter, do not allow for irrefutable conclusions, they do substantiate that America's improved degree of clarity and exacerbated strategic environment have been central to the motivation and timing of the Arctic invigoration. The variance in the variables correlate as documented above, and the American policy change materialised after its systemic surroundings started to deteriorate. The neoclassical realist framework offers a compelling explanation for their observed influence on the causal mechanism, moreover. While I cannot preclude that the relationship is spurious, I find it improbable that an exogenous variable Z should have induced the reported variance in the two structural modifiers as well as in America's Arctic policy. As such, the analysis is fairly able to corroborate the internal validity of this systemic-level causal refinement.

It is not self-evident, moreover, that the US would have revitalised its Arctic policy in 2018 if Russia and China's Arctic build-up and revisionist ambitions had *not* started to accelerate in the preceding years. The US might have done so by virtue of its systemic competition with China, but if China's Arctic interest had remained negligible, it would have been less commanding for the US to check China's power in this particular theatre and at this particular time. If Russia's Arctic force posture had not expanded, moreover, and if its preparedness to disrupt the

American-led world order had remained clouded, the American pressure to pursue Arctic balancing would have been even more modest. While we are able to explain the American policy change without the inclusion of the two structural modifiers, in other words, doing so allows for a more context-sensitive, intuitive, and compelling account of its driver as well as its timing.

4.4 NCR: Intra-state level

While America's strategic environment has indeed deteriorated in recent time, and perhaps even become more restrictive than permissive as indicated in the above table, we should not scorn its sustained supremacy. For instance, America's military expenditures still double Russia and China's combined ditto, and its economic lead is also decent (World Bank 2019c, 2019a). It would be wrong to suggest a priori, therefore, that there has been no room whatsoever for forces within America's domestic political structure to shape its Arctic policy in recent time.

As elaborated in the theory chapter, I will now focus on one such intra-state force: the political beliefs of the American FPE. In particular, I will examine to what degree the ideational differences between the Obama and Trump FPEs can complement the systemic explanation for why America's Arctic posture started to invigorate in 2018, i.e. shortly after President Trump's 2017 inauguration, rather than sometime during Obama's presidency or at a later time.

4.4.1 Climate disparity

The prominence of climate change in America's Arctic policy has greatly fluctuated during the past decade in a way that resonates with the respective political beliefs of Presidents Obama and Trump. While this discrepancy is not critical to America's Arctic balancing as such, it substantiates that the idiosyncratic beliefs of the incumbent FPE are indeed able to shape America's Arctic priorities.

Showcasing and mitigating the ramifications of climate change in the Arctic was a central American agenda under Obama's leadership (Allen et al. 2017: 12). This is reflected in the USCG, DoD, and Presidential 2013 Arctic strategies, which all focus on the need to address the spiralling climatic changes in the region (DoD 2013: 1; USCG 2013: 7; White House 2013: 10). Upon assuming the Arctic Council chairmanship in 2015, the US accordingly highlighted that climate change was among its top three political priorities (State 2015).

President Trump was inaugurated during the last months of this chairmanship, and the US soon after began to redirect its Arctic attention toward economic development and security (Conley 2019). For instance, climatic issues are dislodged as American priorities in the 2019 DoD and USCG Arctic strategies; in fact, the two documents do not mention climate change as such, but instead utilise careful formulations such as “the changing physical environment” to conceptualise the diminishing Arctic sea ice extent and other environmental developments (DoD 2019b: 3; USCG 2019).

This political recalibration resonates with President Trump’s general inclination to prioritise America’s economic development over climate change mitigation. In his *Time To Get Tough*-manifesto, Trump denounces the “many environmentalists who are cheering and applauding higher [gas] prices”, because it will “cripple” the US economy (Trump 2015: 14). During his presidency, Trump has accordingly eased several domestic climate-related restrictions and withdrawn the US from the 2015 Paris Agreement (Bump 2017; Cheung 2020). Climate change was central to President Obama’s political platform, in contrast. Several environmental initiatives were introduced during his tenure, including the Clean Power Plan, notable investments in renewable energy sources, and the instigation and ratification of the Paris Agreement, which was a notable American priority at the time (White House 2016a, 2016b).

The prominence of climate change in America’s Arctic policy has co-varied with the general climate policies of Presidents Obama and Trump, in other words. The relationship appears causal, even, since climate change went from being a central to a spectral Arctic priority shortly after the 2017 inauguration of President Trump. No exogenous variable Z seems capable of accounting for the sudden political recast, moreover. This suggests that America’s Arctic policy is not shaped exclusively by forces in America’s systemic environment. The question is, then, if the ideational change that followed from the Obama-Trump transition in 2017 was decisive for the timing of America’s Arctic invigoration as well.

4.4.2 The Jacksonian Turn

Presidents Trump and Obama have, at the outset, embodied distinct foreign policy values and priorities. While appreciating the importance of America’s military supremacy, Obama championed several traditional liberal foreign policy values upon assuming office, including free trade, human rights, and a rules-based world order (Lynch 2014: 41–42). In his manifesto-

like *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama for instance notes that the US enjoys a unique position to “build consensus around a new set of international rules, that expand the zones of freedom, personal safety, and economic well-being” (Obama 2006: 304). America’s engagement in the Paris agreement, the Iran nuclear deal, and its efforts to improve relations with China in the early 2010s reflect that Obama’s liberal aspirations to some degree also came to inform America’s practical external behaviour during his presidency (Bentley and Holland 2016: 1).

Trump’s presidential campaign centred on “maximum firepower and military preparedness”, “getting tough”, and prioritising American interests before anything else at all times (Trump 2015: 87). As such, the inauguration of President Trump to a large degree represented a return to the so-called Jacksonian tradition of American foreign policy, characterised on the overall by populist values and military resolve (Mead 2002: 244–45). Trump’s lukewarm commitment to NATO’s Article V, contention that China has “ripped off” the American people, including under the auspices of multilateral arrangements such as the WTO, and withdrawal from the Paris agreement demonstrates that Trump’s Jacksonianist sentiments have translated into various recent American actions on the global stage (Clarke and Ricketts 2017: 373–74).

The liberal character of President Obama’s foreign policy agenda seemed to adulterate, once he assumed office (Indyk et al. 2012: 30). Some have conceptualised Obama a “liberal hawk” for this reason, for instance with reference to his extra-judicial targeting of terrorists across the world (Lynch 2014: 43). Still, Trump seems to have pursued a more self-assertive, zero-sum, and realpolitik-informed foreign policy than that of Obama, who, after all, sustained some belief in dialogue, mutual gains, and multilateralism (Clarke and Ricketts 2017: 370). The Obama-Trump divide on Iran, international climate policy, and China as outlined above encapsulates this “Jacksonian turn” in US foreign policy under Trump’s leadership (ibid.: 375).

Trump’s Jacksonian credentials also correspond to America’s increasingly self-assertive and balancing-like Arctic policy. As such, the ideological heritage of the Trump FPE might further help explain why the American policy change started to materialise after Trump’s 2017 inauguration rather than in the preceding years, when President Obama was still in office. Trump’s “getting tough”-vision is, for instance, consistent with the self-confident tone and forceful rebuke of Russia and China’s Arctic postures reflected in the USCG and DoD 2019 Arctic strategies. The recent reactivation of America’s 2nd fleet, investments in military facilities in

Iceland, and bolstering of its icebreaker fleet similarly connect with Trump's aspiration to "strengthen American muscle" (Trump 2015: 85). His Jacksonian sentiments also match America's deteriorated threat perception of Russia and China in the Arctic and elsewhere; when Russia and China win, America loose, and the US accordingly "need to get tough in foreign policy to deal with the threats and challenges America faces from rival and enemy nations" (ibid.: 91).

While we should not overestimate Obama's practical liberal sentiments, they do, conversely, resonate with America's more cooperative approach and sustained commitment to the Arctic institutional framework reflected in the 2013 and 2016 DoD strategies (DoD 2013: 5, 2016b: 3). Obama's foreign policy agenda did not necessitate an invigorated, let alone assertive, American Arctic policy; in contrast, fostering Arctic cooperation and preserving a "cost-effective, small-footprint" American posture was more compatible with Arctic prudence and institutional binding than with a self-confident invigoration (DoD 2016b: 3). This approach also resonated with Obama's ambition to reduce America's military spending to "put our fiscal house in order here at home" in light of the financial crisis of the late 2000s (DoD 2012b: i).

4.4.3 Ideational causality?

To a large degree, therefore, the foreign policy platforms of Presidents Trump and Obama match America's diverse Arctic policies pursued during their respective tenures. It is difficult to determine whether this connection reflects ideational causality or co-variance, however. At the 2015 inauguration of America's Arctic Council chairmanship, which took place shortly after Russia's annexation of Crimea, John Kerry reiterated the importance of "consensus-driven" Arctic stewardship and noted that Russia "is 100 percent looking forward to working with us" in the Arctic Council (State 2015). In his Rovaniemi speech, by contrast, Mike Pompeo necessitated a more self-assertive American Arctic policy with specific reference to "Russia's ongoing aggressive action in Ukraine" (State 2019). It seems telling for the respective ideational propensities of the Obama and Trump FPEs that the Crimean crisis translated into such divergent rhetoric and responses with regards to the Arctic.

This discrepancy might also reflect the different systemic conditions under which the two FPEs had to navigate, however. Russia's Arctic build-up had not started to accelerate, when Kerry performed his 2015 Arctic Council speech. Hence, the idiosyncratic values of the Obama FPE had more room to discuss and pursue its preferred foreign policy response to Russia's

Ukrainian intervention in the Arctic and elsewhere. The room for intra-state “luxury” was constricted in 2019, by contrast, following from America’s increasingly restrictive strategic environment and improved degree of clarity. While Pompeo’s Rovaniemi speech corresponds to President Trump’s Jacksonian sentiments, its assertive appearance could also reflect that America’s balancing imperative had thereby become more commanding at this time.

America’s shifting stance on China’s role in the Arctic Council further demonstrates this causal equivocality. As previously noted, the US allowed China to become an observer state to the Arctic Council alongside five other non-Arctic countries in 2013 (Conley and Melino 2019: 2). Rather than obstructing the decision, John Kerry in fact played an instrumental role in brokering the required compromise (Myers 2013). This cooperative approach greatly contrasts the current efforts by the Trump FPE to undermine China’s near-Arctic claims, reflected for instance in the DoD and USCG 2019 Arctic strategies (DoD 2019b: 5; USCG 2019: 3). The American viewpoint might have toughened in light of Trump’s Jacksonian inclination to remain “suspicious of your enemies” (Trump 2015: 2015). It could also reflect that America’s balancing incentive was more pronounced in 2019 than in 2013, however, when China’s preparedness to challenge America’s primacy was less evident, and when its presence and investments in the Arctic were still modest (Sørensen 2018: 2).

While the ideological rift between the Trump and Obama FPEs is necessary to vindicate the significance of the Obama-Trump transition for the timing of America’s Arctic invigoration, it does not constitute conclusive evidence, in other words. The strong co-variance between Trump’s inauguration and the Arctic invigoration substantiates that his Jacksonian sentiments have, to some degree, helped catapult the policy change. America’s considerable incentive to balance against Russia and China’s power in the Arctic around this time in the first place, following from its exacerbated systemic surroundings, conversely suggests that the US would have revitalised its Arctic posture in 2018 regardless of the political beliefs of incumbent FPE.

More robust evidence than ideational co-variance is required to evaluate the isolated salience of the leader image-variable on the timing of the Arctic invigoration, therefore. While tangible evidence of this kind has been unattainable, two counterfactual experiments might help in this regard. First, would the Obama FPE have sustained a cooperative status quo-informed Arctic policy in today’s systemic environment? Second, would the Trump FPE have commanded a

balancing-like Arctic posture in the pre-2018 environment? If we can answer in the affirmative to one or both of these questions, the timing of America's Arctic invigoration seems, at least partly, to have been contingent on the ideational change that followed from the Obama-Trump transition.

Obama's practical foreign policy agenda was, as indicated above, perhaps as pragmatic as it was liberal. It is far from inconceivable, therefore, that he also would have pursued a more self-assertive Arctic policy in light of America's exhausted systemic surroundings. Obama's liberal inclination did not impede a hardened line on Russia in the post-Crimean period, for instance, despite his inceptive ambition to "reset" the US-Russian relationship. This is, for one thing, reflected in the differences between the 2012 and 2015 national defense strategies as outlined in section 4.3 (DoD 2012b: 2–3; White House 2015: 25). The Obama FPE toughened its Arctic policy in light of Crimea as well, although not so voluminously as during the recent invigoration. For instance, the Obama FPE reignited its interest in the Keflavik base "when they saw what Russia was doing in Crimea, in Donbas, and elsewhere", as the former DoD civil servant notes.

