DISSERTATION

IS THE ARCTIC HEATING UP? COMPLICATING THE PICTURE OF REGIONAL SECURITY

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2025

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ABSTRACT

IS THE ARCTIC HEATING UP? COMPLICATING THE PICTURE OF REGIONAL SECURITY

Why do states maintain policy continuity towards unsettled spaces, even in the absence of intersubjective agreement? In this dissertation, I develop the concept of *unsettledness* to describe geographic spaces where the intersubjective understandings of the status, governance, and territorial meaning of a space remains unresolved. This results in persistent flux in the norms, rules, and behaviors that states adopt towards that space. Unsettledness differs from conventional notions of territorial disputes, ungoverned spaces, or undefined spaces in that it does not necessarily provoke security dilemmas or institutional resolution. Instead, states often respond to these conditions with low-tension narratives and low-key approaches rather than securitization or increased governance to avoid potential risks.

The Arctic provides an ideal case study for understanding unsettledness under conditions of strong institutional norms, given its long history as a frontier space where geopolitical, environmental, and institutional forces have converged. Although the region has been framed in different ways over time—from a Cold War missile pathway to a zone of exceptional peace to an arena of renewed great power competition—its unsettled spaces remain resistant to intersubjective agreement. This dissertation explores three Arctic cases: Svalbard, Greenland, and Arctic maritime routes (the Northern Sea Route and the Northwest Passage). These cases exhibit both continuous flux and an enduring lack of consensus, making them key examples of unsettled spaces.

In analyzing state responses to unsettledness, I assess three potential explanations for policy continuity: (1) states aligning unsettled spaces with broader geopolitical narratives, (2) states varying their security framings might shift how states could sustain continuity, and (3) states relying on expert communities to reinforce policy positions. Through a discourse analysis of policy documents and interviews with experts and policymakers, I find that states neither explicitly integrate unsettled spaces into great power competition nor adjust their security framings to suit different strategic needs. Rather, my findings suggest that states deliberately avoid securitizing unsettled spaces, opting instead for low-tension narratives and restrained policy approaches to sustain the status quo. These low-tension narratives are adopted as part of a broader strategy of risk aversion. States wish to avoid potential future militarization and thus keeping these areas unsettled is part of a broader agenda to avoid risk.

This research challenges conventional wisdom in International Relations that would expect unsettledness to result in interstate competition or institutional stabilization. Instead, it highlights how, under conditions of strong institutional norms, ambiguity can be a strategic asset for states seeking to avoid political costs associated with either escalation or institutional resolution. While this norm may be changing with Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, low-tension narratives continue to be the norm at least in the Arctic cases under examination. By theorizing low-tension narratives and low-key approaches, I also contribute to debates in securitization and desecuritization studies, demonstrating how states manage security ambiguity in spaces of persistent flux. Additionally, my findings shed light on the limited influence of expert communities in shaping policy on unsettled spaces. Rather than seeking expert input to resolve uncertainty, states tend to treat these issues as politically settled despite ongoing intersubjective disagreement.

However, my work does highlight the importance of studying knowledge ecosystems in which experts operate and offers some practical strategies that policy-minded IR scholars could adopt.

The implications of this research extend beyond the Arctic. Other regions with characteristics of unsettledness—such as the high seas and outer space—may exhibit similar dynamics. Understanding how states respond to unsettledness can offer scholars nuance in thinking through spaces that neither fit the mold of a settled territory nor a contested space. By conceptualizing unsettledness as a persistent condition rather than a transitional phase, this dissertation offers a new framework for analyzing spaces where governance and intersubjective agreement remain elusive.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been so incredibly fortunate across the writing of this dissertation to have a supportive community of family, friends, mentors, and colleagues that made 'work' feel less like a burden and more like an opportunity that I am forever grateful for. While the days spent conducting fieldwork far from home and sunny days spent inside writing and editing this work may have seemed long and arduous, there's nowhere else I would have rather spent the last five years of my life than Fort Collins and at Colorado State University.

The two most important people across this journey that I want to express my gratitude for are my husband Jim and my father Bob. I can't imagine writing this dissertation without the many cups of tea that Jim provided and the walks we took together in our neighborhood while he listened to me think through the various theoretical problems I encountered. He encouraged me when I struggled, and was the voice of reason when I felt lost. My father is another person that I can't picture writing this dissertation without. He has always supported me as I've moved from one degree program to the next and our weekly calls always helped me get back on track when I needed it. Having him support me at the defense will be a moment that I always treasure. Even though she is not here physically, I also couldn't write these acknowledgements without mentioning my mother as a strong woman from which I have always drawn strength and courage from. Both my parents taught me to believe in myself and pursue dreams worth dreaming. Words of written acknowledgements don't seem sufficient when I owe so much to them.

My two advisors across the Ph.D. process – Peter Harris and Iasmin Goes – are also two individuals that I am deeply grateful for. I will always appreciate their insights, willingness to challenge me, and most importantly the time they gave to meet with me across the program. I am

also thankful to the rest of my committee including Will Greaves, Daniel Weitzel, Julia Lee, and Sayat Temirbekov. Their assistance across the research process was invaluable and I would not be the scholar I am without their help. I also want to also thank Heidi Hausermann, who was initially on my committee but had to be replaced after taking on a separate position at the University of Michigan.

The Arctic community in which I've found a home also deserves my thanks. The group of individuals in NAADSN including Whitney Lackenbauer, Will Greaves, Andrea Charron, Nicholas Glesby, and Andreas Østhagen – just to name a few – were instrumental in helping me formulate ideas about the Arctic. I am also grateful to the University of Copenhagen and the Fridtjof Nansen Institute for their willingness to host me during my fieldwork. Other individuals initially met at conferences but who soon become friends like Renato Fakhoury, Romain Chuffart, Marc Jacobsen, Lin Mortensgaard, Andreas Raspotnik, Johanna Buerkert, and Charlotte Gehrke also fostered my love of the Arctic and helped me develop a more nuanced understanding of the region, for which I am very grateful for. I would be remiss if I didn't also thank my friends in Fort Collins for their support including Nina and Mike Hamlett, Hailey and Davis Hall-Briggs, Iren Marinova, Julia Munsaka, Tate Williams, Brendan Davidson, Erin Fitz, Walter Oglesby, and Pete Theodoratos.

I also owe gratitude to my friends and family that aren't local, but nonetheless still played an important role in supporting and inspiring me through long conversations and visits around the world including Stephanie Burgos, Rebecca Wolfe, Ellen van Rooijen, Haley Robinson, Gaby de Gvyes, Sebastian Melgar, the Duncan family and their respective partners, the Scheff family, and the extended Gricius and Abbott family. This work wouldn't have been possible without all of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In 2019 and again in 2024, U.S. President Trump suggested that the United States should buy Greenland. While his proposal has been dismissed in both cases as inappropriate, its very existence illustrates that some spaces in the international system remain what I in this dissertation call unsettled. Greenland's shifting geopolitical status is just one example of how states struggle to define and act within spaces where sovereignty, governance, and consensus remains fluid. As a frontier space, the Arctic has long thwarted states' attempts to fully define it even given strong institutional norms geared towards cooperation (Fakhoury, 2023). The Arctic was originally understood as a possible missile path that connected the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cold War and later transformed into a region of exceptional peace in the mid-1990s. However, in recent years, scholars have begun to reframe the region as a theatre of great power competition (Gricius, 2024). Yet there is no stable consensus on how to narrate the Arctic – leading to differing global perceptions and state policies. Unlike stable geopolitical spaces where norms and institutions regulate behavior, these unsettled spaces remain in flux. We might expect that these regions that are in flux would lead to policies that changed on a consistent basis. This raises a key question that is the central driving question of this dissertation: why do states maintain continuity in their policies around unsettled spaces, even in the absence of intersubjective agreement?

Unsettledness refers to the condition within the international system where intersubjective understandings about the status, governance, and territorial meaning of a specific geographic space remain unresolved. This results in persistent flux in the norms, rules, and behaviors that states

adopt towards that space. It is a relational and processual dynamic that arises from the lack of a stable consensus among actors about specific geographic spaces. This dynamic can be observed when a space has observable conditions of 1) flux, and 2) an enduring lack of consensus. While these features are interconnected, they capture different elements of what makes a space unsettled, which I expand upon in Chapter 3.

Importantly, unsettledness is not the same as an abstract changeability of norms (Tannenwald 1999) – ala a constructivist understanding of norms that suggests that norms constantly evolve and are contextual (Acharya, 2004) – but rather the empirical manifestations of flux and disagreement in specific spaces like the Arctic. While constructivists suggest that norms evolve and stabilize expectations over time (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Wendt, 1999; Checkel, 2005), unsettledness by contrast highlights instances where such stabilization remains incomplete and is likely to remain unresolved. This concept provides an important framework for understanding international dynamics in spaces that resist stabilization, particularly in frontier spaces like the Arctic where actors continually project competing priorities and both physical as well as political characteristics are in flux. Moreover, this concept fills an important gap in constructivism. While constructivism may explain why norms change and evolve, it does not always offer a framework for understanding spaces where stabilization is deliberately avoided and state opt for policy continuity. Here, I focus on degrees of unresolvedness and what implications this presents for understanding policy changes.

A neo-realist conception of anarchy would have us expect that an increased degree of unsettledness would lead states to adopt more survival seeking strategies, causing a buildup of

military forces and reliance on pre-existing narratives and framing such as 'the Cold War' to help create order. In this lens, realists might assume unsettledness could lead to security dilemmas in the context of inter-state competition (Chisem, 2012). By contrast, liberal scholars with a less conflict-oriented theorization of anarchy might suggest that states could overcome unsettledness through economic interdependence and increased institutionalization (Rutten, 1999). Such an argument is akin to proponents of Arctic exceptionalism (Exner-Pirot & Murray, 2017). Arctic exceptionalism claims that the Arctic is exceptional due to a high degree of governance, peace, and lack of conflict. However, neither of these theoretical debates hold true in the three Arctic unsettled spaces under analysis. In fact, in the unsettled spaces under analysis, states deliberately avoided linking these spaces to security competition. Instead, they adopt low-tension narratives, desecuritization, and low-key approaches rather than integrating them into great power rivalry or institutional governance as part of a broader strategy to avoid future risks. This is not to say that there are no other avenues that states might take to address unsettledness. For example, states might seek to overcome unsettledness through repeated practices and interactions that gradually lead to a shared understanding and de-facto norms. States might also agree on certain spheres of influence through differentiated governance rather than seeking a full intersubjective understanding, reach a stable modus operandi through agreeing to disagree, or seek resolution through crises. We might also expect that unsettledness might, counterintuitively, lead to political experts having counterintuitively more influence because the questions surrounding these spaces require a certain degree of technical knowledge whether legal, environmental, or economic.

Outside of unsettledness, states maintain continuity in their policies for many different reasons. Once states adopt a policy stance, for example, path dependency makes deviation costly.

Path dependency occurs when initial policy choices create self-reinforcing mechanisms that make it difficult for states to change behavior (Pierson, 2000). States might also be constrained by international institutions and other legal commitments such as treaties and international obligations. Abandoning these can come with diplomatic and reputational costs (Keohane, 1984). Policy changes also may require significant investment, whether in terms of military, economic, or legal costs. Altering positions might cost significant capital that a state isn't willing to expend (North, 1990). Further, policy shifts may also carry significant domestic or international political risks if there is the potential for domestic backlash or a negative reaction from allies (Putnam, 1988). While the above explanations are well-known reasons for policy continuity, this dissertation deliberately focuses on structural geopolitics, security framing, and expert communities because I was interested in the active discursive and strategic choices states make about unsettled spaces rather than structural constraints. The three possible explanations I explore – as below – offer a more nuanced explanation of how states frame, narrate and make sense of these spaces.