Despite Obama's initial aspiration to build a trustful US-China relationship, the Obama FPE similarly adopted a more vigilant China-outlook in light of China's rising self-confidence during President Xi's tenure. This is, for instance, reflected in the development from the rather cooperative 2012 to the more wary 2016 DoD-report on China as previously elaborated (DoD 2012b: iv, 2016a: i). We cannot foreclose that an even more dovish FPE would have resisted America's incentive to balance power in the Arctic in the post-2017 environment, and that the ideational credentials of the incumbent FPE, in theory, thereby could have retarded the timing of America's Arctic invigoration. By virtue of President Obama's ideological pragmatism, however, and following from his somewhat exhausted threat perception of Russia and China in the mid-2010s, we cannot induce from this counterfactual evidence that the US would have refrained from pursuing a balancing-like Arctic posture in 2018, had the Trump FPE not replaced the Obama FPE in 2017.

It is not self-evident, moreover, that President Trump would have promoted a balancing-like Arctic posture in the more permissive pre-2018 environment. America's Arctic policy was less critical to the well-being and security of the American people at this time, which is a guiding principle in Trump's "America first"-paradigm (Trump 2015: 87). Tellingly, the Arctic does not

feature in *Time to Get Tough*, whereas more marketable foreign policy issues such as America's growing trade deficit with China and the "pathetic and weak deal with Iran" is carefully emphasised (ibid.: 93, 100). As such, a pre-2018 Trump FPE might have preferred to maintain a modest foothold in the Arctic, so that both resources and attention could be devoted to external undertakings with more immediate relevance to Trump's populist agenda.

A more outright hawkish FPE could, in theory, have championed a balancing-like posture in the Arctic at this time, for instance in light of Crimea and China's more potent aggregate capabilities. Since Russia and China's Arctic postures were still negligible, however, the systemic pressure to do so was not imminent. The counterfactual experiment does not substantiate, moreover, that the ideational differences between the Obama and Trump FPEs would have translated into particularly different Arctic policies in the pre-2018 systemic environment. As such, while Trump's Jacksonian sentiments correspond to America's Arctic invigoration, it remains dubious whether the Obama-Trump transition was critical to the effective timing of the policy change.

It seems evident, however, that the inauguration of President Trump has propelled a stylistic change in America's Arctic policy. The Arctic strategies, statements, and speeches introduced by the Obama FPE relied on rather restrained diplomatic lingo, including for instance appeals to regional cooperation, common interests, and respectful stewardship (DoD 2013; USCG 2013: 4). The Trump FPE, by contrast, embodies a more outright and conflictual approach, reflected not least in Pompeo's unusually aggressive (and unscheduled) Rovaniemi speech (Koivurova 2019: 5; State 2019). In response to Carla Sands' 2020 *Altinget* op-ed, the Russian ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark publicly exclaimed that the US "instead of dialogue and cooperation now exclusively relies on a confrontational approach to the region" (my translation) (DR 2020).

This stylistic difference resonates with Obama's cooperative positive-sum starting point and Trump's self-confident "getting tough"-vision. In contrast to the timing of America's Arctic invigoration, moreover, some evidence suggests that this difference would have prevailed regardless of the development in America's systemic environment. While the Crimean crisis exhausted the Obama FPE's threat perception of Russia, for instance, its rhetoric remained somewhat dispassionate. Rather than declaring that "13,000 people have been killed due to Russia's ongoing aggression in Ukraine", like Pompeo did in his Rovaniemi speech, the 2015 National Security Strategy solemnly states that "Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty

[...] endangers international norms that have largely been taken for granted since the end of the Cold War” (State 2019; White House 2015: 10). In general, the “Obama administration was more restrained and understated” in its foreign policy conduct, as the former DoD civil servant puts it, whereas the Trump administration “is more about showing a strong front”.

4.4.4 Summary: *Intra-state equivocality*

Accounting for the political beliefs of the American FPE does not supplement the systemic-level explanation of the research question. While the Jacksonian sentiments of the Trump FPE resonate with America’s increasingly self-assertive Arctic posture, the empirical data points do not substantiate that the policy change has been contingent on President Trump’s idiosyncratic beliefs as such. For instance, the analysis cannot preclude that the less Jacksonian Obama FPE also would have pursued a balancing-like Arctic posture in 2018 in light of America’s exhausted systemic surroundings at this time.

This is not to say that proceeding to the domestic explanatory level has been futile. The populist “getting tough”-vision of the Trump FPE seems to have propelled at least two notable changes in America’s Arctic policy: First, America’s aspiration to mitigate climate change in the Arctic under Obama’s leadership has been dismissed. Second, America’s Arctic rhetoric has become more conflictual and self-confident. Both of these developments seem closely related to the ideational and stylistic differences between the Obama and Trump FPEs. Though these findings do not relate to the research question of this paper as such, they are by no means insignificant.

5 Discussion

I will now discuss the results of my analysis. The discussion falls in two sections: First, I will evaluate how and why the neoclassical realist nuances have been able to add explanatory power to the analysis. Here, I will also discuss the analytical implications of using Waltz' balance-of-power framework instead of a more subtle structural realist baseline theory. In the second section, I will assess the validity and inferential potential of my study. What conclusions can be derived from the analysis given, for instance, its intensive case-study design and limited access to candid data material? As such, the ambition of this discussion chapter is to put the findings of my analysis into perspective and evaluate its ability to explain the research question.

5.1 NCR: Added value?

As outlined in the introduction, my research question pertains to (1) the principal driver and (2) the particular timing of America's renewed interest in the Arctic. The Waltzian baseline is able to provide a largely convincing explanation of the first aspect of this research question. America's power advantage over China has diminished since the end of the Cold War. The anarchic self-help system has induced the US to balance against China's power across the world in light of this development to safeguard its hegemony; including in the Arctic. America's more spirited Arctic policy since 2018 reflects that it has honoured this inducement through both military, diplomatic, and economic internal and external balancing means.

The neoclassical realist introduction of geopolitics through the strategic environment-modifier allows the analysis to encompass other systemic conditions than the distribution of capabilities as such. This propels a compelling refinement of the Waltzian explanation of the policy change: The US exhibits a rising foreign policy interest in the Arctic, because it seeks to balance against (1) China's rising power in the international system, including in the Arctic, and (2) Russia's potent force posture specifically in the Arctic. While this nuance does not disqualify the baseline's exposition, it provides a more convincing one that resonates with the investigated empirical data points, which almost unequivocally suggest that Russia's mounting build-up in the Arctic also has been central to the American policy change.

The inclusion of geopolitics and clarity also allows for a more convincing account of the second aspect of the research question regarding timing. Since America's power advantage over China has remained stable since the early 2010s, "friction" is the best Waltzian explanation for why America's Arctic invigoration started to materialise in 2018 and not at a previous time. This is by no means an atrocious explanation; especially when considering that Waltz did not contrive his balance-of-power theory to inform empirical studies, but to explain recurrent international outcomes (Waltz 1979: 125). Also, Waltz could rightly argue that his behavioural expectations are, ultimately, vindicated by the empirical Arctic reality: Russia and China seek to disrupt America's hegemony by balancing against its global power, including in the Arctic, which has then prompted the US to adopt a more vigilant Arctic policy to keep the world 'off balance'. The particular timing of the manifestation of this development is less critical than its overall trend, and the trend unmistakably points toward balancing behaviour from all included parties.

It does seem puzzling from a balance-of-power perspective that the American posture of Arctic disinclination persevered until 2018, however. By virtue of China and, in particular, Russia's growing Arctic build-up in recent time, their Arctic capabilities greatly surpass America's ditto (Tingstad et al. 2018: 7). While the US currently operates two ageing icebreakers; one heavy and one medium-weight, Russia's icebreaker fleet comprises around 40 vessels, for instance (Allen et al. 2017: 21; Staalesen 2019). Since Waltz' behavioural expectations are derived from the systemic distribution of capabilities, this regional capability-gap is not included in the baseline analysis. Still, it arguably challenges Waltz' self-help logic that the US did not respond to its faltering Arctic power position at a previous time, since doing so would have allowed for a more resilient defence of its regional and national security interests.

The neoclassical realist softening of Waltz' causal assumptions makes America's somewhat tardy balancing response more intelligible: Russia and China's Arctic build-up in the early-to-mid 2010s did not present an imminent threat to American security, because (1) its volume was still modest and (2) Russia and China's preparedness to challenge vital American interests, in the Arctic and beyond, was less evident to the American FPE. The growing Arctic capability-gap was not critical to the American FPE, therefore, until a few years ago when the degree of clarity improved, and Russia and China's Arctic presence started to accelerate. This contracted the viable American policy options and compelled the American FPE to pursue Arctic balancing.

While the Waltzian baseline is able to provide a reasonable answer to the research question, therefore, the systemic-level nuances of the neoclassical realist framework allow for a more comprehensive and convincing explanation. As such, the neoclassical realist research program does add explanatory power, and thereby value, to the analysis.

5.1.1 Systemic prominence

The neoclassical realist introduction of leader images does not supplement the environment-based account of the research question. As such, neoclassical realism enriches the analysis; not by virtue of its ability to illuminate the context-specific interplay between forces at the domestic and systemic levels, but because of its intricate understanding of the international system, which has catapulted the formulation of the above-mentioned structural modifiers (Ripsman et al. 2016: 39–40). This is somewhat surprising, given that the neoclassical realist agenda first and foremost claims to provide a corrective to structural IR-realism by appreciating that domestic-level processes can condition the behavioural effects of anarchy and the relative distribution of power (Taliaferro et al. 2009: 37). As outlined in the theory chapter, this is also the primary reason why I preferred neoclassical realism to a single-level IR-framework.

More nuanced structural realist theories than Waltzian neorealism might have been as suitable to inform the analysis as neoclassical realism, therefore. The intra-state level insights did not add explanatory power to the analysis, so why should we expect otherwise? Such theories indeed exist, including for instance Stephen Walt's balance-of-threat theory, which starts from the relative distribution of power, but appreciates that "the level of threat is also affected by geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived intentions" (Walt 1987: 5). This systemic refinement would have enabled an analytical connection between America's Arctic invigoration on the one hand and its exacerbated threat assessment of Russia and China in light of the Crimean crisis, China's mounting external self-confidence, and Russia-China's Arctic build-up on the other. As such, a Waltian analysis might have been able to provide a similar, and equally convincing, explanation of the research question compared to the one formulated by neoclassical realism, but without aspiring to open the black box of the state. My choice of a multi-level theoretical framework might have overcomplicated the attempt to illuminate the causes of America's Arctic invigoration, in other words, which is a valid critique of my study.

This also suggests that introducing the neoclassical realist framework to a more fine-grained structural realist baseline would have added less value than it did to the Waltzian baseline. The systemic-level introduction of strategic environment and clarity might for instance have been redundant to a Waltian baseline, because a such, following from the above, to a large degree would have been able to account for these variables by itself. This might help explain, moreover, why Waltz' balance-of-power framework has been preferred as the structural baseline in so many other neoclassical realist inquiries (Ripsman et al. 2016: 117). A parsimonious Waltzian baseline makes benign room for the neoclassical realist nuances to add explanatory power to a given analysis and, as such, helps vindicate that the neoclassical realist agenda indeed fills a gap in the analytical toolbox of IR-realism. This should be taken into account when evaluating the significance of the neoclassical realist innovation as such. The analysis presented in this paper suggests, at least, that the value added of the neoclassical realist framework is contingent on the subtlety of the structural realist baseline against which it is introduced.

5.1.2 Intra-state innovation?

As outlined in the theory chapter, though, the emphasis in this paper is on explanation rather than on testing, let alone refining, theories of IR-realism. The analysis has, accordingly, strived to "consume" the neoclassical realist framework to provide as convincing an explanation of America's Arctic invigoration as possible; and although its intra-state level insights did not help in this regard, its systemic-level nuances proved significant. Walt's balance-of-threat theory and other fine-grained structural realist frameworks might have been able to account for the American policy change as well; presumably also with more rigour than the Waltzian baseline. There is no guarantee, however, that these frameworks would have catapulted a more convincing explanation than the one formulated by neoclassical realism. And even so, the neoclassical realist starting point of the analysis has still proved well-grounded, because it *has* been able to formulate a convincing answer to the research question. My preference for the neoclassical realist framework was informed precisely with this achievement in mind.

It should be noted, moreover, that other intra-state variables might have exerted more influence on the American policy change than leader images. For instance, the post-Cold War environment might have institutionalised a collective American assumption that Greenland and the broader Arctic region no longer constitutes a vital theatre for American security, which then

has constrained the ability of the American FPE to redirect its attention to the Arctic (Huebert 2009: 2). Internal disagreement within the American FPE might also have retarded its Arctic reorientation (Østhagen 2019). Though the USCG has agitated for a revitalised Arctic posture for some years, for instance, the DoD and State Department seem to have been preoccupied with other foreign policy theatres and priorities, including not least the global war on terror (Henriksen and Rahbek-Clemmensen 2017: 14; Lidegaard 2016: 33; US Senate 2009). While these properties are conjectural, they indicate that the “strategic culture” and “state-society relations”-variables in the neoclassical realist domestic-level toolbox might have been able to supplement the systemic-level explanation for why the Arctic invigoration did not materialise before 2018 (Ripsman et al. 2016: 70, 74). This would have vindicated the neoclassical realist aspiration to include the domestic political structure in an environment-based framework.

Also, more revealing data points than the ones scrutinised in this paper might have evinced that the ideational credentials of the Trump FPE were, in fact, decisive for America’s Arctic invigoration. As elaborated in the analysis, President Trump’s Jacksonian sentiments do correspond to America’s increasingly self-assertive Arctic posture. The investigated sources are unable to substantiate that the two variables are causally connected, yet they do not repudiate that a such connection might exist whatsoever. Access to, for instance, personal diaries and transcripts from critical meetings within the American FPE would have provided a more robust empirical point of departure for evaluating the effective importance of this intra-level insight.

As noted in the analysis, moreover, it cannot foreclose that an American FPE informed by exceptional dovish or hawkish ideational credentials would have catapulted different Arctic policies than the ones pursued by the Obama and Trump FPEs. For instance, a return of the Reagan FPE, which was highly informed by Soviet-wary and non-appeasing sentiments, might have adopted a balancing-like Arctic posture in the early-to-mid 2010s, even though the systemic incentive to do so was moderate at this time (McDermott 2002: 36–37). Also, an FPE directed by Bernie Sanders, who has advocated a more restrained US conduct on the global stage for decades, might have prolonged America’s Arctic disinclination in the post-2017 environment despite its increasingly commanding balancing incentive (Friedman 2020).

It seems more probable from a neoclassical realist-viewpoint that a highly hawkish FPE would have invoked a balancing-like Arctic posture in the pre-2018 environment, since the room for

intra-state variables to shape America's external behaviour was still considerable at this time. It would take a rather dovish and/or isolationist FPE to maintain a non-balancing Arctic posture in the more exhausted post-2017 environment, by contrast. The analysis is unable to preclude this scenario, however, which gives rise to a rudimentary question regarding the use of counterfactuals in IR-inquiries as such: How detached from reality can they become, before their analytical applicability dwindle? An American FPE in favour of unqualified isolationism might, in theory, be able to resist even the strongest systemic pressure to balance power, for instance, but is this a realistic scenario? And could a such FPE be elected in the first place?

While counterfactuals are indeed useful to validate causal interpretations in single-case studies, their relevance are more intuitive, this paper holds, if they are somewhat grounded in the empirical reality (George and Bennett 2005: 191). Suggesting that the leader image-variable might, potentially, have been more central to the timing of America's Arctic invigoration if Reagan or Sanders had presided over the American FPE does not help explain the research question, since neither have assumed office in recent time. Obama and Trump have done so, by contrast, and it therefore seems more fruitful to evaluate the salience of the leader image-variable through life-like counterfactuals based on their particular ideational credentials.

In addition, we should not forget that the leader image-variable did help explain the stylistic change in America's Arctic policy that has followed from the Obama-Trump transition in 2017. This constitutes a relevant finding, which would have been less comprehensible if the analysis had not proceeded to the domestic explanatory level. As such, the neoclassical realist contention that domestic-level intervening variables often condition how states, in practice, translate systemic stimuli into external behaviour is somewhat vindicated by this paper (Rose 1998: 148). Since neoclassical realism, as noted in the theory chapter, in general contends that domestic actors are more likely to shape the timing and style of a given foreign policy response than its principal motivation, it might not come as a surprise that the leader image-variable was not able to contribute with more explanatory power than it did (Taliaferro et al. 2009: 37).

This is not to say that the leader image-innovation helped explain the research question of the paper. It failed to qualify the timing of America's Arctic invigoration; hence this part of the neoclassical realist framework did not add value to the Waltzian baseline analysis. The intra-state insights were not trivial, however, and might have proved more central to the research

question if other domestic-level variables had been included and/or if more revealing data points had been available, and also if the research question as such had pertained to the particular style of the American policy change rather than its principal driver and timing.

5.2 Methodological diligence

I have strived for a study with as much methodological rigour, coherence, and transparency as possible. This is, for instance, why I attempted to carefully explain how and why I would use the process tracing case-study procedure to investigate my research question, and how this method and research design underpins the neoclassical realist framework, before conducting the analysis itself. Still, I acknowledge that the findings of the study are far from impeccable, and that its proceedings engender several methodological risks and limitations.

5.2.1 Measurement validity

While Waltz includes various indicators for aggregate power in his balance-of-power theory, the analysis presented in this paper rests on only three: GDP, population size, and military spending (Waltz 1979: 131). As such, my practical operationalisation of the theoretical power-concept is less extensive than Waltz' proposition, and this might have affected the reported relative power balance between the US, Russia, and China. Russia might have presented a more imminent threat to America's primacy, for instance, if territory size and natural resource endowments had been accounted for. I have no reason to believe, however, that the inclusion of more or other power indicators would have disrupted the analysis' overall account of the post-Cold War development in the relative distribution of power. Even when considering the full list of Waltz' operationalised power variables, including for instance political stability, competence, and resource endowments, America's power advantage over Russia and China remains notable, but less so than in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War (ibid.: 131).

Likewise, I trust that another operationalisation of America's (Arctic) foreign policy would not have induced an entirely different set of analytical findings. Thanks to its neoclassical realist starting point, the analysis has privileged power-related aspects of America's Arctic policy, including for instance its Arctic capabilities. Various speeches, strategies, and initiatives have been encompassed in the analysis, however, and it seems improbable that further, or de-emphasised, aspects of America's Arctic policy would have disrupted its reading of the recent

policy change. The analysis has been able to establish America's Arctic invigoration in the first place, moreover, and since other researchers have observed a similar development, this seems to substantiate that my operationalisation of America's Arctic policy has been somewhat able to capture the empirical reality; as able as the existing literature on the issue, at least.

The paper's declaration that the first notable remnants of America's renewed Arctic interest materialised in 2018 might be contested, though. Few scholars would date the policy change to 2017, I believe, but some might regard 2019 as the decisive turning point. While I agree that several prominent testaments did not materialise until 2019, I still hold that the invigoration started to show in 2018, reflected not least in the reactivation of the US 2nd Fleet and America's vigorous contribution to NATO's Trident Juncture exercise (Rahbek-Clemmensen 2020: 12–13). The overall findings of the analysis would remain intact if 2019 had been selected as the starting point of the Arctic invigoration, however, including that the development in America's systemic surroundings has made its balancing imperative considerable within the last few years, which then helps explain why the policy change materialised at around this particular time rather than sooner or later.

5.2.2 Data sufficiency

The investigated strategies, speeches, manifestos, and initiatives have proved well-suited to help evaluate the analytical expectations of the neoclassical realist framework and its Waltzian baseline. As such, the included empirical data points have, to a large degree, allowed the process tracing analysis to generate intensive knowledge of America's Arctic policy and, through that, provide a convincing explanation of the research question.

Access to more candid sources would have allowed for more robust conclusions as outlined in the methods chapter, however. For instance, interviews and diaries from critical members of the American FPE might have made it easier to evaluate the isolated significance of the leader image-variable. More revealing data points might also have consolidated, or disproved, my systemic-level findings. What if President Trump had demonstrably articulated that a more balancing-like Arctic posture was needed in light of Russia's Arctic facility investments and expanded icebreaker fleet to his inner foreign policy circle in the spring of 2018, for instance? This would vindicate the purported importance of the strategic environment-modifier to the timing and motivation for the Arctic invigoration. What if the Obama FPE in fact did promote a

balancing-like Arctic policy in the mid-2010s, moreover, but in a less overt manner than suggested by official statements and strategies? This would question the reported salience of America's clarity and strategic environment to the timing of the policy change.

I could have extracted more information from my investigated sources, moreover, including in particular the one elite-interview I managed to arrange. I conducted the interview in the beginning of the research process, and my insights into the features of the American policy change were therefore scarce. This left its mark on my interview questions; for instance, I paid great attention to President Bush's 2009 Arctic directive, because I found it to hold great empirical significance at this time. This was ill-advised, I now believe, for reasons outlined in the literature review, and if conducted later in the research process, I am confident that I would have been better able to use the interview to help explain my research question. I was able to make some exploratory use of the interview, though; for instance, it aroused my interest in the stylistic change in America's Arctic policy that followed from the Obama-Trump transition.

If more time and financial resources had been allocated to my research project, and given that doing so would have been practically feasible in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, I would have strived to organise a range of interviews with members of the American FPE in Washington D.C. This, I believe, would have profoundly improved my understanding of the Arctic policy change and constituted a more solid empirical background against which the theoretical expectations could be evaluated. Given my available resources, including also the spatial boundaries of the paper, I hold that the investigated data points have provided sufficient evidence to guide a reasonable process tracing analysis, nonetheless, which, despite its imperfections, has catapulted a rather convincing explanation of my research question.

5.2.3 Inferential potential

What conclusions can be derived from the analysis, then? Thanks to its intensive case-study design, the generalisability of the analysis is limited (Andersen 2012: 111). Its findings first and foremost help explain America's rising Arctic interest since 2018; this is what the research question of the paper pertains to and, therefore, what the analysis has strived to illuminate.

The analysis gives rise to two theorised hypotheses that transcend its immediate scope, however. First, America's exacerbated systemic surroundings have induced a more vigilant

American foreign policy strategy as such. This is demonstrated rather firmly in the analysis, in fact; after the Crimean crisis and China's mounting self-confidence on the global stage, and in light of America's faltering hegemonic supremacy, great power competition has become more accentuated in America's foreign policy strategies and statements; not just with regards to the Arctic, but in general. This might help explain some of America's recent and future actions beyond the Arctic theatre, including for instance its intensified efforts to boost NATO's collective capabilities and its initiation of the so-called trade war with China (Gramer 2019).

Second, if we reverse the balance-of-power logic, Russia and China's distinct internal balancing in the post-Cold War period has been informed by America's persistent power advantage. Russia and China's rising preparedness to disrupt vital American interests, in the Arctic and beyond, might similarly reflect their aspiration to form a more level balance of power in the international system. While the analysis does not investigate this causal mechanism as such, we can use the principal theoretical argumentation of the Waltzian baseline to help understand its overall features.

We should keep in mind, though, that the analysis centres on a single case with no internal, let alone external, spatial variation (Gerring 2004: 243). The inferential potential of the analysis is therefore most promising regarding its account of the particular causal mechanism that links America's systemic stimuli to its conduct particularly in the Arctic. Also, further and more fine-grained research might refine or disprove the conclusions of the analysis at all times. Though the findings seem well-grounded in light of the investigated empirical material, one should bear this in mind when evaluating the robustness, and inferential potential, of the study as such.

6 Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will conclude on my inquiry. I will first do so by summarising the main findings of the paper and, as such, make clear the answer to my research question. I will then present the most notable methodological and theoretical limitations of the study and, finally, evaluate its contribution to the existing literature on America's Arctic policy. Here, I will also outline potential avenues for future research on the issue.

6.1 *Why Arctic invigoration?*

The ambition of this paper has been to explain the following research question:

Why has the US exhibited a rising foreign policy interest in the Arctic since 2018, and why did the policy change start to materialise at this particular time?

I have examined this research question through a neoclassical realist process tracing case-study of America's Arctic policy from the end of the Cold War until today. The process tracing method has proved well-suited to illuminate the causal mechanism that links America's Arctic invigoration (Y) to its causes (X). In particular, I have used the process tracing procedure to evaluate the theoretical expectations of the neoclassical realist framework and its Waltzian baseline on the properties of this causal mechanism against a selection of central qualitative empirical data points. These data points have centred on American strategies, statements, and initiatives related to the Arctic and an elite interview with a former civil servant at the DoD.

The paper has utilised a threefold analytical procedure to examine its research question: First, I sought to document the suggested variance in America's recent Arctic policy. I then explored to what degree the Waltzian baseline's purported causality between state behaviour and the relative distribution of power in the international system was able to explain this variance. Finally, I examined whether the introduction of three neoclassical realist nuances at the systemic and domestic levels, i.e. the nature of America's strategic environment, its degree of clarity, and the political beliefs of the American FPE, allowed for a more convincing explanation.

The analysis contrived three central findings. First, America's Arctic policy has been more spirited, prioritised, and self-assertive since 2018 compared to its more restrained Arctic

approach from the end of the Cold War until the recent invigoration. Since 2018, for instance, the US has reactivated its North Atlantic fleet, announced plans to open a consulate in Nuuk, and stepped up its financial investments in Greenland. As such, this first finding of the analysis has established that there *is* a variance in America's recent Arctic policy to explain.