I explore three possible explanations for why states maintain continuity in their policies around unsettled spaces even in the absence of intersubjective agreement: 1) that states might seek to align these unsettled spaces narratively with broader geopolitical trends to seek stability, 2) that different types of security framings might shift how states could sustain continuity, and 3) that in unsettled spaces, the states could turn to experts to reinforce policy continuity. However, I find that states neither seek to align such spaces with a broader geopolitical narrative, nor do they vary the type of security discourse depending a type of security. By contrast, my primary argument of the dissertation is that when it comes to these unsettled spaces in regions that exhibit strong institutional norms like the Arctic, states are incentivized to use low-tension and desecuritizing

narratives or adopt a low-key approach to maintain policy continuity. These approaches are taken to avoid potential risks and costs. In short, it neither serves their interests to securitize an unsettled region or to create more governance around it. In other words, the more unsettled a space, the more states seek order through normalizing practices to mitigate risks. My cases range across different time periods that largely relate to document availability. For example, much of the analysis on Svalbard is structured around the four White Papers (1975-2018), Greenland is scoped from post-Cold War to present, the Northern Sea Route is similarly from post-Cold War to present, and the Northwest Passage is structured around the 1980s due to the important political events that structured Canadian policy on the route. That said, the predominance of low-tension narratives in the three cases has been changing since Russia's expanded invasion of Ukraine in 2022. However, with Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, there may be a shifting risk calculus that states must adapt to. While securitizing dynamics continues to be absent from the vast majority of discourse, there is a growing recognition that security must be a more central part of discussions around these unsettled spaces. I also find that experts are less unlikely to fully influence policy in unsettled spaces. In most cases, states do not want outside expertise on these issues as the policy areas in question are set and not open to political debate. When issues become open to political debate, the possibility for unexpected risks becomes greater. Rather, states want to maintain a low-tension or desecuritizing narrative or low-key approach that in many cases does not require outside knowledge. Thus, even given the absence of intersubjective agreement, states seek continuity towards these spaces. That being said, many experts were able to share notable reports or examples of how their interface with ministries of Foreign Affairs or Defense did merit shifts in policy over time in limited cases. The question of influence is deeply contextual and it is difficult to make a universal argument concerning expert-government interaction. Further, there are notable strategies

and constraints that seem to be consistent across the cases, illustrating that even with structural constraints, there are useful strategies that might be applicable for those wishing to engage more effectively with policymakers.

Falsifiability

For unsettledness to be a meaningful concept in IR, it must be falsifiable, namely there must be clear conditions under which the argument could be wrong. Below I offer a series of possible observable implications and alternative explanations for different portions of my argument. In first looking at the concept of unsettledness itself, if it were not a distinct observable empirical reality, we would expect states to be able to resolve these spaces 'in flux' either through narrative methods such as through securitization or through institutionalization and governance measures. A key falsifiable claim of my argument is that unsettled spaces remain resistant to such dynamics because of their inherent flux. However, if I instead found that my cases in question systematically were consistently narrated in a fashion to resolve these tensions or governed to avoid ambiguity, this would undermine the explanatory power of unsettledness. My cases emphasize instances of unsettledness in regions where there are strong institutional norms. As I outline in Chapter 2, there are counter examples of unsettledness that indicate militarization and securitization are policy responses.

Second, my three independent variables to answering the question 'why do states maintain continuity in their policies towards unsettled spaces even in the absence of intersubjective agreement' offer three possible explanations, all of which are falsifiable. The first possible explanation is that states might seek continuity by bringing unsettled spaces into a broader

narrative of geopolitics, particularly around significant shifts. If this were to be true, we would expect to see clear correlations between major geopolitical shifts such as Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea or its 2022 annexation of Ukraine, such as immediate securitization or desecuritization of unsettled spaces. If it were not to be true, we would see states avoiding references to these geopolitical shifts and consciously not shifting to a different approach. My findings suggest that states deliberately avoid linking unsettled spaces to broader geopolitical competition. The second possible explanation is that differing types of security framings can impact continuity. If this were true, we would expect to see that when states changed the type of security framing used around the unsettled space, that policy would similarly change. For example, if states consistently framed unsettled spaces in the language of traditional security threats, we might expect to see securitizing and militarizing behavior taken to normalize expectations. However, my analysis illustrates the opposite – namely that this was not the case. I show instead that states avoided security discourse as much as possible, suggesting that the argument was falsifiable. The third explanation interrogated the question of the role of expert communities. If it were to be true, we would expect to see governments using experts to reinforce policy justifications or changes in policy following the recommendations of Arctic scholars and practitioners. However, this explanation was proven false as my research showed that while experts operate in these spaces, their direct influence is often limited. Instead, I find that states largely narrated these spaces through low-tension narratives, which I argue has to do more with avoiding risks rather than any of the initial hypotheses.

Third, what alternative explanations exist to the research question? In short, is my argument falsifiable. At its core, I argue that states deliberately avoid securitizing and institutionalizing

unsettled spaces because the inherent flux of these spaces makes securitization politically costly for states and institutionalization a poor solution. Instead, I argue that states adopt low-tension narratives and low-key practices to sustain a status quo in unsettled spaces in the Arctic as part of a risk mitigation strategy.

According to a neorealist approach, one possible explanation is that states would actively seek resolution of unsettled spaces to enhance their security power position (Waltz, 1979). If neorealism was proven true, we would expect states to securitize these spaces and integrate them into broader security rivalries. However, my research finds that states avoid securitization in unsettled spaces, even when geopolitical competition intensified. I do not find evidence of securitization or clear proof that states seek to position these spaces within geopolitical narratives. A second possible explanation through the lens of liberal institutionalism would be that states would seek stability through institutionalization practices (Keohane, 1984). If liberal institutionalism was proven true, we would expect to see states resolving unsettledness through formal agreements, international law, and multilateral institutions. My argument instead illustrates often states do not seek stabilization through efforts at institutionalization or economic interdependence. Rather, they aim to maintain an ambiguous status quo as it allows for more flexible political maneuvering. I do not find evidence of states seeking institutional solutions. A third and final explanation comes from constructivism. Namely, constructivist scholars might argue that states would eventually develop stable intersubjective understandings of unsettled spaces in order to find norm stability over time. While my research does show that states do seek low-tension narratives as a consistent stabilizing tactic over time, it does not lead inherently to a stable expectation over time. In short, unsettledness is a condition of permanent flux. Even when

states try to stabilize expectations, competing interpretations of these spaces remains unresolved. Here, constructivism offers a partial answer of how states seek to narrate unsettled spaces – they want to find order; however, the very nature of these spaces resists stabilization. My framework and argument highlights this, suggesting that unsettled spaces lead states to adopt low-tension practices that aim to 'settle' a space, but can never fully be successful.

Why Does This Matter?

This dissertation offers four important takeaways that may resonate with IR scholars studying the Arctic and across the discipline. First, it illustrates that the subsuming of unsettled spaces into broader securitizing narratives of great power competition is not the default. That is, unsettled spaces are not inherent security dilemmas waiting to emerge but rather opportunities for low-tension or desecuritizing narratives or a low-key approach to offer cooperation in the face of increasing degrading relations between East and West. This may be different in other regions that do not have strong norms as in the case of the Arctic. Even with the increase in security rhetoric since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, low-tension narratives continue to be the norm rather than the exception in these spaces within the Arctic. In short, states do not wish to link these unsettled spaces to changes in the security environment. Even under extreme unsettled conditions in the Arctic, states have an interest to cooperate and see narratively linking spaces to unpredictable changes in security circumstances as risky. Thus, maintaining policy continuity is part of a larger strategy of risk avoidance.

Second, this dissertation focuses on unsettled spaces in the Arctic, where strong institutional norms are particularly strong. As I will outline in the chapter on unsettledness, there

are other unsettled spaces where militarization is more often the response, such as China-Taiwan, Russia-Ukraine, and Israel-Palestine. However, this still raises questions about other spaces that might exhibit characteristics of unsettledness such as the high seas and outer space. Often these spaces are framed solely as new arenas for competition and contestation. My work suggests that by building institutional norms, it may be possible to instill incentives for states to cooperate on these spaces. The extent to which this is true in a post-2022 world remains to be seen.

Third, this research offers practical realism and some optimism for investigating the role of individuals in security policy. Even though there are clear structural constraints on how outside experts can interface with government and ministries, the contextual situatedness is nonetheless notable and could offer future research opportunities. My dissertation also suggests that empirical work that should focus more heavily on knowledge ecosystems as offering fruitful areas of research. Moreover, as part of the findings of this dissertation, there are strategies IR scholars could adopt that may be useful for those seeking to be more policy-minded scholars.

Fourth, I theoretically ask how low-tension narratives and low-key approaches sit within in the broader theory of desecuritization literature. If low-tension narratives and low-key approaches are not desecuritization, what then are they and how can we theorize their presence? I suggest that states proactively choose to mobilize low-tension narratives and low-key approaches to avoid securitizing and desecuritizing outright. Both have consequences for states that may prefer a status-quo situation.

Why Does the Arctic Matter?

The Arctic is a significant case study of unsettledness as it is a frontier space and a region that has strong institutional norms. First, because it is uniquely impacted by both great power competition and extreme climate change, there are many differences in intersubjective understanding over how spaces should be narrated in the region. For example, should we consider maritime shipping routes areas of traditional security threats or ones concerning climate developments originating from melting ice? Second, it is deeply connected and intertwined with global security dynamics. Scholars argue that the Arctic not only reflects of global security dynamics, but also that Arctic security is closely connected to large security events. This includes militarization during the early Cold War, détente in the 1970s-1980s, and the fall of the Soviet Union (Heininen, 2019). Third, the Arctic is particularly important when it comes to experts' participation in regional governance. The proliferation of conferences and meetings where practitioners and experts meet across the spectrum of international issues in the Arctic is notable and represents an illustrative case to study the influence of experts (Steinveg, 2021). This makes it all the more telling that even in a region where experts are close to policymakers, their role in influencing outcomes over unsettled spaces remains tangential.

Outline of the Dissertation and Methodological Approach

The following three chapters offer a literature review, followed by a detailed conceptual picture of unsettledness, and end with a theory and methodology chapter. The three chapters after these three explain each case in detail. I describe the nuances and background of each case including their historical context, their geographical position, and which actors have interests there. Each case also explores each possible explanation in depth, whether structural geopolitics plays a

role, the predominance of low-tension narratives, and the role of the expert community. Each chapter's section focusing on the role of an expert community slightly differs in its construction as the interviews led to difference focus areas. For example, while Canadian interviewees emphasized key individuals who made an impact, Norwegian and Danish interviewees emphasized structural knowledge ecosystems, thus the chapters also emphasize these factors. All three chapters rely on a combination of interview data and discourse analysis of key documents relevant to the case in question.

In the final chapter, I conclude the dissertation by asking how we should think about unsettledness in the context of great power competition and how we should theorize the role of low-tension narratives and low-key approaches in the theoretical picture of desecuritization. What opportunities does unsettledness offer for smaller states or states engaged in rivalry? Unsettledness is not just a characteristic of the Arctic but has implications for greater questions of international security which I discuss further. I also discuss how, while it might be difficult to ascertain the influence of experts, what is feasible is describing particular constraints and strategies that seem to be consistent across the cases as well as describing the knowledge ecosystem that surrounds questions of Arctic security in each of my cases. I pull together the theoretical claims and empirical observations to situate my research within the broader study of International Relations and Arctic studies.