Second, America's renewed Arctic interest reflects balancing against Russia and China. China has caught-up on America's global primacy since the end of the Cold War. The anarchic self-help system has, consequently, induced the US to balance against China's power across the world to safeguard its hegemony. China's rising attentiveness to the Arctic within the last few years has increased pressure on the US to translate its global competition with China into a balancing response in this particular theatre as well. While Russia's relative power increase has been modest, its force posture specifically in the Arctic has elevated significantly in recent time. Russia therefore presents a potent threat to America's regional and national security interests. These impulses; systemic competition with China and regional security apprehensions about Russia has propelled the transition from America's post-Cold War posture of Arctic disengagement to a more spirited and self-assertive approach. This can explain the first aspect of the research question regarding the principal driver of America's Arctic invigoration.

Third, the American policy change started to materialise in 2018, because China and Russia's Arctic build-up started to accelerate at around this time. Following from Russia's self-assertive foreign policy since its 2014 annexation of Crimea and China's growing external self-confidence under President Xi's leadership, the evidence that Russia and China are prepared to challenge vital American interests in the Arctic and beyond had become considerable in 2018, moreover. This made America's balancing incentive particularly commanding at this time; more so than in the early-to-mid 2010s, for instance, when China and Russia's ability and readiness to harm America's security was less evident. It also made it difficult for the American FPE to sustain its Arctic disinclination for much longer; its systemic surroundings strongly impelled the US to pursue Arctic balancing from around this particular time. This can explain the second aspect of the research question concerning why the policy change traces back to 2018 rather than sooner or later.

The analysis also shows that the timing of the American policy change resonates with the 2017 transition from the liberally inclined Obama FPE to the more "getting tough"-inspired Trump

FPE. The investigated empirical data points do not vindicate that this ideational change has been critical to the Arctic invigoration, however. America's systemic incentive to balance against Russia and China in the Arctic might have been so imperative in 2018, for instance, that the Obama FPE also would have invoked a balancing-like Arctic posture at this time.

As such, the analytical introduction of leader images did not help explain the research question. The systemic-level nuances of the neoclassical realist framework improved the explanatory power of the analysis considerably, however. By virtue of its unconditional focus on the systemic distribution of power, the Waltzian baseline regards America's global competition with China as the cardinal driver of its Arctic invigoration. Since America's power advantage over China has remained stable since the early 2010s, moreover, "friction" is the best Waltzian explanation for why the American policy change materialised in 2018 rather than sometime in the preceding years. As reflected above, the neoclassical realist introduction of geopolitics through the strategic environment-modifier alongside its clarity-innovation refined this baseline explanation in several notable ways.

6.2 Limitations and blind spots

The findings of the analysis seem well-grounded in light of its theoretical starting point and included data material. The analysis does not come without methodological limitations and potential blind spots, however. Most importantly, the analysis is largely based on public primary sources; and though useful, these might not reflect the sincerest reasons for the recent policy change. Access to more candid data points such as personal diaries and more interviews with members of the American FPE might therefore have allowed for a more intricate, or even divergent, explanation of America's Arctic invigoration compared to the one suggested above.

In addition, my deductive use of the process tracing method carries two notable risks: First, I might have overestimated the importance of the variables included in my analytical framework. My realpolitik-hammer might have seen balance-of-power nails everywhere, in other words. Second, I might have overlooked certain empirical dynamics that transcend my theoretical expectations. I could have used a more inductive procedure instead, therefore, but doing so would have presented a risk of an incoherent ad-hoc analysis with no or little ability to systematise the vast number of data points that may hold importance to America's Arctic policy.

The findings of the paper are also conditioned by its neoclassical realist starting point. Thanks to its nuanced understanding of the international system, neoclassical realism has proved well-suited to formulate a convincing explanation of the research question. As indicated above, though, its theoretical origin in IR-realism means that materialistic realpolitik-aspects of America's Arctic policy have been privileged in the analysis. It might have failed to appreciate relevant data points or additional influencing factors on the recent invigoration for this reason. For instance, identity, norms, and history are not included in the analysis. Russia's prominent position in recent American Arctic strategies might relate to the vigorous US-Soviet history as great power competitors as much as Russia's tangible force posture in the Arctic, nonetheless. A historical or identity-based IR-approach such as Wendtian constructivism would have been better suited to identify and evaluate the validity of a such non-materialistic explanation.

In its attempt to capture the Arctic reality 'as it is' through the analytical vocabulary of realpolitik, moreover, the paper arguably reproduces a militaristic and state-centric discourse, where the technical interests of states are privileged at the expense of marginalised groups such as the indigenous Arctic people (Roach 2008: 174–75). The sociology of science is central for the production of better and more aware knowledge, and though it has managed to answer its research question, the positivist starting point of the paper makes it unfit to evaluate how its theoretical assumptions and findings are embedded in, and have been shaped by, the political context in which it has been produced (Bueger 2012). A critical theory such as Foucauldian poststructuralism would have been well-suited to do so, but a such analysis would also have engendered a different inquiry; centred on reflexivity and political emancipation rather than explaining America's renewed interest in the Arctic as such (Hansen 2016: 107–8).

6.3 Contribution to the field

While the literature on America's Arctic invigoration remains scarce, some studies have, too, interpreted its features in light of increased great power competition with Russia and China (Conley 2019; Østhagen 2019; Weitz 2019). The particular use of neoclassical realism to illuminate the policy change is not ground-breaking either (Sørensen 2019). The profundity of the analysis presented in this paper is unmatched by previous investigations, however; at least to my knowledge. Books and anthologies are yet to be published, and the existing articles and reports on the issue are less comprehensive than this paper. While several of these publications

have illustrated *how* America's Arctic policy has become increasingly spirited, moreover, few have strived so specifically to explain *why* the policy change has materialised and why at this particular time (Pincus 2019b; Rahbek-Clemmensen 2020).

The paper seems, in particular, to bring new insights into the timing of America's Arctic invigoration. The combination of America's improved degree of clarity and exhausted strategic environment within the last few years provide a convincing, and somewhat novel, explanation for why, in particular, the first notable testaments to the policy change materialised in 2018 rather than sooner or later. This is not to say that I have resolved an empirical puzzle incomprehensible to other IR-researchers. I am confident that other scholars, once they engage in more thorough investigations, will contrive just as convincing accounts of the policy change as the one provided by this paper; and presumably even more so.

Until more research is conducted, however, the paper seems to fill a notable gap in the literature on America's Arctic policy. At the least, it identifies a set of developments in America's systemic surroundings that seem to have been central to the policy change, which further research can build on. My research design, empirical data points, and theoretical skeleton is readily available for reproduction. Scholars are able to adjust my proceedings as well, and for instance explore new empirical data points or focus on other intra-state level variables than leader images. It might, for instance, generate useful insights to examine whether America's strategic culture and fragmentation within the American FPE can help explain why the Arctic invigoration did not materialise before 2018. In addition, it would be interesting to include the past experiences of the incumbent president in the leader image-variable and, for instance, assess to what degree President Trump's past in the real estate and showbiz industries have shaped; not only the American proposal to purchase Greenland, but the style of its renewed Arctic interest as such.

Scholars might also want to explore whether a different theoretical starting point allows for a more convincing explanation of the policy change. For instance, and as suggested above, it might be fruitful to illuminate to what degree America's conflictual past with Russia and the Soviet Union has shaped its expressed desire to balance against Russia's Arctic force posture through an identity-based IR-framework.

All of the above would put the findings of this paper into perspective and expand the current, and rather scarce, knowledge production on the issue. This would indeed be useful, since we

might have witnessed only the tentative beginnings of an enduring great power scramble for the Arctic between the US, Russia, and China.

Bibliography

- Allen, Thad W., Christine T. Whitman, and Esther Brimmer. 2017. *Arctic Imperatives: Reinforcing U.S. Strategy on America's Fourth Coast*. Independent Task Force Report No. 75. New York, NY: Council on Foreign Relations.
- Andersen, Lotte B. 2012. 'Forskningskriterier'. Pp. 97–113 in *Metoder i statskundskab*, edited by L. B. Andersen, K. M. Hansen, and R. Klemmensen. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Andersen, Lotte B., Anne S. Binderkrantz, and Kasper M. Hansen. 2012. 'Forskningsdesign'. Pp. 66–96 in *Metoder i statskundskab*, edited by L. B. Andersen, K. M. Hansen, and R. Klemmensen. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- AP News. 1992. 'Text of Boris Yeltsin's Speech to the U.N. Security Council With UN-Summit, Bjt'. *AP News*. Retrieved 26 April 2020 (<https://apnews.com/e5458697cf06bbb518a9ffaffd650e5>).
- Arctic Centre. n.d. 'Definitions of the Arctic'. *Arctic Centre*. Retrieved 7 May 2020 (<https://www.arcticcentre.org/EN/arcticregion/Maps/definitions>).
- Baker, Peter, and Maggie Haberman. 2019. 'Trump's Interest in Buying Greenland Seemed Like a Joke. Then It Got Ugly.' *The New York Times*, August 21.
- Beach, Derek, and Rasmus B. Pedersen. 2012. 'Process Tracing: Metode, Design og Forskningslogik'. Pp. 235–57 in *Metoder i statskundskab*, edited by L. B. Andersen, K. M. Hansen, and R. Klemmensen. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Bekkevold, Jo I. 2019. 'China, Russia and the Great Power Contest in the Middle East'. Pp. 141–66 in *Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century*, edited by Jo I. Bekkevold and B. Lo. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bennett, Andrew. 2008. 'Process Tracing: A Bayesian Perspective'. Pp. 702–21 in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, edited by J. M. Box-Steffensmeier, H. E. Brady, and D. Collier. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Bennett, Andrew, and Jeffrey T. Checkel. 2014. 'Process Tracing'. Pp. 3–38 in *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*, edited by A. Bennett and J. T. Checkel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bentley, Michelle, and Jack Holland. 2016. 'Introduction'. Pp. 1–6 in *The Obama Doctrine: A Legacy of Continuity in US Foreign Policy?*, edited by J. Holland and M. Bentley. London: Routledge.
- Bertelsen, Rasmus G., Li Xing, and Mette H. Gregersen. 2016. 'Chinese Arctic Science Diplomacy'. Pp. 442–60 in *Global Challenges in the Arctic Region: Sovereignty, environment and geopolitical balance*, edited by E. Conde and S. I. Sánchez. London: Routledge.

- Boulègue, Mathieu. 2019. *Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic: Managing Hard Power in a 'Low Tension' Environment*. The Royal Institute of International Affairs.
- Brooks, Stephen G., and William C. Wohlforth. 2016. 'The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century: China's Rise and the Fate of America's Global Position'. *International Security* 40(3):7–53.
- Bryman, Alan. 2012. *Social Research Methods*. 4th ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Buchanan, Elizabeth. 2016. 'Arctic Thaw'. *Foreign Affairs*, January 21.
- Bueger, Christian. 2012. 'From Epistemology to Practice: A Sociology of Science for International Relations'. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 15:97–109.
- Bump, Philip. 2017. 'Trump's Explanation of "Clean Coal" Was Wrong — but Not as Wrong as It Sounded'. *Washington Post*. Retrieved 1 May 2020 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2017/08/23/trumps-explanation-of-clean-coal-was-wrong-but-not-as-wrong-as-it-sounded/>).
- Byman, Daniel, and Kenneth M. Pollack. 2001. 'Let Us Now Praise Great Men'. *International Security* 25(4):107–46.
- Casula, Philipp. 2017. 'Russia's Foreign Policy from the Crimean Crisis to the Middle East: Great Power Gamble or Biopolitics?' *Rising Powers Quarterly* 2(1):27–51.
- Chen, Gang. 2012. 'China's Emerging Arctic Strategy'. *The Polar Journal* 2(2):358–71.
- Cheung, Helier. 2020. 'What Does Trump Actually Believe on Climate Change?' *BBC*, January 23.
- Clarke, Michael, and Anthony Ricketts. 2017. 'Donald Trump and American Foreign Policy: The Return of the Jacksonian Tradition'. *Comparative Strategy* 36(4):366–79.
- Cohen, Ariel. 2010. *From Russian Competition to Natural Resources Access: Recasting U.S. Arctic Policy*. The Heritage Foundation, Background No. 2421.
- Collier, David. 2011. 'Understanding Process Tracing'. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44(4):823–30.
- Conley, Heather A. 2019. 'The Arctic Spring'. *Foreign Affairs*, September 26.
- Conley, Heather A., and Matthew Melino. 2019. *The Implications of U.S. Policy Stagnation toward the Arctic Region*. Center for Strategic & International Studies.
- DoD. 2012a. *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2012*. United States Department of Defense.
- DoD. 2012b. *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*. United States Department of Defense.
- DoD. 2013. *Arctic Strategy*. United States Department of Defense.

- DoD. 2016a. *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2016*. United States Department of Defense.
- DoD. 2016b. *Report to Congress on Strategy to Protect United States National Security Interests in the Arctic Region*. United States Department of Defense.
- DoD. 2018. *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*. United States Department of Defense.
- DoD. 2019a. *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019*. United States Department of Defense.
- DoD. 2019b. *Report to Congress, Arctic Strategy*. United States Department of Defense.
- Dodds, Klaus, and Mark Nuttall. 2018. 'Materialising Greenland within a critical Arctic geopolitics'. Pp. 139–58 in *Greenland and the International Politics of a Changing Arctic*, edited by K. S. Kristensen and J. Rahbek-Clemmensen. Milton Park: Routledge.
- DR. 2020. 'Ruslands ambassadør i Danmark: Amerikansk donation til Grønland er konfrontatorisk'. *Danmarks Radio*. Retrieved 4 May 2020 (<https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/ruslands-ambassador-i-danmark-amerikansk-donation-til-gronland-er-konfrontatorisk>).
- Elklit, Jørgen, and Henrik Jensen. 2012. 'Kvalitative Datakilder'. Pp. 117–43 in *Metoder i statskundskab*, edited by L. B. Andersen, K. M. Hansen, and R. Klemmensen. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Ferdinand, Peter. 2016. 'Westward Ho-the China Dream and "One Belt, One Road": Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping'. *International Affairs* 92(4):941–57.
- Fravel, Taylor M. 2012. 'Revising Deng's Foreign Policy'. Retrieved 26 April 2020 (<https://thediplomat.com/2012/01/revising-dengs-foreign-policy-2/>).
- Friedman, Uri. 2020. 'The Sanders Doctrine'. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved 22 May 2020 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/02/bernie-sanders-doctrine-america-military-foreign-policy/606364/>).
- Gardner, Hall. 2016. 'The Russian Annexation of Crimea: Regional and Global Ramifications'. *European Politics and Society* 17(4):490–505.
- George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Gerring, John. 2004. 'What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?' *The American Political Science Review* 98(2):341–54.
- Goertz, Gary, and James Mahoney. 2012. *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Gramer, Robbie. 2019. 'Trump Wants NATO's Eyes on China'. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved 28 May 2020 (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/20/us-wants-nato-to-focus-on-china-threat-critical-infrastructure-political-military-huawei-transatlantic-tensions/>).
- Gramer, Robbie. 2020. 'Trump Budget Funds New U.S. Diplomatic Outpost in Greenland'. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved 21 April 2020 (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/13/trump-budget-proposal-greenland-consulate/>).
- Hamre, John J., and Heather A. Conley. 2017. 'The Centrality of the North Atlantic to NATO and US Strategic Interests'. Pp. 43–58 in *NATO and the North Atlantic: Revitalising Collective Defense, Whitehall Papers*, edited by J. A. Olsen. Milton Park: Routledge Journals.
- Hansen, Lene. 2016. 'Discourse Analysis, Post-Structuralism, and Foreign Policy'. Pp. 95–110 in *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, edited by S. Smith, A. Hadfield, and T. Dunne. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Harrits, Gitte S., Carsten S. Pedersen, and Bente Halkier. 2012. 'Indsamling Af Interviewdata'. Pp. 144–72 in *Metoder i statskundskab*, edited by L. B. Andersen, K. M. Hansen, and R. Klemmensen. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Henriksen, Anders, and Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen. 2017. *Grønlandskortet: Arktis' betydning for Danmarks indflydelse i USA*. Centre for Military Studies, University of Copenhagen.
- Hermann, Margaret G., and Joe D. Hagan. 1998. 'International Decision Making: Leadership Matters'. *Foreign Policy*. No. 110 Spring: 124-137.
- Hill, Christopher. 2015. *Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century*. 2nd ed. London: Palgrave.
- Huebert, Rob. 2009. 'United States Arctic Policy: The Reluctant Arctic Power'. *The School of Public Policy - SSP Briefing Papers* 2(2):1–27.
- Huebert, Rob. 2019. 'A New Cold War in the Arctic?! The Old One Never Ended!' *Arctic Yearbook* 2019.
- Humpert, Malte. 2019a. 'China Reveals Details of Newly Designed Heavy Icebreaker'. Retrieved 26 April 2020 (<https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/china-reveals-details-newly-designed-heavy-icebreaker>).
- Humpert, Malte. 2019b. 'New Satellite Images Reveal Extent of Russia's Military and Economic Build-Up in the Arctic'. *High North News*. Retrieved 3 April 2020 (<https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/new-satellite-images-reveal-extent-russias-military-and-economic-build-arctic>).
- Humpert, Malte. 2019c. 'New U.S. Department of Defense Arctic Strategy Sees Growing Uncertainty and Tension in Region'. *High North News*. Retrieved 1 April 2020 (<https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/new-us-department-defense-arctic-strategy-sees-growing-uncertainty-and-tension-region>).

- Humpert, Malte. 2019d. 'U.S. Will Not Increase Presence in Arctic Until 2025'. *High North News*. Retrieved 21 April 2020 (<https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/us-will-not-increase-presence-arctic-until-2025>).
- Indyk, Martin S., Kenneth G. Lieberthal, and Michael E. O'Hanlon. 2012. 'Scoring Obama's Foreign Policy: A Progressive Pragmatist Tries to Bend History'. *Foreign Affairs* 91(3):29–43.
- Isachenkov, Vladimir, and Irina Titova. 2019. 'Putin Outlines Ambitious Arctic Expansion Program'. *AP News*. Retrieved 29 April 2020 (<https://apnews.com/d0c2eb39a3b44b40ac8ddb1749ebe143>).
- Jervis, Robert. 1976. *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kanet, Roger E. 2018. 'Russia and Global Governance: The Challenge to the Existing Liberal Order'. *International Politics* 55(2):177–88.
- Kania, Elsa B. 2019. 'Made in China 2025, Explained'. *The Diplomat*. Retrieved 27 April 2020 (<https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/made-in-china-2025-explained/>).
- King, Angus. 2019. 'King, Colleagues Stress Urgency of Arctic Policy Through New Legislation'. *www.king.senate.gov*. Retrieved 10 March 2020 (<https://www.king.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/king-colleagues-stress-urgency-of-arctic-policy-through-new-legislation>).
- King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Klimenko, Ekaterina. 2016. 'Ruslands politik i Arktis'. *Udenrigs, Det Udenrigspolitiske Selskab*, February, 38–45.
- Knecht, Sebastian, and Kathrin Keil. 2013. 'Arctic Geopolitics Revisited: Spatialising Governance in the Circumpolar North'. *The Polar Journal* 3(1):178–203.
- Koivurova, Timo. 2019. 'Is This the End of the Arctic Council and Arctic Governance as We Know It?' *The Polar Connection*. Retrieved 8 April 2020 (<http://polarconnection.org/arctic-council-governance-timo-koivurova/>).
- Konyshev, Valery, and Alexander Sergunin. 2012. 'The Arctic at the Crossroads of Geopolitical Interests'. *Russian Politics and Law* 50(2):34–54.
- Konyshev, Valery, Alexander Sergunin, and Sergei Subbotin. 2017. 'Russia's Arctic Strategies in the Context of the Ukrainian Crisis'. *The Polar Journal* 7(1):104–24.
- Kopra, Sanna. 2020. 'China and Its Arctic Trajectories: The Arctic Institute's China Series 2020'. *The Arctic Institute*. Retrieved 30 April 2020 (<https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/china-arctic-trajectories-the-arctic-institute-china-series-2020/>).

- Krickovic, Andrej. 2017. 'The Symbiotic China-Russia Partnership: Cautious Riser and Desperate Challenger'. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 10(3):299–329.
- Kyzer, Larissa. 2019. 'One Step Too Close to Having a Military Base Here Again'. *Iceland Review*. Retrieved 21 April 2020 (<https://www.icelandreview.com/news/one-step-too-close-to-having-a-military-base-here-again/>).
- Lanteigne, Marc. 2019. *Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction*. 4th ed. London: Routledge.
- Laruelle, Marlene. 2014. 'Resource, State Reassertion and International Recognition: Locating the Drivers of Russia's Arctic Policy'. *The Polar Journal* 4(2):253–70.
- Lidegaard, Bo. 2016. 'USA's strategiske interesser i Arktis'. *Udenrigs, Det Udenrigspolitiske Selskab*, February, 31–37.
- Lim, Soon K. 2018. 'China's Arctic Policy & the Polar Silk Road Vision'. *Arctic Yearbook 2018*.
- Lobell, Steven E. 2009. 'Threat Assessment, the State, and Foreign Policy: A Neoclassical Realist Model'. Pp. 42–74 in *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy*, edited by S. E. Lobell, N. M. Ripsman, and J. W. Taliaferro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lobell, Steven E. 2010. 'Structural Realism/Offensive and Defensive Realism'. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*.
- Lynch, Timothy J. 2014. 'Obama, Liberalism, and US Foreign Policy'. Pp. 41–52 in *Obama and the World: New Directions in US Foreign Policy*, edited by I. Parmar, L. B. Miller, and M. Ledwidge. London: Routledge.
- Mahoney, James, and Gary Goertz. 2006. 'A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research'. *Political Analysis* 14(3):227–49.
- Mariia, Kobzeva. 2019. 'China's Arctic Policy: Present and Future'. *The Polar Journal* 9(1):94–112.
- Martinez, Luis R. 2019. *How Much Should We Trust the Dictator's GDP Growth Estimates?* SSRN Scholarly Paper. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network.
- Mastanduno, Michael. 2019. 'Partner Politics: Russia, China, and the Challenge of Extending US Hegemony after the Cold War'. *Security Studies* 28(3):479–504.
- McDermott, Rose. 2002. 'Arms Control and the First Reagan Administration: Belief-Systems and Policy Choices'. *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4(4):29–59.
- Mead, Walter R. 2002. *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*. 2009 ed. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mearsheimer, John J. 2005. 'Better to Be Godzilla than Bambi'. *Foreign Policy* No. 146:47–48.
- Mearsheimer, John J. 2009. 'Reckless States and Realism'. *International Relations* 23(2):241–56.

- Miles, Matthew B., and Michael A. Huberman. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Moravcsik, Andrew. 1997. 'Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics'. *International Organization* 51(4):513–53.
- Morton, Katherine. 2016. 'China's Ambition in the South China Sea: Is a Legitimate Maritime Order Possible?' *International Affairs* 92(4):909–40.
- Mouritzen, Hans, and Anders Wivel. 2012. *Explaining Foreign Policy: International Diplomacy and the Russo-Georgian War*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Myers, Steven L. 2013. 'Arctic Council Adds 6 Nations as Observer States, Including China'. *The New York Times*, May 15.
- Naalakkersuisut. 2019a. 'Press Release Regarding the U.S. Reestablishment of a Permanent Department of State Presence in Greenland'. *Naalakkersuisut - Government of Greenland*. Retrieved 8 April 2020 (https://naalakkersuisut.gl/en/Naalakkersuisut/News/2019/05/0905_genoprettelse).
- Naalakkersuisut. 2019b. 'The US Secretary of State's Councilor Visits Greenland and Denmark'. *Naalakkersuisut - Government of Greenland*. Retrieved 8 April 2020 (https://naalakkersuisut.gl/en/Naalakkersuisut/News/2019/10/2810_USAbesoeg).
- Naalakkersuisut. 2020. 'Project Funds from the USA to Greenland'. *Naalakkersuisut - Government of Greenland*. Retrieved 24 April 2020 (https://naalakkersuisut.gl/en/Naalakkersuisut/News/2020/04/2304_civile_midler).
- Obama, Barack. 2006. *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*. New York, NY: Broadway Books.
- Okke, Tom. 2020. 'Carla Sands: "Hvis Du Vælger at Arbejde for En Republikansk Præsident i et Land Som Danmark, Kan Du Forvente Den Slags Overskrifter"'. *Børsen*. Retrieved 6 May 2020 (<http://borsen.dk/nyheder/longread/carla-sands-hvis-du-vaelger-at-arbejde-for-en-republikansk-praesident-i-et-land-som-danmark-kan-du-kun-forvente-den-slags-overskrifter>).
- Olesen, Mikkel R. 2018. 'Lightning rod: US, Greenlandic and Danish relations in the shadow of postcolonial reputations'. Pp. 70–82 in *Greenland and the International Politics of a Changing Arctic*, edited by K. S. Kristensen and J. Rahbek-Clemmensen. Milton Park: Routledge.
- O'Rourke, Ronald, Laura B. Comay, Peter Folger, John Frittelli, Marc Humphries, Jane A. Leggett, Jonathan L. Ramseur, Pervaze A. Sheikh, and Harold F. Upton. 2020. 'Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress'. *Congressional Research Service*.
- Pengelly, Martin. 2019. 'Trump Confirms He Is Considering Attempt to Buy Greenland'. *The Guardian*, August 18.