Caveats and Limitations

There are always caveats and limitations to any research project. In this dissertation there are two that bear paying attention to. First, there is a notorious difficulty in measuring influence

or understanding how much impact can be measured through the role of experts. Even if policymakers claim that particular reports were useful or that relationships with individuals were helpful, the measurable impact of interpersonal relations is a common limitation in work that studies the role of experts. In tandem, my research focuses only on the role of political experts rather than those that studied these spaces using expertise from natural sciences or other fields. Not only would have expanding this field have made the research too broad for the scope of one dissertation, it also allowed me to focus more seriously on those with a political science, international relations, or akin background. Second, the documents under analysis are, by their very nature, public-facing documents. Thus, some private narratives of how these unsettled spaces operate might be very different in public settings. There is reason for a reader to wonder whether low-tension narratives are not the internal narratives of how states narrate these spaces but rather propaganda.

In this introduction, I have described the rationale for the dissertation, explained the primary research questions, and situated the research within the broader body of work in IR. Chapter 2 will outline the literature that I draw from; Chapter 3 will introduce the concept of unsettledness; and Chapter 4 will explain my theory in depth. Chapter 5 will explore the Svalbard case. Chapter 6 will describe the Greenland case. Chapter 7 will cover the maritime shipping lanes case (the Northern Sea Route and the Northwest Passage). Last, Chapter 8 will discuss final implications.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

An analysis of unsettledness as a condition in the international system where intersubjective understandings about the status, governance, and territorial meaning of a specific geographic space remain unresolved is rooted in the vast literatures of anarchy from Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism. While Realism and Liberalism view anarchy as a structural condition that shapes state behavior, Constructivism challenges this by arguing that anarchy is what states make of it. This chapter integrates these three perspectives, emphasizing how the concept of unsettledness fits within these perspectives on anarchy and influences politics. I then turn to the literature that underpins my theory, namely securitization and desecuritization. I also incorporate some literature on expertise within my section on Constructivism as it helps to explain the mechanisms through which states navigate and manage unsettled spaces. Rather than treating these literatures as separate, I show how they interact to form a cohesive theoretical foundation for my argument. In each section, I highlight key developments in the literature before turning to how I build upon existing approaches. The following chapter will then turn to my theoretical framework and methodological approach.

Theoretical Approaches to Anarchy

While Realists assume that anarchy forces states into self-help behavior, Liberalism challenges this by arguing that institutions and cooperation can mitigate anarchy's effects. Importantly, Realism is not one collection of theories, but rather a group of different types of scholarship that has roots in the work of Thucydides and Clausewitz. All share surrounding their

conception of anarchy is an ontological premise that the anarchic structure of the international system creates such a degree of either perceived uncertainty or actual conflict that states must constantly assume and prepare for the possibility of war (Wohlforth, 2008). Classical realism emerged in the first half of the 20th century and proponents including E.H. Carr and Hans Morgenthau understood anarchy as a structuring characteristic of the international system (Rose, 1998). This anarchic characteristic came from human nature itself. A second type of realism called 'neoclassical realism' emerged in the 1990s, who understood anarchy as a structuring force of the international system that translates those pressures into domestic situations (Schweller, 2018). A third and final form, 'structural realism' understood anarchy as all-encompassing. In other words, anarchy is the organizing principle through which the international system is structured, and thus states understand one another through differing relative material capabilities (Waltz, 1979). For Waltz, anarchy is an ordering principle where competition and socialization help to maintain it by leading to states to behave in predictable ways.

Similar to realism, liberalism shares an ontological premise with realism that anarchy is a condition of the international system, but theoretically comes to a different conclusion. Rather than assuming anarchy was a condition that structured state behavior, often in negative ways, it takes an optimistic view of human nature that could lead to the amelioration of the condition and constraints of anarchy. In short, it sees anarchy as something that could be overcome through cooperation and international institutions. This normative approach is a core premise of the liberal theory originating from Keohane and Moravcsik, rooted in the assumption that people are better off without war (Owen, 1994). Similar to realism, there is not one liberal theoretical approach, but rather may be sub-types of liberal theory. Beginning with classical liberalism, scholars understand

anarchy as malleable. It is not a strict determinant of state behavior but rather a description of the international system that can be shaped through international institutions and cooperative processes. Such scholars stress international institutions and economic interdependence (Sterling-Folker, 2020). A neoliberal argument agrees with a neorealist premise that anarchy creates structural constraints for states by fostering uncertainty (Russett, 2020; Moravcsik, 2009). The difference lies in the neoliberal theoretical argument that anarchy-fostered paranoia, fear, and drive for power about survival has been mitigated over time and can be overcome through institutions that provide information and reduce transaction costs. The theory acknowledges that cooperation is difficult to achieve in anarchic conditions, but suggests international institutions can facilitate cooperation and offer opportunities for states to overcome collective action barriers. For neoliberal theorists, anarchy is a vacuum gradually being filled with human-created processes and institutions (Sterling-Folker 2020).

Of the "Big Three" theories (Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism), the conception of anarchy that holds the most weight with my concept of unsettledness is that of constructivism. For constructivists, anarchy is what states make of it (Wendt 1992), and there are multiple logics of anarchy that differ across time and space (Hurd, 2009). In a now famous article, Alexander Wendt (1992) suggests that states exist in a social relationship with one another, thus their choices and understanding of anarchy are mutually constituted. In other words, states can respond to anarchy in different ways as part of a long and iterative relationship. Anarchy by itself, according to Wendt, is not a useful concept in of itself for understanding why states behave the way that they do, but is variable depending on how states see themselves and others. This opens the door for different types of social relations between states including community (Adler & Barnett, 1998), hierarchy within

anarchy (Simpson, 2004), and other social relations. This interpretation may also include the role of experts, who may play a crucial role in shaping the narratives that states use to understand these spaces. Rather than being neutral arbiters of knowledge, experts operate within relational social structures (Kuus, 2014) that grant them authority, legitimacy, and influence over decision-making processes (O'Reilly, 2017). Experts then can function as interpreters of uncertainty or agenda-setters in policy discourse, particularly in global governance settings (Kennedy, 2005; Berling & Bueger, 2015). Whether through epistemic communities (Adler & Haas, 1992), transnational guilds of professionals (Bigo, 2011), or communities of practice (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015), experts play a role in how states engage with their external environments. The role of knowledge ecosystems, research networks, and policy elites also reinforces that expertise is not just about providing technical knowledge, but also embedded seriously in power relations (Littoz-Monnet, 2022). In unsettled spaces, where uncertainty is a characteristic of these spaces, experts may play important role in shaping policy debates by framing issues in ways that avoid escalation, and reinforce the status quo.

My understanding of unsettledness as a consequence of the international system departs from the literature from Realism and Liberalism on anarchy in important ways. While anarchy as an important characteristic of the international system, I am neither focused on its origination from human nature nor how it is an all-encompassing reality that forces states to behave in predictable ways. Similarly, I do not take a normative stance of whether overcoming anarchy is a necessarily positive or negative thing – rather I observe it as a political phenomenon that states construct. I am also not convinced that anarchy can be overcome through institutions and economic interdependence alone. While such mechanisms might be helpful, my concept of unsettledness

suggests that when states continue to disagree about then nature of the international system it is even harder for the mechanisms that liberalism and neoliberalism suggest are helpful in mitigating anarchic conditions. In other words, norms and institutions in unsettled spaces continue to be in flux, rather than inherently stable. My concept thus illustrates that there are consequences for these unsettled conditions and they are particularly prevalent in frontier spaces such as the Arctic. Even when strong institutions are present in the Arctic, unsettledness shapes how states can act in particular spaces. Importantly, I argue that when in regions where there are strong and pervasive institutional norms, unsettledness will not lead to a security dilemma – which contradicts a realist tradition that would rather argue that anarchy produces security-seeking, often conflictual behavior. When we understand that unsettledness is a consequence of anarchy, my concept of unsettledness may help explain how and why states do *not* act in predictable ways.

My conception of unsettledness fits best into the constructivist tradition, as my concept that spaces are shaped by fluid, evolving interpretations suggests a shared intersubjective understanding will remain incomplete. This concept builds upon constructivist traditions of anarchy as it agrees that this anarchic unsettledness is dynamic and varies depending on how states interpret it. While a constructivist reading of norms often normatively presupposes that once established their stabilize expectations, I suggest that in frontier spaces like the Arctic, norms and shared meaning may remain inherently unsettled and there is no expectation that there will be a final end result of a set norms. Constructivism, in emphasizing that anarchy is what states make of it, also opens the door for the role of experts as a mechanism through which states interpret and navigate unsettled spaces. In other words, expert communities and the knowledge ecosystems in

which they operate within these unsettled spaces may provide knowledge and context for states to help manage uncertainty.

Introducing Desecuritization

Most approaches to studying security discourse depart from the traditional International Relation schools of Realism and Liberalism. The tradition of securitization that studies the construction and deconstruction of security threats is a burgeoning field that has expanded beyond its original Copenhagen home towards an increasing focus on practice theory, and explores the normative implications of security speech. I build from this literature in important ways. I draw attention to theories of *desecuritization,* a long-undertheorized twin of securitization, and ask how low-tension discourse and a low-key approach fits within this framing. I suggest that rather than outright desecuritizing issue areas, states are incentivized to use low-tension narratives to reiterate the status quo and maintain their authority in decision-making processes.

Critical Security Studies: Securitization Theory

Critical security studies have evolved over the last twenty years, and even today debates exist about the nature of securitization and security (Gad & Petersen, 2011). The broader field of critical security studies is largely understood to have originated from the widening of the security debate in the wake of the Cold War (Case Collective, 2006). However, by the early 2000s, debates already surrounded whether the theory was analytically operationalizable at all (Balzacq, 2005; Roe, 2008) and specifically outside the West (Wilkinson, 2007; Vuori, 2008). Later, debates surrounded the normative implications that the theory had – specifically that it tended to reproduce the existing political order (Aradau, 2004).

Although often discussed in contrast to one another, the Aberystwyth, Copenhagen, and Paris schools of security reflect debates and broad trends in how critical literature has taken up different aspects of security. What these different monikers have in common is their goal of making military assumptions of traditional security studies visible and explicit in their orientation. For example, while the Copenhagen School has been associated with studying the linguistic speech act of securitization, the Aberystwyth School is associated with emancipation as the goal of security, and Paris with the practice of security (Case Collective, 2006). In brief, the Paris School moves beyond a rhetorical understanding of security and addresses some of the criticisms to traditional readings of securitization, categorizing "securitization as a set of interrelated practices, and the processes of their production, diffusion and reception/translation that bring threats into being" (Balzacq, 2019, 333). This broader approach to securitization considers regimes of practices, context, audiences, and the power relations that underlie these relationships and enable specific types of governmentalities (Balzacq, 2005). Studying security in this way engenders a focus on the performative practices of security (Cote, 2015). For those scholars who adopt this approach, security is always contested, and the question is not *how* is security created or what *should* security do, but rather what security *does*. Thus, the center of analysis is moved to practices that enable security thinking, and the creation of networks of professionals in security (Gricius, 2024). By contrast, the Aberystwyth School suggests that a critical security studies agenda ought to focus on the 'Critical' influence from the Frankfurt School. It names emancipation as the normative goal of securitization rather than the realist approach to military, violence, and the state (Booth, 1991), and particularly studies whether securitization leads to emancipatory action. This normative engagement with politics centers human rights abuses, poverty, development, oppression of minorities, and powerlessness. Reading security in this fashion engenders a significantly different

understanding of what topics comprise a security agenda. Below, I focus on the Copenhagen School as the primary vehicle through which desecuritization has been theorized.