- Perreault, François. 2016. 'The Role(s) of China in the Arctic'. Pp. 420–41 in *Global Challenges in the Arctic Region: Sovereignty, environment and geopolitical balance*, edited by E. Conde and S. I. Sánchez. London: Routledge.
- Pezard, Stephanie, Abbie Tingstad, and Alexandra Hall. 2018. *The Future of Arctic Cooperation in a Changing Strategic Environment*. RAND Corporation.
- Pincus, Rebecca. 2013. "'The US Is an Arctic Nation': Policy, Implementation and US Icebreaking Capabilities in a Changing Arctic'. *The Polar Journal* 3(1):149–62.
- Pincus, Rebecca. 2019a. *An Emerging China-Russia Axis? Implications for the United States in an Era of Strategic Competition*. Washington, DC: Hearing: The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.
- Pincus, Rebecca. 2019b. 'Trump's New Arctic Policy Has a Familiar Ring'. *Defense One*. Retrieved 12 March 2020 (<https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2019/06/trumps-new-arctic-policy-has-familiar-ring/157622/>).
- Politiken. 2019. 'Ambassadøren er ikke tilfreds: USA vil have tankfly og overvågning af Danmark'. *Politiken*. Retrieved 24 April 2020 (<https://politiken.dk/udland/art7017565/USA-vil-have-tankfly-og-over-v%C3%A5gning-af-Danmark>).
- PwC. 2017. *The Long View: How Will the Global Economic Order Change by 2050?* PricewaterhouseCoopers.
- Rahbek-Clemmensen, Jon. 2020. *Nye militære spændinger i Nordatlanten og Arktis*. Institute for Military Operations: Royal Danish Defense College.
- Rasmussen, Mikkel V. 2016. 'Geopolitiske rammer for kongerigets sikkerhedspolitik i Arktis'. *Udenrigs, Det Udenrigspolitiske Selskab*, February, 23–30.
- Ripsman, Norrin M. 2009. 'Neoclassical Realism and Domestic Interest Groups'. Pp. 170–93 in *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy*, edited by S. E. Lobell, N. M. Ripsman, and J. W. Taliaferro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ripsman, Norrin M., Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell. 2016. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Roach, Steven C. 2008. 'Critical Theory'. Pp. 171–86 in *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, edited by S. Smith, A. Hadfield, and T. Dunne. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Rose, Gideon. 1998. 'Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy'. *WORLD POLITICS* 51(1):144–72.
- Sands, Carla. 2019a. 'De valg, grønlænderne skal træffe nu, har aldrig været vigtigere'. *Sermitsiaq*, October 25, No. 43, 40–41.

- Sands, Carla. 2019b. 'Remarks by Ambassador Sands at the Future Greenland Conference'. Presented at the The Future Greenland Conference, May 14, Nuuk.
- Sands, Carla. 2019c. 'The US View on the Arctic'. Presented at the Folk & Sikkerhed Annual Security Policy Conference, November 15, Christiansborg.
- Sands, Carla. 2020. 'Økonomisk hjælp til Grønland og hård kritik af Kina: Her er USA's mål for Arktis'. *Altinget*. Retrieved 21 April 2020 (www.altinget.dk/forsvar/artikel/usas-ambassadoer-her-er-vores-maal-med-arktis).
- Schweller, Randall L. 1997. 'New Realist Research on Alliances: Refining, Not Refuting, Waltz's Balancing Proposition'. *American Political Science Review* 91(4):927–30.
- Sermitsiaq. 2018. 'USA's nye ambassadør vil besøge Grønland'. Retrieved 24 April 2020 (<https://sermitsiaq.ag/node/202689>).
- Sestanovich, Stephen. 2014. *Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama*. New York, NY: Knopf.
- Shevtsova, Lilia. 2007. *Russia - Lost in Transition: The Yeltsin and Putin Legacies*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Sleivyte, Janina. 2010. *Russia's European Agenda and the Baltic States*. London: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Smith, Nicholas R. 2020. *A New Cold War? Assessing the Current US-Russia Relationship*. Cham: Palgrave Pivot.
- Smith, Steve. 2013. 'Introduction: Diversity and Disciplinarity in International Relations Theory'. Pp. 1–13 in *International Relations Theories*, edited by T. Dunne, M. Kurki, and S. Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sørensen, Camilla T. N. 2018. *China as an Arctic Great Power*. Royal Danish Defense College.
- Sørensen, Camilla T. N. 2019. 'Intensifying U.S.-China Security Dilemma Dynamics Play out in the Arctic: Implications for China's Arctic Strategy'. *Arctic Yearbook 2019*.
- Staalesen, Atle. 2019. 'Already the World's Largest, a Russian Icebreaker Fleet Is Set to Expand'. *Arctic Today*. Retrieved 29 April 2020 (<https://www.arctictoday.com/already-the-worlds-largest-a-russian-icebreaker-fleet-is-set-to-expand/>).
- State. 2015. 'Remarks at the Presentation of the U.S. Chairmanship'. *United States Department of State*. Retrieved 30 March 2020 (<https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/913>).
- State. 2019. 'Looking North: Sharpening America's Arctic Focus'. *United States Department of State*. Retrieved 19 March 2020 (<https://www.state.gov/looking-north-sharpening-americas-arctic-focus/>).

- State. 2020. 'Briefing With Senior State Department Official on the Administration's Arctic Strategy'. *United States Department of State*. Retrieved 18 May 2020 (<https://www.state.gov/briefing-with-senior-state-department-official-on-the-administrations-arctic-strategy/>).
- Taliaferro, Jeffrey W. 2009. 'Neoclassical Realism and Resource Extraction: State Building for Future War'. Pp. 194–226 in *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy*, edited by S. E. Lobell, N. M. Ripsman, and J. W. Taliaferro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taliaferro, Jeffrey W., Steven E. Lobell, and Norrin M. Ripsman. 2009. 'Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy'. Pp. 1–41 in *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy*, edited by S. E. Lobell, N. M. Ripsman, and J. W. Taliaferro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tamnes, Rolf. 2017. 'The Significance of the North Atlantic and the Norwegian Contribution'. Pp. 8–31 in *NATO and the North Atlantic: Revitalising Collective Defense, Whitehall Papers*, edited by J. A. Olsen. Milton Park: Routledge Journals.
- Tingstad, Abbie, Scott Savitz, Kristin Van Abel, Dulani Woods, Katherine Anania, Michelle D. Ziegler, Aaron C. Davenport, and Katherine Costello. 2018. *Identifying Potential Gaps in U.S. Coast Guard Arctic Capabilities*: Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center.
- Tisdall, Simon. 2019. 'Trump's Bid to Buy Greenland Shows That the "Scramble for the Arctic" Is Truly upon Us'. *The Guardian*, August 24.
- Trump, Donald J. 2015. *Time to Get Tough: Make America Great Again!* Updated ed. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing.
- Turnowsky, Walter. 2019. 'Carla Sands: Danmark skal styrke sin forsvarsindsats i Grønland'. *Sermitsiaq.AG*. Retrieved 6 May 2020 (<https://sermitsiaq.ag/node/217455>).
- Uljua, Ryan. 2020. 'In Major Move Trump, Congress Earmark 675 Million USD for Icebreaker Program'. *High North News*, February 27.
- US Air Force. 2019. 'Senior US Military Officials Tour the Arctic as the Region Copes With'. *United States Air Force*. Retrieved 8 April 2020 (<https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1833116/senior-us-military-officials-tour-the-arctic-as-the-region-copes-with-changing/>).
- US Embassy. 2015. 'A Shared Arctic Agenda'. *United States Embassy in Denmark*. Retrieved 7 April 2020 (<https://dk.usembassy.gov/shared-arctic-agenda/>).
- US Navy. 2019. '2nd Fleet Declares Full Operational Capability'. *United States Department of the Navy*. Retrieved 20 April 2020 (https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=111782).
- US Senate. 2009. *Strategic Importance of the Arctic in U.S. Policy*. Anchorage, AK.
- USCG. 2013. *Arctic Strategy*. United States Coast Guard.

- USCG. 2019. *Arctic Strategic Outlook*. United States Coast Guard.
- Walt, Stephen M. 1987. *The Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Walt, Stephen M. 2002. 'The Enduring Relevance of Realist Tradition'. in *Political science: State of the Discipline*, edited by I. Katznelson and H. V. Milner. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.
- Walt, Stephen M. 2018. *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Waltz, Kenneth N. 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Waltz, Kenneth N. 2000. 'Structural Realism after the Cold War.' *International Security* 25(1):5–41.
- Weitz, Richard. 2019. 'US Policy Towards the Arctic: Adapting to a Changing Environment'. *Diplomaatia* 194:7–9.
- Wendt, Alexander. 1992. 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics'. *International Organization* 46(2):391–425.
- White House. 2009. *National Security Presidential Directive 66/Homeland Security Presidential Directive 25*. The White House.
- White House. 2013. *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*. The White House.
- White House. 2015. *National Security Strategy*. The White House.
- White House. 2016a. 'FACT SHEET: Obama Administration Announces Clean Energy Savings for All Americans Initiative'. *The White House*. Retrieved 1 May 2020 (<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/19/fact-sheet-obama-administration-announces-clean-energy-savings-all>).
- White House. 2016b. 'Remarks by the President on the Paris Agreement'. *The White House*. Retrieved 1 May 2020 (<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/10/05/remarks-president-paris-agreement>).
- Wivel, Anders. 2017. 'Realism in Foreign Policy Analysis'. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.
- Wohlforth, William C. 2002. 'U.S. Strategy in a Unipolar World'. Pp. 98–118 in *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*, edited by J. G. Ikenberry. New York, NY: Cornell University Press.
- World Bank. 2019a. 'GDP (Current US\$) - United States, China, Russian Federation'. *Data World Bank*. Retrieved 22 April 2020 (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2018&locations=US-CN-RU&start=1993>).

- World Bank. 2019b. 'GDP Growth (Annual %) - United States, China, Russian Federation'. *Data World Bank*. Retrieved 22 April 2020 (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2018&locations=US-CN-RU&start=1961&view=chart>).
- World Bank. 2019c. 'Military Expenditure (Current USD) - Russian Federation, United States, China'. *Data World Bank*. Retrieved 22 April 2020 (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.CD?end=2018&locations=RU-US-CN&start=1993>).
- World Bank. 2019d. 'Population, Total - United States, China, Russian Federation'. *Data World Bank*. Retrieved 22 April 2020 (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?end=2018&locations=US-CN-RU&start=1993>).
- Xi, Jinping. 2017. 'Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era'. Presented at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18.
- Xinhua. 2018. 'Full Text: China's Arctic Policy'. *Xinhua*. Retrieved 29 April 2020 (http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/26/c_136926498.htm).
- Young, Oran R., and Niels Einarsson. 2004. 'Introduction'. Pp. 15–26 in *Arctic Human Development Report*, edited by N. Einarsson, J. N. Larsen, A. Nilsson, and O. R. Young. Reykjavik: Stefansson Arctic Institute.
- Zhao, Quansheng. 1997. 'Chinese Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era'. *World Affairs* 159(3):114–29.
- Zilber, Ariel. 2019. 'China Will Be Largest Economy by 2030 While India Will Surpass U.S.' *Mail Online*. Retrieved 22 April 2020 (<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6575793/China-worlds-largest-economy-2030-India-surpass-U-S.html>).
- Østhagen, Andreas. 2019. 'What the New US Coast Guard Strategy Tells Us about the Arctic Anno 2019'. *The Arctic Institute*. Retrieved 1 April 2020 (<https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/new-us-coast-guard-strategy-arctic-anno-2019/>).

Appendix A

A.1 Interview guide for interview with member of the American FPE

Research question	Interview question
How central was the Arctic to the Obama administration?	What role did the Arctic play in US foreign policy in the Obama administration?
	Russia has pursued an increasingly active and self-confident Arctic policy during the last decade. Was this factored in by the Obama administration? If so, how?
	President Bush introduced a new American Arctic strategy in January 2009. It did not seem to translate into a more ambitious Arctic policy by the Obama administration. Why?
Why has the Arctic now become a more central priority?	In recent months, the Arctic seems to have become a more prioritised theatre in US foreign policy. Why?
	Developments on the global stage?
	Have domestic politics had anything to say?
	Russia and China have elevated their Arctic presence for several years. Why did it US not respond until recently?

A.2 *Transcript: Interview with anonymised member of the American FPE*

Conducted on February 10th, 2020.

What role did the Arctic play in American foreign policy in the Obama administration?

Well. One thing that is quite consistent between the Obama administration and the current administration is that they have a high-level interest in the Arctic, but they don't necessarily follow that with resourcing. For the Obama administration, I think, the interest was probably two-fold. First, it was climate and environment. So much more aligned with what the other European Arctic nations, particular our allies and partners in the EU and NATO, prioritised there. So, climate and the environment were priorities for the Obama administration. People always think about the European Arctic, but for the US, the Arctic is also the Canadian Arctic, which plays a very important role in our home defence, and then of course Alaska, which has a Pacific and homeland dimension. So, there was also that aspect. And then, finally, the Obama administration payed quite a bit of attention to indigenous populations and making sure that those, particularly in Alaska, were being treated properly. That any claims on use of their land for commercial purposes were handled through the appropriate procedures.