The Copenhagen School

Securitization theory originated from the Copenhagen School to better explain the changing nature of security after the end of the Cold War (Buzan et al., 1998). Buzan et al (1998) began by disaggregating state security into several sectors – military, political, societal, economic, and environmental. In doing so, they broadened the idea of different possible issues that could be under threat apart from the state but that all of them used a rhetoric of survival against existential threats to justify their existence. These different types of security were also paired with Buzan et al's (1998) understanding of security as *not* objective reality. Instead, security is socially constructed through speech acts. In short, issues only become security threats when actors agree upon them as such. While traditional security studies suggest that there are objective threats that a state might face, a Copenhagen School approach turns our attention to the construction of security threats by relevant actors.

Traditionally, the process of securitization as a speech act from the Copenhagen School has two steps. The first is the securitizing move, in which a securitizing actor makes a rhetorical move that identifies a referent object, such as the state, environment or identity, and a threat to its existence. The securitizing actor must be a political elite that has sufficient legitimacy to make such claims, such as a President or Prime Minister. This step is illocutionary, a performative function where the statement of security makes it so. The second step is the process through which the audience may or may not accept this securitizing move. The audience is a key element of

securitization theory as it rests on audience assent (Balzacq et al., 2016). This audience must have the ability to enable the securitizing actor, which may include a public or political party. Scholars then argued that securitization is the process by which a political issue becomes a security issue, moving from normal to extraordinary politics. This is known as the 'securitizing move.' Securitizing moves can be successful if they are accepted by an audience or unsuccessful if not. This has allowed securitization theory to be applied to different empirical contexts including but not limited to migration and minority rights, climate change, epidemics, terrorism, and military threats (Bigo & Guild, 2005; Sjöstedt, 2017). This Copenhagen School approach represents an interesting combination between an English School constructivist realist (Buzan) and a post-structural realist (Waever) – leading to a theoretical approach that focuses on the speech act as the center of security and centering their analysis on security language: the grammar and vocabulary of speaking security. An issue is considered successfully securitized when the securitizing move is accepted by the audience. In other words, a securitizing actor initiates a securitizing move and if successful, the referent object is then considered securitized. Some scholars argued that the Copenhagen School's understanding of securitization was insufficient and suggested that securitization was intersubjective relational – requiring more of a focus on the audience (Leonard & Kaunert, 2010; Balzacq, 2015). This largely falls within a second-generation approach to securitization. This second generation emphasizes the importance of context and intersubjectivity (Roe, 2008). Rather than being solely focused on the speech act as a single event, a second generation approach emphasizes the iterative nature of how security is constructed.

Serious critiques of the Copenhagen's School of securitization exist. Critics argue there is tension within the theory itself, particularly in maintaining a focus on the securitizing move

(illocutionary in nature) and the concern with the audience (intersubjective) (Balzacq, et al., 2016). In other words, securitization is both a speech act event and the result of a negotiated process between audience and speaker (Strizel, 2007). Strizel (2007) argues that securitization should be analyzed in discursive contexts, focusing on the locale of the securitization. Because the Copenhagen School focuses heavily on the illocutionary aspect of the speech act, it tends to ignore the role of the audience in accepting the actor's speech act which leaves it unable to account for the place of the audience in a particular context. Given that security should interrogated in the "wider cultural framework within which security receives its meaning," this poses a problem (Huysmans, 1998, 228). Other scholars argue that securitization is unable to contribute on ethical and moral questions of different securitizations and desecuritizations and cannot theorize why actors securitize objects. This is matched by the absence of any normative or emancipatory concept within the theory itself (Floyd, 2010).

Another issue within the theory shows the tension around exceptionalism. Securitization theory requires the rhetoric of an existential threat but the actual utilization of emergency measures is not necessary. Thus, in one case, "exceptionalism signifies securitization… [but] in another case, exceptionalism is no longer a necessary condition for securitization" (Balzacq, 2019, 342). In response, scholars have proposed different bars for what is considered a successful securitization, such as setting the bar higher by including the requirement of a change in relevant security behavior (Floyd, 2010). Further criticisms revolve around the lack of development around the question of the audience (Balzacq et al., 2016). Some scholars argue that the audience should be differentiated between various settings including the general populace, elite, as well as technocratic and scientific settings and that securitization must account for the movement of issues in and out of a securitizing

process over time (Salter, 2008). However, even with the question of a multiplicity of audiences, scholars can focus on the enabling audience. Notably, with different audiences comes different contexts, logics of persuasion, epistemologies and knowledge networks. Thus, the threshold for securitization is different for each audience (Salter, 2008). Others argue that securitization is state-centric and reproduces a universalistic and state-centric meaning of security (Wilkinson, 2007). Taking this approach, Wilkinson argues, erases local understandings of security and privileges spoken speech. Further, the Copenhagen School implies an elitist view of politics as it perceives actors who can speak security as mostly originating from political elites (Huysmans, 2011). What is also missing is an account of the important role the global political economy plays an in structuring social relations (Patomaki, 2015), and a lack of engagement with the question of uncertainty (Van Rythoven, 2020).

The Corresponding Turn to De-Securitization

De-securitization has long been understood as its underdeveloped twin of securitization (Floyd, 2007). In Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde's 1998 original work, one chapter mentions it. In other words, it is undertheorized and not considered normative by contrast to the other forms of critical security studies (Aradau, 2004; Floyd, 2010). That is not to say that other critical security scholars have not discussed desecuritization. Scheel (2020), for example, suggests desecuritization must be creatively developed in order to understand destabilize authority of security professionals in the field of migration via a Paris school approach. Claudia Aradau (2004) has also argued from an Aberystwyth School approach that voices for desecuritization should come from the silenced other rather than the agents of securitization themselves.

Defining desecuritization is often challenging. Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde (1998, 29) favor it as a long-term option, vaguely defining it as "the shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into normal bargaining process in the political sphere." In later work, Waever (2000) offers three strategies to desecuritize: 1) not to talk about the issue in terms of security, 2) once an issue is securitized, respond to the issue in strategies that do not create security dilemmas, and 3) move security issues back into the realm of normal politics. He also suggests that it is particularly difficult to desecuritize societal security issues as they tend to have a self-reinforcing character (Waever, 1995).

However, because of this vague theoretical development, there are many different interpretations of strategies to desecuritize and the definition itself (Taureck, 2006). For example, Jef Huysmans (1995) offers three contrasting ways to desecuritize. First, he uses an *objectivist* approach in which an actor tries to convince others that the object is not a security problem through teaching them that the object is not dangerous. Second, he uses a *constructivist* approach through which an actor tries to understand how securitization occurs and tries to change the causal processes. Third, and last, he offers a *decontructivist* approach which involves telling the story of the object in a way that does not frame it as a security problem (Huysmans, 1995).

Some describe it as a process of political negotiation over the threshold of security. In short, when something is successfully securitized it is a threat and above the threshold. When issues fall below this threshold, they are considered challenges (Nguyen, 2020). Rita Floyd (2019, xvi) defines desecuritization as a "sum of actions (a process) referring to the unmaking of securitization, involving the termination of security language and security measures." The difficulty of this

definition comes from the fact that desecuritization is context-dependent and thus there is no universal answer of how to desecuritize or unmake security (Scheel, 2022).

Perhaps the most recognized scholar on theorizing de-securitization is Lene Hansen, who offered four ideal forms that can be found empirically when studying desecuritization (Hansen, 2012). First, desecuritization can take place via 'change through stabilization' when an issue is cast into terms other than security. The example often used is that of the détente during the Cold War and issues that had been securitized were cast in terms of normal politics (Benhke, 2006). Second, desecuritization can take place via replacement, when an issue is removed and another takes its place. Third, desecuritization can be achieved via rearticulation, when an issue moves from the realm of securitization to politicization due to the resolution of threats. This rearticulation requires, according to some, serious self-reflection to reframe and actively offer a solution, in other words transforming the security act (Roe, 2004). Fourth, desecuritization can occur via silencing, when an issue is entirely removed from discussion altogether (MacKenzie, 2009; Guillaume, 2018).

Recent contributions to this growing literature center around what counts as securitization, why there should be desecuritization (or not) (Floyd, 2011), and how it can be achieved (Balzacq et al., 2015; Bourbeau & Vuori, 2015). For example, some argue that that 1) when a state securitizes an issue in one sector, it tends to desecuritize other sectors, and 2) successful desecuritization is a condition to maintain securitization when it is used as a diversionary strategy that helps a government to maintain legitimacy (Nguyen, 2020). Other scholars have argued that preemptive desecuritization is also possible (Bourbeau & Vuori, 2015). Still others suggest that

securitization and desecuritization can occur simultaneously (Kim & Lee, 2011; Austin & Beaulieu-Broissard, 2018). Because the state has limited resources, when securitization occurs, a negotiation must occur that by default desecuritizes older threats. Still others suggest that when considering interstate relations, mutual desecuritization is key for understanding how to deescalate in state dyads (Felfeli, 2023). Case studies using desecuritization also exist including those that focus on the Kurds in Middle East politics (Karakov, 2020), Turkey-Iraq relations (Lindenstrauss, 2013), and the desecuritization of the Iraqi Kurds in the context of Turkey-KRG relations (Pusane, 2017). Literature has also explored the ways in which memory can play a role in desecuritizing social conflicts (Rosoux, 2020). For example, French and German leaders today use the language of common tragedy instead of glorious victory to describe their battles on the Rheine during the World Wars, effectively desecuritizing memory that could lead to securitization. In regards to the Arctic, Jacobsen, Waever, and Gad's (2024) recent book on Greenland argue for how desecuritization can be applied on a variety of different scales (Jacobsen et al., 2024). While desecuritization seeks to remove items from security discourse, it by default assumes that these threats can be neutralized ore redefined. However, in unsettled spaces, the lack of stable norms and institutions means that desecuritization is neither feasible nor necessarily desirable for states seeking to maintain authority. By contrast, then, low-tension narratives emerge as a strategic alternative.

My primary contribution to desecuritization is asking how low-tension narratives and low-low-key approaches fit within this literature. While desecuritization assumes that security threats can be deconstructed and removed from discourse, unsettled spaces in regions where there are strong and pervasive institutional norms require a different strategy. In these context, low-tension

narratives emerge as a tool not to fully eliminate security concerns, but rather to sustain ambiguity and avoid securitization. Similarly, low-key approaches can be described as a deliberate strategy in which a state downplays a particular issue through restrained rhetoric, non-confrontational policy choices, and acting quietly. Given that many of my interviewees rejected the proposition that the state was desecuritizing unsettled spaces – particularly in Greenland – it raised important theoretical questions of how questions of low-tension narratives operate. As the type of narratives present were neither desecuritizing, securitizing, or even politicizing- an additional type of narrative needed to be added to the theoretical lexicon. I describe these low-tension narratives as discourse that deliberately minimizes security framings, avoids militarization and sustains an atmosphere of status quo stability without necessarily promoting formal cooperation. Unlike desecuritization, which actively removes an item from the security realm, low-tension narratives do not reframe the issue as non-threatening but rather avoid security discourse altogether and aim to sustain a low-key framing. Similarly, unlike cooperative narratives, which actively encourage collaboration, low-tension narratives are passive and strategic. Their purpose is to avoid future risks without making binding commitments to cooperation. Low-tension narratives are also not the same as politicization, which brings an issue onto the political agenda. Low-tension narratives operate within environments which are already politicized and are used to prevent further escalation. Low-key approaches, as stated above, can be a variety of different strategies that states use to downplay the significance of a policy issue. This can look like restrained rhetoric, where states intentionally avoid definitive security claims through strategic ambiguity; non-confrontational policy choices, where states behave in a way that are non-confrontational; and acting quietly to avoid escalation.

While low-tension narratives and low-key approaches are a new contribution to security studies, the empirical observation builds upon existing literature on desecuritization, strategic ambiguity, and status quo narratives. As noted above, low-tension narratives do not directly aim to remove items from security discourse, but rather they sustain ambiguous framing to avoid escalation. Low-key approaches do similar work in avoiding escalation through behavioral choices. Both align closely with the literature on strategic ambiguity (Goh, 2006) and hedging strategies (Kuik, 2008) where states deliberately avoid taking strong negotiating positions. Additional research on neutral and status quo narratives similarly highlights how states use discourse to maintain stability and to avoid confrontation (Tunsjo, 2013).

I suggest here that states may proactively choose low-tension narratives or adopt low-key approaches to avoid future risks. In other words, they are not desecuritizing but rather they are using low-tension narratives to avoid securitizing and militarizing discourse in the Arctic at large. States understand that simply subsuming these unsettled spaces into the broader narratives of great power competition has consequences. Thus, they preemptively use low-tension narratives to maintain a general lack of security discourse in each case. Importantly, this is different from politicization where an issue is brought onto the political agenda as many of these unsettled areas and issues are already matters of debate in some way. Rather, by using low-tension discourse, states reiterate the importance of the status quo. This means 1) they will not securitize these areas as that has political consequences, 2) they will not de-securitize these areas, as that may lead to a lack of authority in decision-making as states would open the space to other actors, and 3) as the issues are already politicized – they are not necessarily brought newly onto the stage of political decision as they have been there. Similarly, low-key approaches do the behavioral work of

restrained rhetoric, non-confrontational policy choices, and acting quietly to avoid possible escalation or confrontation. This has two implications. First, it suggests that states aim to avoid future risks in broader regional Arctic-level securitization by using different strategies on unsettled areas that might be vulnerable to securitization – speaking across scales. Second, the actors around each case do not have a shared intersubjective understanding of security threats. In some cases, states use desecuritization as a tactic to maintain control over these spaces as much as they can. Therefore, states use low-tension narratives as an alternative – particularly in Greenland. In Svalbard, both Norway and Russia see desecuritization as doing the same work of maintaining control as so too does Canada with the Northwest Passage.

This chapter has aimed to illustrate three central points that I will reiterate here before turning to the theory. First, I show that unsettledness is a consequence of anarchy, yet it differs from traditional accounts of anarchy in that it resists resolution through the mechanisms that Realism and Liberalism suggest. Second, I illustrate that Constructivism provides the best theoretical grounding for understanding unsettled spaces as it accounts for the role of social relations, norms, and expert authority. Third, desecuritization is insufficient for explaining how states manage unsettled spaces, which has led me to theorize on low-tension narratives and low-key approaches as alternative strategies. These three insights help explain why certain frontier spaces, like the Arctic, remain in flux despite existing institutional frameworks and broader structural geopolitical competition.

CHAPTER 3. UNSETTLEDNESS

Introduction

The study of spaces in IR has long been grounded in well-established concepts including 'territorial sovereignty', 'disputed territories', 'undefined territories', 'ungoverned territories', and *terra nullius.* These concepts have helped explain how states claim, contest, and govern physical spaces. However, certain spaces like Svalbard, Greenland, and maritime shipping routes in the Arctic do not fit neatly into these existing classifications. Instead, these spaces exist in a state of flux – there is continuous changes in how they are discursively framed and physically shift over time – and there is an enduring lack of consensus and intersubjective understanding. Below I outline the existing concepts around space and illustrate while they have utility in IR, they miss important aspects that frame my cases. In this chapter, I will also introduce the concept of unsettledness using the literature on concept formation. I offer two conceptual ladders drawing from related spatial and epistemic concepts. I then situate the concept in Goertz's structured categories model and outline how the concept can be operationalized. I finally respond to two possible critiques of the concept before turning to explaining my emphasis on unsettled spaces under conditions of strong institutional norms and offer a table where I situate all cases as degrees of unsettledness.

Existing Scholarship on Space-Related Concepts

Territorial sovereignty is one of the most fundamental concepts in IR, and refers to the authority of a state over recognized territory. It is rooted in the Westphalian system, and assumes clear border and recognized jurisdiction (Philpott, 2001). Scholars have long understood that

sovereignty is far from fixed, but rather is limited and shared in some cases (Krasner, 1999) and dynamic in others (Agnew, 2005). However, Arctic spaces like Svalbard, Greenland, and maritime routes challenge this notion. For example, while Svalbard falls under Norwegian sovereignty, its governance is constrained by the 1920 Svalbard Treaty, which grants other signatories economic rights – leading to a situation where there is not a fully shared intersubjective understanding of the space. Greenland is a case of where territorial sovereignty does fit in that Denmark has sovereignty over Greenland as it is a constituent part of the Kingdom. However, as Greenland is striving for independence, there are changes in how Greenland itself seeks its own sovereignty through independence movements and related parties like the U.S. want to upset Denmark's sovereignty over the island. Similarly, Arctic maritime routes pass through waters in which states have competing claims between whether these spaces exist under national jurisdiction or international law. In short, while this concept explains much of how space operates in IR, it has gaps concerning spaces where states do not agree over on the recognition of a space or how to mediate spaces that are undergoing physical and discursive change.

Disputed territories refer to specific geographic spaces over which two or more states may claim sovereignty to, often leading to territorial conflicts (Huth, 1996). Consider the territory of Kashmir between India and Pakistan. In such spaces, states disagree about the nature of control, which can lead to military confrontation (Toft, 2003). However, again, Arctic spaces like Svalbard, Greenland, and maritime routes do not fit into this concept. None of the cases are truly disputed by state parties. While there is disagreement about the nature of the Svalbard Treaty, Russia does not dispute Norway's territorial control over the archipelago. Similarly, while there are discursive changes around how Greenland as a space is narrated, no one disputes Denmark's sovereign

control over the island. Maritime shipping routes including the Northern Sea Route and Northwest Passage also not directly disputed in a serious capacity. Certainly, states disagree on the nature of these routes, but the source of the disagreement is not solely about national claims to space, but rather shifting interests. While disputed territories as a concept explains certain types of spaces where control is under question, it does not convincingly explain spaces that are not in active dispute, but rather are ambiguous in nature.

Undefined territories refer to an area where legal borders and jurisdictions have not been clearly demarcated (Ratner, 1996). These spaces often are regions that have unresolved border agreements or areas affected by shifting natural boundaries (Sampaio, 2017). When political boundaries have not been formally established, these spaces remain in a legal gray area. The Arctic cases at hand certainly do not fit this characterization. Svalbard and Greenland, for example, are very clearly defined. Maritime boundaries in the Arctic are slightly more akin to this concept as they are in a state of constant flux given changing ice patterns that require ships to take different routes. However, importantly these routes are not undefined, it is rather that their physical characteristics are undergoing constant change. Again, while undefined territories certainly add much to the lexicon of IR, it does not help explain the three cases.

Ungoverned territories refer to spaces where state authority is weak, contested, or absent. When a state fails to exercise effective control over a space, it becomes ungoverned. This can take multiple forms. Consider a territory where no centralized authority exists such as an anarchic region. Similarly, one can consider a space where there are multiple forms of governance including criminal organizations or warlords. While some define ungoverned spaces in terms of the failure

of state to govern it (Rotberg, 2004), other focus on the differentiating types of functional actors that provide services and enforce rules (Clunan & Trinkunas, 2010). The Arctic cases – Svalbard, Greenland, and Arctic maritime routes – do not fit these cases. Not only are there existing sovereignty claims for all, but in all cases, states exercise effective control over these spaces. There is no lack of governance. There are also no alternative forms of governance that challenge or compete with the state.

The final concept is that of terra nullius – no man's land. This term means land belonging to no one. It has been traditionally used to justify colonial expansion into areas deemed 'empty' and was essential in justifying European imperialism (Fitzmaurice, 2014). The term is used in a modern fashion to explain spaces like Antarctica, where there is no Indigenous population (Collis, 2017). Quite clearly, Svalbard, Greenland, and maritime routes are not terra nullius. These spaces are neither legally unclaimed nor devoid of human or state presence. Svalbard is under Norwegian sovereignty. Greenland is under Danish sovereignty and maritime shipping routes are not 'empty' but rather the site of competing interests amongst different actors. Thus, the concept of terra nullius misses the important nature of a lack of shared intersubjective agreement that characterizes these spaces.

Defining Unsettledness

What the above exploration of concepts illustrates is that the four relevant concepts to thinking about space and territoriality not fully set in IR does not explain certain cases. What these cases have in common is two-fold. First, they all are the sites of continuous changes in how a state is discursively framed and how it physically shifts over time. Second, there is persistent

disagreement and a lack of shared intersubjective understanding among actors that are historically involved and have a serious stake in the space's governance and sovereignty. In short, some actors may have a very straight forward claim of territoriality over a particular space as in the case of Norway with Svalbard, Denmark with Greenland, Russia with the NSR, and Canada with the NWP. However, other actors may have divergent understandings such as Russia's position on Svalbard, Greenland's perception of its own space, the U.S.'s perception of Greenland as a strategic outpost, and much of the international community's understanding of the NSR and NWP. Such perceptions do not have to directly contradict one another, but they clearly are different and represent that there is not a clear and shared understanding around the territoriality of a space. This lack of intersubjectivity often leads to incomplete and ambiguous governance, even though norms, governance, and rules do still exist. These dynamics come together to create what I call 'unsettledness'.

I define unsettledness as a condition within the international system where intersubjective understandings about the status, governance, and territorial meaning of a specific geographic space remain unresolved. This results in persistent flux in the norms, rules, and policies that states adopt towards that space. Unlike other forms of territorial uncertainty, unsettledness is not merely a transitional phase on the path towards legal or political resolution. Rather, it is a persistent condition defined by 1) flux, and 2) an enduring lack of consensus.

Table 1: Unsettledness Definition and Dimensions

Unsettledness	
Flux	Enduring Lack of Consensus
Continuous changes in how a space is discursively framed or physically shifts over time	Persistent disagreement and lack of shared intersubjective understanding among key actors

Unsettledness is an important addition to the literature on spatiality and intersubjectivity. It captures the middle ground where spaces are neither contested nor uncontested. In regions like the Arctic, there are very limited spaces that are openly contested, ungoverned, undefined, or disputed. However, that is not to say that there is a fully shared intersubjective understanding of all spaces. Thus, a concept like unsettledness helps to navigate that middle ground, explaining long-term conditions where this middle ground is the norm, rather than the exception. The concept also provides theoretical grounding for explaining why these spaces continue to remain there. Simply calling a space uncertain or ambiguous does not fully capture the actor-driven dynamics of states to maintain ambiguity.

Unsettledness is not determined by specific global powers such as the United States or Russia, but rather by which actors historically matter in defining a space's governance and sovereignty. In short, not just anyone can unsettle a space. Rather, a space becomes unsettled when **k**ey actors—those with historical, legal, or strategic stakes—disagree on its status. This means that while great powers *can* influence a space, they do not inherently unsettle it unless they have a historical or legal role in its governance. For example, in the case of Greenland, the United States, Denmark, and Greenlandic authorities themselves have the capacity to unsettle its status: the U.S. due to its long-standing defense presence in Greenland, Denmark due to its sovereignty over Greenland, and Greenland itself due to its independence movement that actively contests Danish sovereignty. Thus, not only can powerful states disrupt a status quo but so too can independence movements with entrenched claims from below. Countries like Brazil or India, even though both have significant regional and even global relative power, cannot unsettle Greenland because they

lack historical governance and close linkages to it. Thus, unsettledness is driven by those actors who are historically involved in defining a space's territorial and governance status.