So, what about security politics? Was that not connected to the Arctic at this time?

No. We were having conversations with the Canadians about upgrading NORAD and the radars that underpin defence of North America. And there were a few senators that always pointed out that we needed to develop icebreakers, again mainly for the pacific Arctic. But in terms of the European Arctic, there wasn't a security and defence dimension. It wasn't even really discussed in a NATO context. There were some discussions with the Norwegians about the High North. And our cooperation up there, around the Barents Sea. There were some conversations with Iceland about... You know... We had troops there... Rumsfeld took them out, despite everybody's best warnings. Only under the Obama administration to have people go back and say, 'that was actually a pretty strategic location, and we need a presence there'. So, the conversations about the Icelanders about returning some kind of US presence to Iceland began under Obama. But it wasn't forces, it was maritime control aircraft, maybe a hangar, more cooperation with their coast guards. And then, finally, we had conversations with the Danes,

but again, not about Arctic security and defence, but about the role that Thule played in the defence of North America. And there were some difficulties surrounding the base maintenance contracts at Thule. For a long time, they had been held by a Danish-Greenlandic company. And the conditions were rather favourable to the Greenland government. Then we competed that. Nobody lost their jobs, and the amount of work stayed the same, but the overall costs that was payed were lower. But that was about it. Pompeo's speech at Rovaniemi was really a shock for a lot of people. Because for us, the Arctic has had, of course that Alaska-Canada homeland defence aspect, but in terms of the European Arctic, it has always been about cooperation and working through international bodies. And of course, the Obama administration had certainly become aware that some of the scientific endeavours being undertaken by China and Russia could have been serving dual purpose. But really, this discussion about great power competition in the Arctic, you can't find that in our defence reviews from the 8 years under Obama. You could look in the Quadrennial Defense Review or the defence strategic guidance around 2012-2013. And there probably would have been one more update under Obama. But... Does that answer your question?

Yes, absolutely. Looking at it from today's perspective, it seems like Russia was appreciating the Arctic as a prominent place of security competition and has pursued a more self-confident Arctic policy in the last decade. For example, by investing in new ice breakers and modernising its Northern Fleet. Was that factored in by the Obama administration?

I would have to look at when the build-up really accelerated. But of course, it was starting under the Obama administration. I don't think they were naïve of Russian investment and capabilities for the Arctic. But there was probably more of an understanding that of all the Arctic nations, Russia, I think, has the most people living in the Arctic regions. And has maybe even beaten the Canadians in terms of territory in the Arctic. So, one could argue that they have a legitimate interest in building up defensive capabilities in the Arctic. Particularly, if they are seeing other actors... If they are seeing NATO-exercises on their border that they are concerned about. Or if they are even seeing commercial opportunities that they want to be able to take advantage of earlier than other actors. People put it in that context. As long as Russia was, one, playing by the rules that were established by international organisations like UN law at the sea and, two, that the capabilities they were developing were mainly defensive in nature, there wasn't much we could do about it. Certainly, the kinds of things that we would push back on, would be the

Russian bear bombers coming into the Bering Sea and challenging Norwegian and other NATO forces. We would do B2-flights to show the Russians that we had nuclear capability, even in the High North. We would meet them even in a naval context if that was necessary... It was definitely a concern in the broader context of Russian military build-up. But in the grand scheme of Russian behaviour, that wasn't what concerned people the most. Because within the context of Russia's presence, territory, and people in the Arctic, as long as they are abiding by the laws and the capabilities look relatively defensive, we'll just keep an eye on it. People were much more concerned about some of their activities throughout Europe. A lot of their behaviour in the Baltic Sea. The Black Sea. That kind of stuff was really what the US and NATO were focused on. And that's when you got the European deterrence initiative in 2015 under Obama. But that money really went to shore up US presence in the Baltics, a bit more in the Black Sea, really nothing for the Arctic, until you got the P-8 hangars at Reykjavik.

Ok. It still seems that the Obama administration took a rather active decision not to pursue an active Arctic policy. The Bush administration introduced a new, rather self-confident and ambitious Arctic strategy in January 2009. I am wondering – because it seems the Obama administration didn't honour the ambitions embedded in Bush's policies – why did the Obama administration make that decision not to do so?

Can you give me some specifics on things in the Bush strategy that weren't implemented? I am not that familiar with it.

He hinted at a more ambitious posture and presence in the Arctic. For example, I think his strategy mentions icebreakers. It doesn't seem like the Obama administration followed that path. On the opposite, Obama closed down the regional fleet in the North Atlantic and decided not to mandate investments in new icebreakers. So maybe not specific gaps, but a gap in the overall approach to the Arctic, which seemed less ambitious and spirited than the Bush strategy had pointed to.

I was in the UK from 2009 to 2013, which is why I lack an understanding about that specific period of the transition. So, my answer might not be as in-depth as on other areas. I sense that there was a relatively smooth transition between the Bush administration to the Obama administration. It certainly wasn't like earlier ones where you took the w's off the keyboard. At least in the Pentagon, it was pretty much "let's have more continuity than change; let's try to keep what we have and build upon that". The exception was... Again, if you look at the Strategic

Defence and Security Review that followed... Every administration that comes in, the first thing they do, ideally, is create a national security strategy and then some kind of defence strategy that underpins that. So, very early on I think, there were broad foreign policy differences between the two administrations. The Obama administration wanted to set a new course. So, very early on you saw them launch a Quadrennial Defence Review and national defence strategy process. Which ended in, you might remember, the rebalance to Asia. A lot of people who came in, particularly in the Pentagon as I remember it, thought that... You know, there was that period early in the Obama period, like there has been in the republican ones, about reset. Like come in, these guys didn't understand the Russians, yes of course there are some competitive elements there, but let's try to reset the relationship, or at the very least let's try to make it not worse by doing things that are provocative. So, there was a little bit of a reset. There was a little bit of the rebalance to Asia. The fact that Europe truly was whole free and at peace. I remember our office pushing back and saying, "you are taking a pretty positive view with the Russians, look at some of the things they are doing". But you only have so many resources. And you really have to put your mark on the strategy. So, the rebalance to Asia became the home mark of the first term of Obama. So, you saw a lot of resources starting to come out of Europe. You saw consolidation of US forces in Europe. You saw some base closures. And that continued pretty much until Crimea. And then around 2014-15, they were like "oh, oh, right". As far as I remember it, that Quadrennial Defence Review hit the presses, or came out days after or right around the time when Russia started to move forces into Ukraine. And they were like "okay, maybe we made a slight miscalculation". But certainly, in the early days, it was full speed ahead on resetting the relationship with Russia, which meant "less focus on Europe writ large and rebalancing to Asia". So, to come full circle with your question on the Arctic, in that construct my guess would be that they didn't want to build on posture or capabilities, at least in the European Arctic, and provoke the Russians. They also didn't want to focus on the Arctic, when they had real issues in the South China Sea that they had to put resources towards. So, I wouldn't say it was a wilful not implementation of the Bush Arctic strategy, it was more that their relative focus was elsewhere. And their views of Russia were different. Those, of course, evolved, but even in that context, this is the fate of the Arctic. We all see its changing. We see that the Russians are taking advantage of the UN laws and pushing them as far as they can without actually breaking. Or if they are breaking them, they count on the fact that nobody will punish them or enforce them or do anything about it. So, therefore we can almost get away with not resourcing things. If you

do an analysis of the US icebreakers, it's always poor Senator Murkowski from Alaska or Senator King from Maine, and they are always asking for those icebreakers. This is the first year that they got the extra ones. But they are not gonna go to the European Arctic. They are gonna go either north of Alaska or to the Antarctica. And we're gonna largely rely on European allies or the Canadians to do any icebreaking in the Canadian and European Arctic. That's my view. So, resourcing in the Arctic has been a problem, because even if people recognised that it's growing in importance, it's not the number one threat. Near-term. It's not urgent.

Now, it seems, there has been a shift towards a more spirited Arctic policy. You have, aside from the icebreakers, a diplomatic mission, which is set to begin this year. You have the reactivation of the Northern Fleet. You have a more spirited focus on it from the President and the Secretary State. Why do you think that is?

Couple of reasons... Let me just take one of the things you mentioned off the table, the North Atlantic Fleet. I would argue that the changes in the NATO command structure, which led to the return of the North Atlantic Fleet, and the dual hatting of joint forces command in Norfolk, started under the Obama administration. And that happened largely because the Norwegians are amazing lobbyists for the High North. For years, as early back as like 2008, the Norwegians had been saying "hey, we are watching the Russians every day, and your idea of a reset, that's just crazy, and in fact NATO needs to get more involved in this area". So, I'd say the things you saw, like US marines going to Norway for cold-weather training, the P8-hangar again, we have a trilateral MOU between the US, UK and Norway, to operate those P8s, and then the North Atlantic Fleet. All of those things happened under the Obama administration, when they saw that Russia was doing in Crimea, in Donbas, and elsewhere. So, it was part of what was started under the European deterrence initiative and within the NATO context. So, I'd take that off the table. I think that was just a continuation of what happened in the late-Obama years. So, why this new interest from the current administration? I don't want to be too cynical about it... But certainly, a big part of it is commercial and business interests. I was out of government when the idea of buying Greenland came up. But you could just see almost how it would come up. My guess is somebody explain to the President that "you are going to Denmark, Greenland is a part of the Kingdom of Denmark, we have a base there that contributes to the defence of the United States, there are some issues about the contract, and we are working out the money". And then he probably said something crazy like "why don't we just buy it?". Right, because, somebody

probably also briefed about the rare minerals, and the fact that there is gonna be more free passage and economic opportunities. With his mercantilist mindset thought “why negotiate with these people, let’s just buy it”. I don’t know if that’s the case, but certainly, if you look at how the current administration has treated native Americans in the United States, including in Alaska, they are only interested in the tribes that have natural resources that can be exploited or land that can be developed. They have cut back education programmes, programmes to help orphan children or people with dependency problems. They have done nothing for native populations in the US. So, I always say “the Greenlanders need to be very careful”. I understand the lure of more independence and more autonomy and more commercial opportunities. But you can’t assume this crowd is gonna have their best interests in mind in the way that I think the Kingdom of Denmark usually does. So, I see a big commercial aspect there, pushing our interest in Nuuk, in Greenland. I think that’s why you saw the consolidate in Nuuk. If you look at the composition, yes, of course there’s somebody who can do political-military-type stuff, but a lot of it is commercial and business opportunities. Some of it is probably intelligence, keeping an eye on the Chinese and the Russians. So, that brings me to my other point. I do think there is an element here... Again, going back to how any administration tries to set a mark. I was still at the Pentagon at this point. They kicked off a national defence strategy. And the national defence strategy says “great power competition with Russia and China, peer competitors” or whatever they called it. It’s a total gift to Russia and China to call them great powers. Especially Russia. I’m sure they are loving that. But again, it’s this mindset of “we need to have a competitor to define ourselves rather than defining who we are and what we stand for”. That was my only problem with the strategy. It defines the US and its posture and its objectives vis-à-vis Russia and China. And we are seeing that play out in the Arctic. They see Russian activity there. They see Russian military build-up. They see Russia challenging the law of the sea and other norms. And they see Chinese economic activity and influence. So, other than the commercial and business interests, there is a great power competition with Russia and China. The continuity here, though, to come full circle, is I don’t think they are gonna do anything about it. I don’t think you’re suddenly gonna see a huge posture in the Arctic. More icebreakers, more ice-hardened ships. You’re not gonna see that. You are just gonna see continued rhetoric. Which is dangerous, then, because you are changing the nature of cooperation in the Arctic and creating more tension through the rhetoric. But you don’t have the capabilities to back that up if something would go wrong. Actually, we did a piece on this at CRIS. It was pretty interesting. We had this

thing called “Northern connection”. We invited the retired CNO to discuss whether or not the US should do a freedom-of-navigation operation in the Arctic and specifically the North Sea Route. And he kind of said that while it would be a good idea to demonstrate will, and not stand by when people are pushing the boundaries of rules and norms, we don’t have the capabilities to do it. We have this ship, it’s super old, we have to cannibalize parts from this, and if anything went wrong, people would have to come and get us for the Russians. So, his point would be that doing it without the capabilities needed to conduct such an operation would actually carry more risk than not doing anything at all. Then I had Admiral Jørgensen of the Danish Arctic Command, he wrote a piece, and his Canadian counterpart, whose name is escaping me, also wrote a piece. And everybody’s view was “let’s try to keep the tensions low”. So, I do think there is some danger in Pompeo’s speech at Rovaniemi in really changing the nature of how we do things up there, when they really have no political will or military capability to back that up, if something goes wrong.

Okay. This is my last question: does that mean you would exclude domestic politics from the policy shift? The political differences between the Trump and Obama administrations – they don’t really have an impact of this more spirited Arctic strategy?

I’m not sure I understand the question.

Do you think the shift from a more restrained to a more spirited Arctic policy has something to do with the political differences between the Obama administration and the Trump administration?