The nature of treaties plays a crucial role in determining whether a space remains unsettled and to what degree unsettledness can occur. For example, narrow and clearly defined treaties reduce unsettledness because they leave little room for interpretation or contestation. By contrast, broad or ambiguous treaties tend to perpetuate unsettledness by failing to resolve intersubjective disagreements. For example, the 1920 Svalbard Treaty grants Norway sovereignty over the archipelago, but because it also provides equal economic access to Svalbard to treaty signatories. One of these countries is Russia, who has long-standing presence on Svalbard. While Russia does contest certain aspects of Norwegian sovereignty, the Svalbard Treaty's specifics mean that the vast majority of contestation is relatively limited. By contrast, UNCLOS (the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) provides a broad legal framework for maritime governance but does not explicitly settle disputes over whether Arctic maritime routes (such as the Northern Sea Route and the Northwest Passage) are internal waters or international straits. As a result, these areas remain unsettled because different actors - Canada, Russia, and the broader international community - interpret the treaty and the maritime space in ways that suit their interests. The key distinction here is that when a treaty precisely defines governance over a space, it may settle it, whereas when it leaves key issues open-ended, it may sustain unsettledness.

For a space to be unsettled, there must be at least two key actors with historical governance or sovereignty stakes who fundamentally disagree on its status. One actor alone cannot unsettle a space unless another key actor contests its position, sustaining the intersubjective disagreement. In

short, it is not just a single actor that can unsettle a space. However, it is also not the case that a certain number of states or a critical mass must be present to indicate unsettledness. Rather, at least two states with historical stakes in the space must disagree fundamentally about a space's territorial status and governance. U.S. foreign policy provides a strong example of how external powers that have a historical stake in the space can contribute to unsettledness. In Greenland, for example, the U.S. has had long-standing strategic and military presence on the island including at Pituffik (formerly Thule) Air Base. This framing of Greenland as purely strategic has been reiterated through historic and modern attempts to purchase Greenland from the Kingdom of Denmark. While Denmark views Greenland as an integral part of the kingdom, U.S. actions suggest an alternative framing—one where Greenland is a strategic asset rather than a fully governed Danish territory. Because the U.S. has a long-standing historic stake in Greenland, its actions and foreign policy – particularly Trump's recent statements – illustrate a heightened degree of unsettledness. However, U.S. influence alone is not enough. Greenlandic aspirations for independence further unsettle its status, as internal governance disputes amplify the lack of intersubjective agreement. This demonstrates that unsettledness may involve both disagreements between state actors such as the U.S. and Greenland as well as sub-state actors such as Greenlandic aspirations for independence.

While this dissertation focuses on unsettled spaces, I briefly provide here an example of what a settled space in the Arctic would look like. Iceland and the Aland Islands serve as clear counterexamples of settled spaces. Iceland, once under Danish rule, became fully independent in 1944 through a relatively recognized and uncontested process. Unlike Greenland, which remains unsettled due to U.S. strategic interest and internal sovereignty debates, Iceland's governance

status is universally agreed upon. Denmark does not contest its sovereignty, and no additional actors challenge its territorial integrity. Similarly, the Aland Islands, an autonomous region of Finland, were once disputed by Sweden, but the League of Nations mediated the dispute in 1921, granting Finland sovereignty while guaranteeing autonomy and demilitarization for the Aland population. Unlike Greenland, where sovereignty is still debated, the Aland Islands' sovereignty is fully accepted by Finland, Sweden, and the international community, making it a settled space. These examples reinforce that settled spaces are defined by clear intersubjective agreement among key actors, whereas unsettled spaces like Greenland remain in flux due to ongoing contestation.

While the terminology of 'unsettledness' was developed as part of this dissertation, the idea that a space might be inherently in flux has been studied using different terms. For example, there is some literature that explores 'undergoverned' spaces (Kastens, 2023). Undergoverned is adjacent to unsettled but the two share interesting characteristics. For example, undergoverned spaces are often described as having complex patterns of authority or possessing actors that compete for dominance in terms of access to resources and territorial control (Kastens, 2023). While not precisely the same, scholars have investigated – for example – the politics of fragile states and the potential for undergoverned spaces to be hotspots for terrorist activity, often shifting towards terminology of 'ungoverned spaces' (Taylor, 2016). Others have examined how undergoverned spaces should be considered background conditions that uncertainty-based outcomes in long-term competition in infinite games (Bartels & Frank, 2022). It would be inaccurate to state that the Arctic is lacking governance as there are many multilateral governance systems that cover the region. However, that does not mean that there are not continual disagreements and debates over the core characteristics of parts of the Arctic including sovereignty

debates on Svalbard, primarily originating from Russia; changing discursive framings of Greenland; and the nature of maritime shipping routes both in Russia's Northern Sea Route and Canada's Northwest Passage.

Situating Unsettledness in Concept Development Literature

The development of new concepts in IR has a long history in the discipline. This is not surprising given that we need concepts to describe, compare, and explain different dynamics in international politics. Scholars that reckon with the theories of concept formation highlight the importance of clarity, coherence, and operationalization. In short, concepts must be clear in their definition, they must be coherently different from other concepts, and they be operationalizable. In other words, how do we know a concept when we see it in the wild? Without well-defined concepts, theories and ideas can fall victim to conceptual stretching. Conceptual stretching is a state when terms are applied too broadly and end up lacking explanatory power (Sartori, 1970; Collier & Mahoney, 1993).

A key debate amongst scholars concerns 1) levels of abstraction, and 2) conceptual differentiation. Giovanni Sartori (1970; 1991) introduced the initial concept of a conceptual ladder, which deals with levels of abstraction. A ladder helps scholars move beyond a high rung (the most abstract) to a more specific and lower rungs (more specific concepts). As a concrete example, uncertainty and ambiguity as a concept exist as highly abstract concepts. Both address a general lack of knowledge or predictability in politics. However, at such an abstract level, it is difficult to apply this concept. As one moves down the ladder, a mid-level concept such as unsettledness is a

more specific version of this concept, that targets a persistent lack of intersubjective agreement over a space.

If we apply a conceptual ladder to the concept of unsettledness, it would sit within a hierarchical structure of related concepts. Because unsettledness has both spatial characteristics and emphasizes intersubjective uncertainty, I have outlined two possible conceptual ladders below. One possibility is to situate it within a ladder of spatial concepts – similar to the concepts described above.

Table 2: Unsettledness within a Conceptual Ladder of Spatial Concepts

Level of Abstraction	**Concept**	**Definition**
High	Territoriality	The organization and governance of space by political entities
Mid-Level	Territorial Uncertainty	A condition of a space that lacks clear governance and ownership
Intermediate	Unsettledness	A condition where intersubjective understandings about the status, governance, and territorial meaning of a space remains unresolved
Lower-Level	Disputed Territories	Spaces where states claim overlapping sovereignty, leading to military or legal disputes
	Undefined Spaces	Spaces where borders and jurisdictional authority remains legally ambiguous
	Ungoverned Spaces	Spaces where there is a lack of effective governance
Most Specific	Svalbard, Greenland, Arctic maritime routes	Cases where unsettledness manifests through flux and a lack of intersubjective agreement

A second possibility is to situate unsettledness as a condition of epistemic and political uncertainty. This ladder would look different as the related concepts would reckon more with questions of ambiguity, lack of consensus, and flux in definition. When we look at concepts like ambiguity and uncertainty as high and mid-level concepts, both are quite broad. Uncertainty refers to a condition where actors lack complete knowledge about the outcomes, threats or intentions of others. It is a central concept for realists, who emphasize that states operate under conditions of anarchy, namely systemic uncertainty, which then leads to their behavior (Waltz, 1979). Game-theoretic approaches to IR have also focused on strategic uncertainty and investigated how states make decisions based on incomplete information (Fearon, 1995). Through a constructivist lens, uncertainty is socially constructed. Some have argued that normative uncertainty is a condition that emerges when international norms become contested (Zürn, 2018). By contrast, ambiguity refers to when meanings and interpretations remain unclear and are open to multiple readings. Ambiguity can be deployed intentionally, as in the case of U.S.-Taiwan relations. However, it can also be unintentional when states are unclear as to their interests and how to act. Some scholars have explored how legal ambiguity is a strategic tool because it allows states to be flexible (Abbott & Snidal, 2000). Similarly, others have suggested that international norms by their very nature rely on interpretive flexibility – which allows actors to justify their decisions (Kratochwil, 1989). While uncertainty and ambiguity are often studied separately, the concept of unsettledness integrates both as it refers to uncertainty in regards to governance structures in a space, ambiguity in legal and normative frameworks around a space, and a persistent lack of intersubjective understanding of a space. Unlike uncertainty, which often assumes eventual resolution through strategic interactions, unsettledness explains persistent lack of intersubjectivity. Unlike ambiguity, it emphasizes spatial aspects of intersubjective understanding.

Table 3: Unsettledness within a Conceptual Ladder of Epistemic Concepts

Level of Abstraction	Concept	Definition
High	Uncertainty	A state of general lack of knowledge
Mid-Level	Ambiguity	A condition where political actors lack shared understandings of norms, rules, and meaning
Intermediate	Unsettledness	A persistent condition where intersubjective understanding about the status and governance of a space remain unresolved, leading to flux in norms and behavior
Lower-Level	Norm Contestation	Disputes over meaning, legitimacy, and application of political norms
	Policy Ambiguity	Unclear, shifting, or contradictory policy decisions by states and actors
	Legal Indeterminacy	Areas where legal principles remain open to interpretation due to competing frameworks
Most Specific	Svalbard's sovereignty ambiguity, Greenland's gradual autonomy, Arctic maritime uncertainty	Cases where unsettledness manifests through political and legal ambiguity

Goetz (1999) has emphasized a different type of concept develop: conceptual differentiation. He advocated for structured categories, where concepts are developed through creating a hierarchy of defining attributes (Collier & Levitsky, 1997). Larger abstract ideas are then broken down into more specific and measurable categories. For example, an abstract idea like 'sovereignty' can be broken down into different dimensions such as legal sovereignty, Westphalian sovereignty, and de-facto sovereignty. These dimensions are then operationalized into indicators. In the case of sovereignty, we could point to recognized territorial boundaries, international recognition, and the ability to enforce domestic laws. Other scholars have also highlighted that concepts must include precision, coherence, and utility. They must be specific enough to be useful

(precise), but also broad enough to allow for meaningful comparison (utility). Concept development is also linked to case selection and measurement. Literature has long understood that concept creation influences how we choose our cases (Geddes, 1990). Concepts can be too rigid, for example, and lead to the exclusion of cases that might otherwise expand the theory. Concepts can also be too broad and include too many cases, making comparison unhelpful.

If we apply Goertz's structured category model to 'unsettledness', it could be organized in the following way:

Core Concept:

- Unsettledness – a condition within the international system where intersubjective understandings about the status, governance, and territorial meaning of a specific geographic space remain unresolved

Defining Dimensions:

- Flux: Continuous changes in how a space is discursively framed or physically shifts over time
- Enduring Lack of Consensus: Persistent disagreement and lack of shared intersubjective understanding among key actors

Indicators and Empirical Measures

- Key differences in policy documents from different actors over time around space
- Frequent physical changes in a space over time
- Ambiguous legal frameworks
- Recurring diplomatic disputes or shifting geopolitical interests

Operationalizing Unsettledness

Looking above at Goertz's structured category framework, four key indicators emerge from the two defining dimensions. If a space is unsettled, we can expect to see flux and an enduring lack of consensus. These two dimensions are necessary to define a space as unsettled. We can measure this in four ways.

1. Key differences in policy documents from different actors over time around space

Unsettled spaces experience recurring shifts in how states and key actors frame them in policy and legal documents. Unlike routine policy updates, unsettledness requires frequent shifts that illustrate a clear state of flux. This includes:

- Shifting territorial or governance claims
- Policy contradictions and inconsistencies over different frameworks, where multiple actors impose conflicting interpretations over a space

2. Frequent physical changes in a space over time

Unsettled spaces undergo material transformations. While all spaces experience physical transformation over time, unsettled spaces exhibit changes that directly challenge existing interpretations of a space. Climate change is also a central part of unsettledness. It plays an important role in altering territorial changes, resources access and governance feasibility. Spaces where climate-driven changes require policy adaptation are particularly prone to unsettledness, particularly in the Arctic, where:

- Melting sea ice alters maritime routes, changing the strategic importance of these areas
- Permafrost thaw affects infrastructure, influencing governance priorities

3. Ambiguous Legal Frameworks

Legal ambiguity is a defining feature of unsettled spaces given a lack of intersubjective understanding. Many international agreements around spaces involve ambiguity. However, unsettledness occurs when this state of affairs is not only long-standing, but there is no clear settlement.

- Overlapping and competing jurisdictional claims
- Persistent disagreements over treaty application

4. Recurring diplomatic disputes and shifting geopolitical interests

Unsettled spaces are not only legally ambiguous, but also the sites of ongoing geopolitical change. While many disputes and diplomatic disputes are common, unsettledness is defined by a persistent lack of shared intersubjective understanding. The degree of dispute here matters. Disputes that have led to military conflict are above the threshold for a space to be unsettled.

- Recurring diplomatic tensions
- Strategic narratives that shift over time
- Fluctuating state interests

One possible critique to the above operationalization is how much change is enough change? In other words, what is the threshold of change that an unsettled space must reach? Unsettledness is not defined by the mere presence of change, but rather by the persistence, frequency and impact that change has on governance and legal structures. A high threshold of change is what characterizes these spaces. Discursive and physical changes must be ongoing and not move

towards resolution. Intersubjective disagreements must also be unresolved rather than part of a known process leading to resolution.

A second possible critique is the question of temporality. Given that all political spaces change over time, unsettledness cannot be understood as a temporary uncertainty. Instead, unsettledness refers to persistent and unresolved contestation. In other words, many spaces go through phases of uncertainty but eventually stabilize. However, unsettledness differs because it does not progress naturally to resolution. It is not a short-term state of uncertainty, where territorial disputes might eventually resolve under a decade through court rulings or negotiation. Consider Brexit, where the U.K exited the European Union and led to short-term uncertainty regarding the status of Northern Ireland. While uncertainty existed in the short-term, it had a defined end point with the Brexit Agreement. It is also not a case of transitional ambiguity, which may last from 10-30 years. This longer and prolonged state of uncertainty is long-standing but ultimately a period of transition that is resolved. One case of this transitional ambiguity might be the changing status of Hong Kong from 1984-2047. In 1984, the Sino-British Joint Declaration outlined how Hong Kong's sovereignty would be shifted from British to Chinese sovereignty. While the transition period was long and often uncertain, the ambiguity has an end point when Hong Kong's special status is expected to end in 2047. By contrast, unsettledness refers to a state of flux and enduring lack of consensus that exists for 30+ years, a generational time period. There is no trajectory towards resolution or expectations that a final agreed-upon solution will emerge.

Explaining the Possible Outcomes of Unsettledness

We might expect that unsettledness could lead to violence and securitization. Spaces such as Russia-Ukraine, Israel-Palestine, and China-Taiwan all fit the dimensions for being spaces under flux and where actors do not have a shared intersubjective understanding of how the space is narrated and governed. For example, the post-Soviet space including the current conflict in Ukraine, tensions between Moldova and Transnistria, the Nagorno-Karabakh territory between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia all illustrate that securitized responses can be common to unsettled spaces. Similarly, China's actions in Taiwan show that unsettled spaces can lead to militarization strategies. Israel's response to the unsettled territory of Palestine is also marked by heightened military occupation and armed conflict.

If unsettledness in the above cases does lead to heightened security and military outcomes, why then do unsettled spaces in the Arctic remain relatively desecuritized? The key distinction in the Arctic that differentiates it from the above examples are the presence of strong, pervasive institutional norms that shape how states narrate and engage in the region. Three institutional features of the Arctic differentiate it from the above cases. First, unlike post-Soviet spaces and the South China Sea, where no overarching governance institution exists, the Arctic Council and UN Convention on the Law of the Sea provide a framework that incentivizes diplomatic and legal approaches. In the Arctic, states have strong mechanisms to pursue their claims, which reduces the need for military escalation. Moreover, these governance institutions exist in tandem to norms of cooperation over contestation. Second, there are serious non-military norms in the Arctic. Many point to Gorbachev's 1987 Murmansk Speech as a key example of incentives from both Western Arctic states and Russia to cooperate rather than compete over disagreements. Third, unlike post-

Soviet regions and Israel-Palestine, the Arctic does not have large populations with politicized national identities living in these unsettled spaces. These differences illustrate that unsettled spaces do not exist in isolation. Instead, they are embedded in broader regional and normative structures that shape how policy is made. In short, unsettledness in of itself does not predetermine militarization, but rather the political and institutional context matters.

Climate change plays a critical but uneven role in shaping unsettledness in Arctic spaces. While all Arctic spaces experience environmental changes, the extent to which these changes contribute to unsettledness depends on governance structures. In the NSR and NWP, declining sea ice has increased commercial and strategic interest, leading to increasingly different discursive framings around the spaces. In contrast, while Greenland and Svalbard are also affected by climate change, their governance frameworks—whether through Greenland's increasing autonomy or Norway's administration of Svalbard—provide more stability. Thus, while climate change introduces material flux, its impact on unsettledness is conditioned by existing legal and political structures.

As a region, the Arctic is an important case to then study how states make policy in unsettled spaces because it offers three cases of varying degrees of unsettledness in a broader region where strong and pervasive institutional norms exist. These norms may condition how states make policy in these spaces. While this dissertation just explores the Arctic as one sub-set of unsettled spaces, future work should focus more on how unsettledness may cause states to make

different policies if norms do not exist. In the below table, I outline how the cases illustrate different degrees of unsettledness in the Arctic.

Table 4: Cases as Degrees of Unsettledness

Case	Explanation	Overall Degree
Svalbard	Norway has legal sovereignty over Svalbard but Russia contests key elements of Svalbard Treaty. Climate change has led to changes in physical nature of Svalbard, leading to changes in governance and discursive framings. However, there is a low degree of flux in these framings.	Low
Greenland	Greenland is discursively framed very differently by Denmark, the U.S., and Greenland. Greenland is also experiencing physical changes due to climate change, leading to changes in intersubjective understanding (is Greenland a geostrategic asset, a protectorate of Denmark, or a new potential partner for critical mineral mining).	Medium
Northern Sea Route (NSR)	Russia claims the NSR as internal waters, in contrast to other actors which claim it as an international strait. Climate change is reshaping the ice conditions of the route, which impacts how other actors perceive it.	High
Northwest Passage (NWP)	Canada claims the NWP as internal waters, in contrast to other actors which claim it as an international straight. Climate change is reshaping the ice conditions of the route, which impacts how other actors perceive it.	High

The concept of unsettledness is valuable because it helps scholars studying spaces where governance, sovereignty, and strategic narrative remain fluid. While this dissertation focuses on unsettledness in the Arctic, future research could apply unsettledness to other regions where territorial or geopolitical ambiguity persists. For example, consider outer space and the high seas

as two such spaces. In addition, scholars interested in how states sustain low-tension approaches in domestic or regional contexts – such as liminal border zones – could adapt unsettledness as a tool to understand how actors deliberately maintain ambiguity in those spatial areas. In short, by integrating unsettledness into broader research on spatiality, we can move beyond binary categorizations of contested and uncontested spaces. This offers a more nuanced read of how states balance stability, strategic interests, and governance under conditions of a persistent lack of intersubjectivity.

This chapter has built the concept of unsettledness through defining the concept clearly, engaging with the literature on concept development and formation, introducing related concepts and explaining how unsettledness builds upon them, and justifying how it benefits IR generally. I have also operationalized the concept and explained why the Arctic is an important region through which to understand unsettledness under conditions of strong institutional norms. The next chapter will explain my theory and methodological approach.

CHAPTER 4. THEORY AND METHODS

Introduction

Understanding how states sustain policy in unsettled spaces requires a theory that accounts for ambiguity, shifting narratives, and structural variables. This chapter builds upon the theoretical basis for unsettledness as outlined in the previous chapter, a concept that captures the persistent lack of shared intersubjective understanding about specific spaces. While a constructivist approach to norms highlights how norms evolve and change over time (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Wendt, 1999), unsettledness characterizes cases where stabilization remains incomplete or deliberately avoided. Unlike realism, which might predict that unsettled spaces would be subsumed into great power competition or liberal internationalism, which would expect institutionalization to resolve ambiguity, the concept of unsettledness implies that states actively sustain a space's unresolvedness as a strategic choice and use low-tension narratives, low-key approaches, and desecuritization. This chapter introduces the theory. I then turn to my methodological approach including my justification for case selection, and the methods: elite interviews and discourse analysis.

As a reminder, my research question asks: why do states maintain continuity in their policies around unsettled spaces even in the absence of intersubjective agreement. I argue that there are three possible reasons why states might maintain continuity. First, structural geopolitics can have an effect. States might seek to bring order to unsettled spaces by subsuming them into broader narratives of geopolitics. If spaces are constantly in flux and there is no intersubjective understanding, states may wish to find it through linking spaces to the geopolitical level. Second,

security framing can impact continuity. Different types of security framings (i.e., environmental, military, societal) might shift how states could sustain continuity in their policies towards unsettled spaces. Third, an expert community can impact how states make policy in these spaces because the unsettledness of the space in question would lead to states to turn to experts to help reinforce, challenge, or maintain state narratives around these spaces. Of these three explanations, I hypothesized that expert communities would have the weakest effect while security framing and structural geopolitics would be primary drivers of continuity. However, instead, I found that none of these explanations were strong conditions for how and why states maintained their policies. Instead, I find that the primary explanation was that risk avoidance – namely that states had an interest in avoiding potential future risks in unsettled spaces that could emerge such as militarization.

My primary argument is that when it comes to unsettled spaces in regions with strong pervasive institutional norms, states are *not* influenced by structural geopolitics, security framings, or expert communities to maintain continuity, but rather they sought to mitigate and avoid future risks. Because unsettled spaces lack a stable intersubjective order, states are incentivized to avoid future risk through low-tension or desecuritizing narratives or adopt a low-key approach because it neither serves their interests to securitize an unsettled space nor does choosing to create institutions. Unsettledness in regions with strong institutional norms like the Arctic then leads to states sustain a status quo of flux in these spaces rather than seeking ordering through narratively spaces with structural geopolitical, securitizing framing, or through relying on expertise from outside political experts. In other words, states are maintaining continuity in their policy around unsettled spaces, but not due to any of the three explanations under study. Rather states seek to

avoid risk in the unsettled spaces through maintaining policy continuity via through low-tension or desecuritizing narratives or adopt a low-key approach.