Certainly, some of it is style. Having worked under both administrations... It just wasn’t the style of the Obama administration, for better or worse, to be confrontational, when they didn’t need to be. To do things themselves when they could lead from behind and work with allies and partners. Or to make a problem where there wasn’t one. And again, security and defence wasn’t their number one thing, it was more about economics and controlling the budget. So, I think there are definitely some style things in your question. The Obama administration was more restrained and understated, it did foreign policy behind the scenes in a very collaborative way through the inter-agency, very bottom-up. Whereas the Trump administration, it’s almost like, even when I was with Secretary Mattis, it’s very top-down. You had the cabinet ministers, who would go in, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defence, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And they would make recommendations based on the advice of the policy experts under

them in those various departments. Sometimes it wouldn't make the difference, because the President would come in and say, "let's just buy Greenland" or "let's just pull out of NATO". Those kinds of things became very hard to control. But again, it reflects a difference not so much in policy... I do think there is the thing we talked about at the outset, that the Obama administration was more on climate, environment etc. Whereas the Trump administration is more economics, posturing in terms of security and defence, showing a strong front. But also, in terms of style. The current administration is much more broad statements at a higher level without a lot of policy underpinning it. And I don't say that... Okay, I'm not a Trump supporter. But I say that as a government person who has seen how things work. Even under Bush, there was a system. You might not have agreed with their Russia strategy or their China strategy or their trade policy. But there was a policy, and everybody knew what it was and could roll in the same direction. I think, under the Trump administration, you called it more spirited, I would just say it's chaotic. Even the Secretary of Defence didn't know what the policy was when he walked into a meeting. And that's a problem. Because then, how do you act on somebody's guidance? You can't, because it could change from day to day. So, I think that's problematic. But it's more style than policy, the differences between the two.

Okay. So, you wouldn't say that the current administration, for instance John Bolton's hawkishness and realpolitik approach to foreign policy... That has not affected the current more spirited, or chaotic, Arctic policy?

It's consistent with a realpolitik view of the world, and a more hawkish foreign and security policy, but I don't think that's what has driven our policy towards the Arctic. It's not as deliberate as it seems. I know that's a subtle distinction. But I don't think somebody went down the list and said "okay, we're the realists, zero-sum mentality, we win, you lose, so in the Arctic, our policy will be X". I think they just backed into it. Partly because of the style and the way they go about things. With the small, minor exception that the national defence strategy does say posture to great power competition with Russia and China. So, that's at least consistent. If I'm gonna do like a report card, at least the national defence strategy and that element is consistent with the policy in the Arctic. But again, no implementation. Just the headline.

Right. It will be interesting to following in the coming years and months.

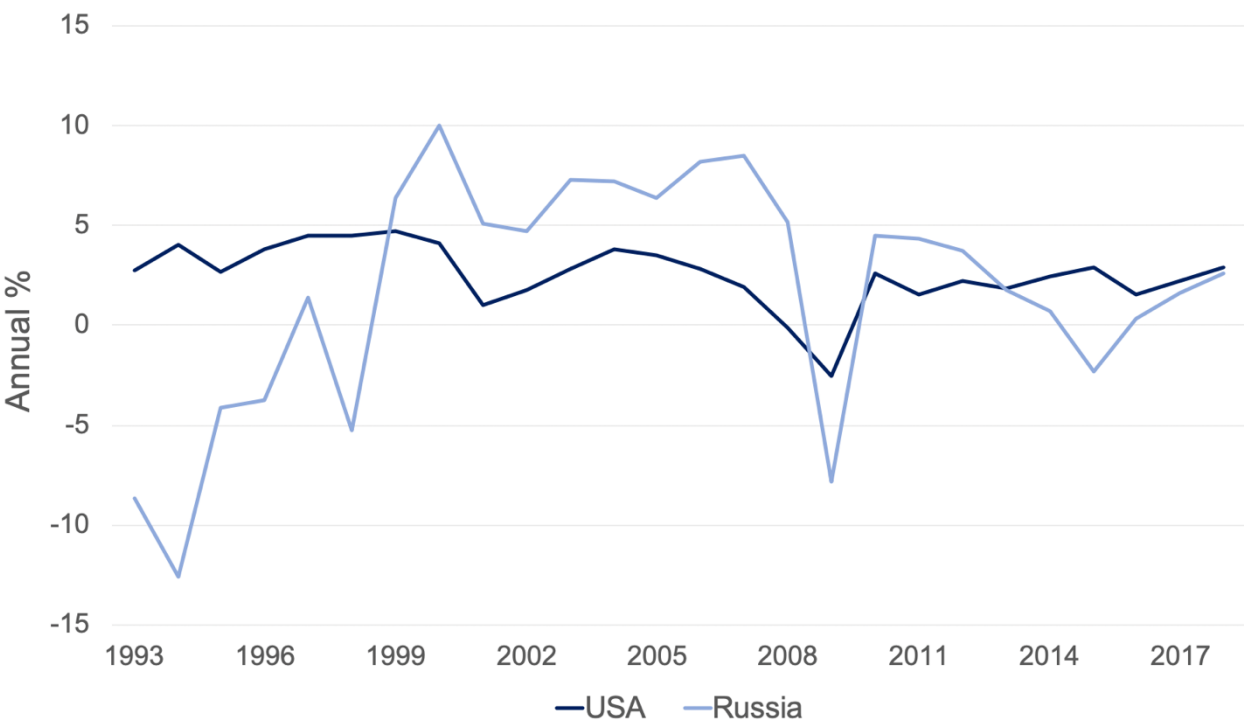
Yeah. And the Arctic, of all places, doesn't lend itself to that kind of foreign policy mindset. It is ungoverned space. It's a global common. Everybody benefits from the fact that it's... not ungoverned... but that it's loose governance structures and everybody has a piece of it. The one thing I always put on the table is that for Arctic nations, as they think about China's role in the region, they have a choice. They can say "well, we are the Arctic nations, we are the littoral states, so we have right at first to refusal and determining what the rules and regulations are in this part of the world". Or, they can say "well, global commons, anybody can be here as long as they follow the rules of the road as they are established by international law". Well, take the same model and translate it to the South China Sea. If we do the former, then China will say "oh that's right, remember in the Arctic you said that you Denmark, and you Norway, and you United States have right at first to refusal and establishing the way things are run here. We're in the South China Sea, so we apply that same model here. We, China, are a 'littoral state'. You guys are outsiders, so you will follow the rules we establish". So, we have to be really careful about the precedent we set. And changing the way we do business in the Arctic. I think that this looser model that's very cooperative is probably a much better one. If you think about how that could be applied more globally, if we're not careful. Does that make sense?

Yes, absolutely, very interesting. Thank you so much, I think that's all I had.

Appendix B

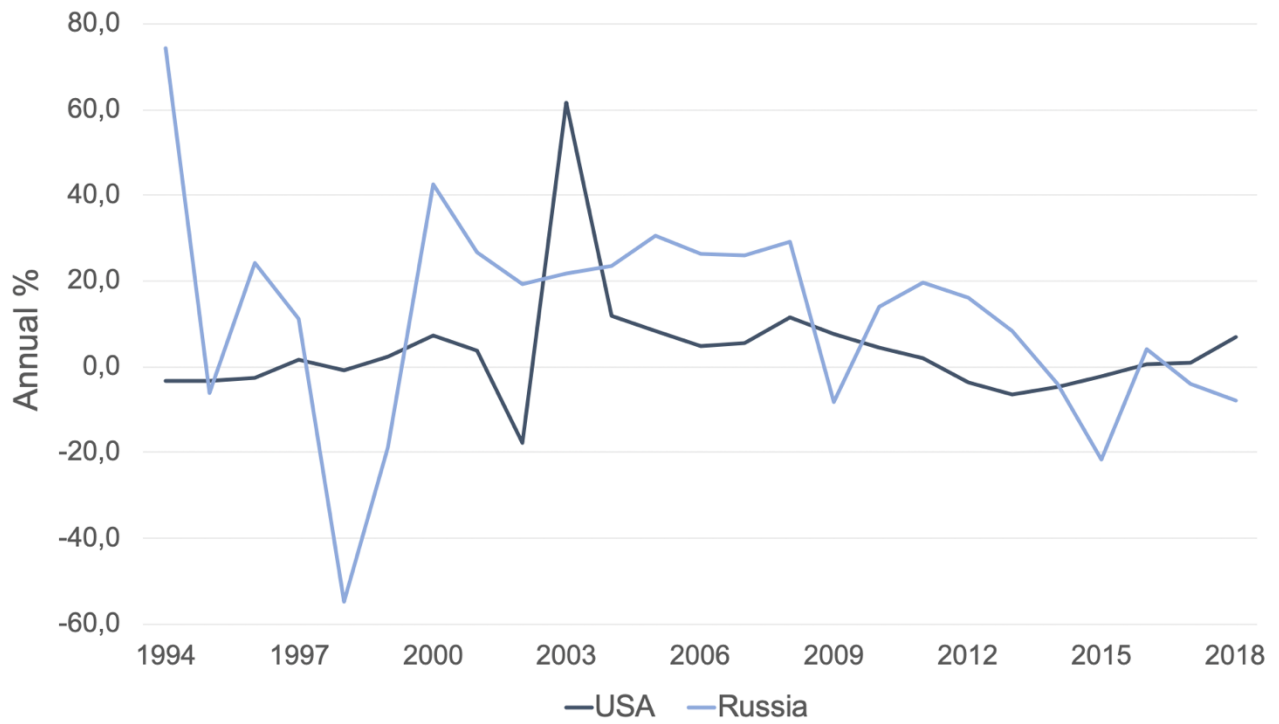
B.1 GDP growth: the US and Russia, 1993-2018.

Based on data from the World Bank (2019b).



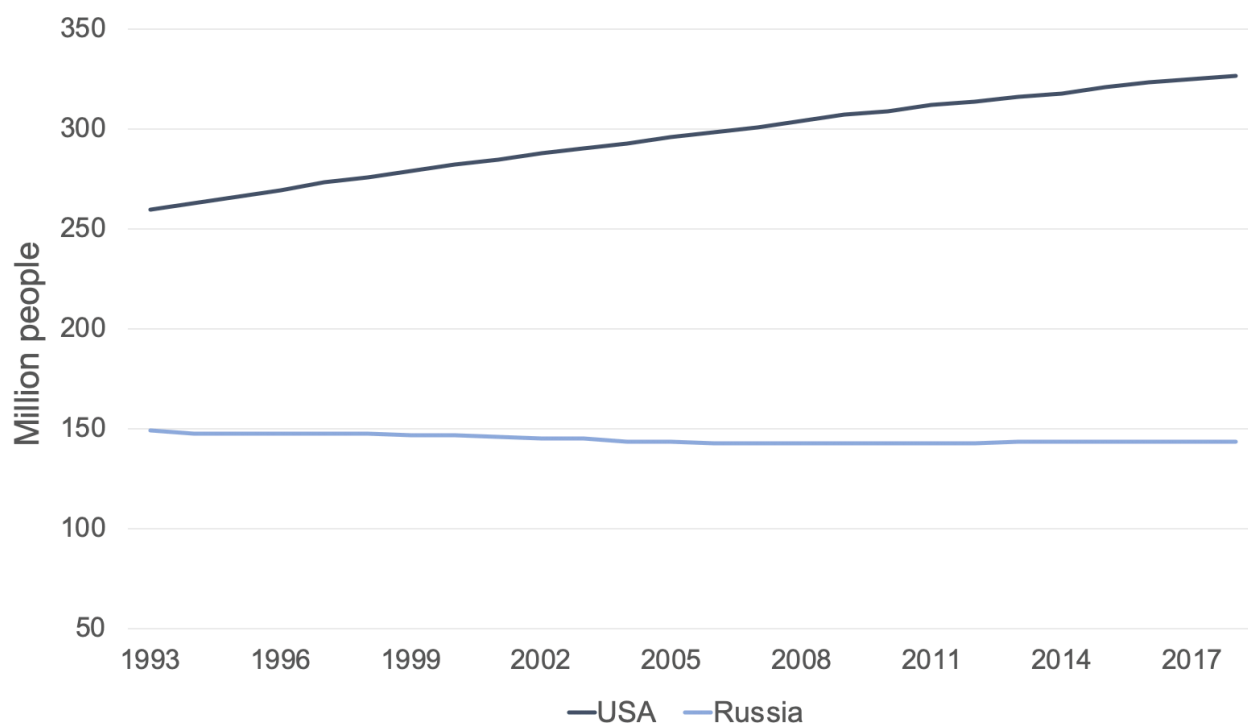
B.2 Growth in military expenditures: the US and Russia, 1994-2018.

Based on data from the World Bank (2019c).



B.3 Total population: the US and Russia, 1993-2018.

Based on data from the World Bank (2019d).



B.4 Total population: the US and China, 1993-2018.

Based on data from the World Bank (2019d).