While my initial research was interested in how different types of security discourse and framings might compete for hegemony and shift how states maintained their policies and the link between great power competition and regional spaces, I instead found a lack of security discourse and a general lack of mention of great power competition. Thus, my theory suggests that in response to unsettledness in regions like the Arctic, states are incentivized to avoid securitizing discourse and linking these spaces to global trends of competition (i.e., structural geopolitics) amongst them. States achieve this aim through using low-tension narratives, desecuritization discursive strategies, and low-key approaches[1] rather than immediately subsuming them into the security discourse of great power competition or subjecting them to institutionalization. States are incentivized to behave in this fashion because it neither serves their interests to securitize an unsettled region nor does institutionalization. That being said, the predominance of low-tension narratives in the three cases under analysis has been changing since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. However, with Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, there may be a shifting calculus that states must adapt to. My contribution here is twofold. First, I illustrate that in unsettled spaces in regions like the Arctic, states are incentivized to maintain a status quo desecuritized and low-tension environment, which is different from expectations from realism or liberalism. Second, I show that the condition of unsettledness leads state to *not* change policy. Rather, they seek to stabilize areas of disorder through consistency in discourse and practice as part of a broader risk avoidance strategy. However, this consistent attempt to create a low-tension environment does not

[1] The three approaches that I outline above, namely low-tension discourse, desecuritization, and a low-key approach are variations of the different contexts that each case illustrates.

fully settle the space, it remains fluid and lacking consensus – creating a continued sense of unresolvedness.

The second aspect of my theory regards the role of experts. Could the role of outside experts on these particular unsettled spaces be a condition under which states maintained their policies in order to seek predictability? My theory suggests that experts are relatively unlikely to fully influence policy in such cases. This comes into contrast with literature on the role of experts in highly technical areas within global governance, which suggests that the more technical the issue, the more influence an expert could have. In the context of these unsettled spaces, however, while the contours of the spaces might be unsettled, the policy surrounding them is largely set and not open to political debate. Thus, experts have little to no role as states want to continue to operate their low-tension and desecuritizing approach that does not benefit from outside knowledge. This is not to say that there were not cases of experts sharing reports or examples of how interface with ministries did lead to changes in policy, but rather there is no clear mechanism through which experts were able to change policy as a rule. By contrast, the nuances and contextual background of each case, specifically the knowledge ecosystem where research organizations and ministries interacted, seemed to be of more relevance than causal mechanisms.

My theory is falsifiable because it makes clear empirical predictions that have observable implications for being proven true or false. If unsettledness were not a meaningful concept, for example, we would expect that in the Arctic, states to either 1) securitize such spaces in response to external threats, as realism suggests, or 2) resolve their unresolved nature through governance and institutionalization, as liberalism predicts, or 3) develop shared intersubjective understandings

over time, as constructivism argues. None of these three results were found during my research. By contrast, I found that unsettledness persists and that states choose to sustain its contours to maintain control over the unsettled space and avoid escalation. If my cases instead showed a pattern of sustained securitization in tandem with geopolitical security changes, institutionalization over time, or norm stabilization, my theory would be proven inaccurate. Below I outline my independent and dependent variables in more depth.

The Three Mechanisms

The primary object under analysis is the unsettled space in question, namely Svalbard, Greenland, or maritime shipping lanes in the Arctic. The dependent variable is changes (or lack thereof) in how states make policy around the unsettled space over time. How the policy was made over the unsettled space was studied through exploring three mechanisms which are also operationalized as independent variables: 1) structural geopolitics, 2) how *security* was framed in reference to these spaces, and 3) the role of an expert community. As I state above, I find that none of these mechanisms held true, but rather the actual reasoning behind policy continuity was risk avoidance.

The first possible explanation for why states might maintain their policies regarding an unsettled space deals with structural geopolitics. In short, if spaces are constantly in flux and there is no intersubjective understanding, states will seek order and shared understanding through linking spaces with geopolitical changes. When states see unsettled spaces as strategically important, they may be incentivized to integrate them into larger geopolitical narratives. However, I found that due to the largely securitizing structural geopolitical narratives of, for example, great

power competition, states chose instead to avoid linking these areas to strategic competition unless it was absolutely necessary. As one concrete example, the Arctic as a region remained broadly decoupled from global great power competition narratives until Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which forced states to re-evaluate their stance.

To explore this in the discourse analysis, I looked for examples of whether global geopolitical occurrences such as the outbreak of war in Ukraine or the Cold War were referenced alongside the objects under analysis, and if these outside-of-the-Arctic geopolitical happenings shifted how the object was understood or narrated. In practice, this meant looking for any mention of things happening outside the Arctic that were closely linked or adjacent to mentions of the unsettled spaces. I also asked interviewees whether they thought the case would be impacted by these outside occurrences, and to what extent they understood policy around the unsettled space to be relevant to great power competition. I also specifically asked policymakers if policy changed around the unsettled space on key security moments such as the 2014 annexation of Crimea or the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

The second possible explanation was that different types of security framings (i.e., environmental, military, and societal) might shift how states could sustain policy continuity. If a state consistently describes an unsettled space in terms of traditional military security risks, it is less likely that they would change their policy whereas if a state often mixed types of security such as economic or environmental – they might be more willing to shift their narratives. However, I did not find examples of many different types of security discourse, instead finding that states broadly opted to use low-tension discourse to avoid potential escalating tension. For example, in

the Northwest Passage, Canada strategically avoids calling the route a 'security issue' to avoid potentially triggering escalation with the United States.

I looked for how words that connotated security surrounding my cases such as *security, risk, danger,* and similar framings that suggested uncertainty to see when security was mentioned – how it was framed. It is important to note here that I was cognizant of different linguistic differences across language. When relevant, I looked for other words that might connotate security in Russian, Norwegian, or Danish. When looking for such discourse, I was surprised to find little or no mention of security in most of the cases. Instead, I found a surprising lack of security discourse around most of my cases which I also discussed with interviewees. This led to an analysis that focused heavily on desecuritizing and low-tension practices and language rather than emphasizing different types of security. To build upon this, I also reread the documents under analysis and looked for words that connotated desecuritization practices such as *cooperation, dialogue,* and additional words that indicated lack of conflict or security. In tandem to this emphasis on showing desecuritizing and low-tension practices and language, I also outlined the key framings that came up over time in each case, asking what frames surrounded the DV. By illustrating these framings, it gave better context to the findings of desecuritizing or low-tension discourse. I also asked interviewees about instances of low-tension, desecuritizing or low-key approaches to the spaces under study.

The third possible explanation for why states might maintain policy continuity was the role of outside experts that focused on the cases through the language of politics. In short, I focused on scholars and those recognized as experts who researched and spoke publicly about the political

implications of my cases. My hypothesis was that in unsettled spaces, states would be more inclined to reach out to outside experts as the area in question required significant knowledge. Experts could act as a stabilizing force to maintain predictability. In traditional epistemic community theory, experts influence policy by providing decision-makers with technical knowledge and play an important role in key issue areas such as climate change, arms control, and financial governance (Haas, 1992). However, I found that in unsettled spaces, expert knowledge is largely outside the scope of policy decision-making because it is constrained by the strategic interests' states benefit from maintaining unsettledness.

I was particularly interested in the role of academics and political scientists. While there as little mention of such outsiders in the documents from states using discourse analysis, I used my interviews with both outside experts, policymakers, and civil servants inside of government to ascertain the manner in which experts engaged with my cases, what strategies they used, and what constrained them. I also asked for specific examples of impact that I then confirmed with policymakers when possible. My research ended up focusing more on the knowledge ecosystems in which these individuals operated such as universities and research institutes. Understanding the country-specific ecosystem at play was particularly helpful in explaining the different experiences of particular interviewees and some of the structural constraints as well as opportunities that each presented. It is important to emphasize here that using a more inductive research approach led to contextual differences across the cases. Thus, the maritime shipping lane case drew upon specific individuals and programs that connected the Canadian community to the government, whereas the Russian expert community and policy makers had little to no connection. The Greenland case emphasizes a politics of familiarity amongst experts and policymakers due to Denmark's small

state status and the Svalbard case draws attention to interministerial politics. These contextual differences illustrate just how important country-specific ecosystems are when understanding the interface between experts and policymakers.

Case Selection

Unsettledness operates differently in spaces where there are strong institutional norms and where there are none. For this dissertation, I look at the Arctic as a region in which there are strong norms that may condition states to act in particular ways. The cases in this dissertation demonstrate different degrees of unsettledness and sit on different parts of the continuum between complete intersubjective understanding and complete unsettledness. Svalbard, as the first case, illustrates a higher degree of intersubjective understanding between Russia and Norway given their long-standing practice of co-existing together on the archipelago and many legal agreements between them. A small archipelago in the High North, it falls under Norwegian sovereignty but due to the legal intricacies of the 1920 Svalbard Treaty other actors such as Russia often disagree or provoke Norwegian sovereignty over this territory, leading to an enduring lack of consensus and an unresolved quality to the space. Greenland, as the second example, has a mid-level degree of intersubjective understanding where Denmark, Greenland, and the United States have historically largely agreed on Greenland's status,[2] but the changing nature of Greenland itself through constitutional measures, means that the degree of unsettledness is higher. Greenland is clearly undergoing changing ongoing political processes that mean its spatial characteristics are understood differently. In short, is Greenland a newly burgeoning state, a constituent part of Denmark, or a geostrategic location on which weapons can be forward deployed? The third case,

[2] Trump's recent pronouncements about wanting to buy Greenland appear to be challenging this long-standing norm.

maritime shipping routes in the Arctic, namely the Northwest Passage and the Northern Sea Route, possess the highest degree of unsettledness as their physical characteristics are quite literally in flux, as the degree of sea ice blocking them changes every year and the degree of shipping and activity surrounding them is fluid, leading to an unresolved quality to both spaces that keeps them from being fully fixed.

For each case, I have chosen the one or two most proximate state actors for analysis in addition to studying experts in those states. The state actors were chosen because they have a stake in the governance of the space under question. Thus, for the Svalbard case, I have analyzed documents and interviewed individuals in the states of Norway and Russia, as one has sovereignty over the archipelago (Norway) and the other has serious presence on the island and often disputes Svalbard's legal status (Russia). For the Greenland case, I have focused on Denmark, Greenland, and the United States. I focus on Denmark as my central state for this case study as its policy around Greenland is of particular interest given the relationship between the two entities and the Faroe Islands within the overall Danish realm (i.e., the intra-Realm relationship). I have specifically included the United States in this case as it has a long history on Greenland and is closely connected to the island's history. While I have less documentation that references Greenland in the context of the United States, the *lack* of mention tells an important story that I expand on in Chapter 6. Similarly, I expand on how the lack of security discourse in Greenlandic documents is an important factor that I expand on that is largely due to constitutional competence divisions. For maritime shipping lanes, I have explored Russia (the Northern Sea Route) and Canada (the Northwest Passage). The analysis on the Northern Sea Route centers Russia as the

state that claims full legal control over the route. My analysis of the Northwest Passage primarily focuses on Canada as the state through which the route flows.

In this dissertation, I argue that unsettledness in the Arctic may lead to states choosing to avoid security discourse. Some adopt low-tension narratives to maintain the status quo and avoid future risk. Securitizing such a space could lead to an unwanted security dilemma while desecuritizing could lead to a state losing control over the space. Others directly desecuritize these spaces, and others still take a low-key approach to their discourse around the area. What all of these strategies have in common is that they suggest that unsettledness in regions with strong institutional norms leads to a deliberate avoidance of security discourse as part of a broader strategy to avoid future costs. In short, the more unsettled a space, the more states have an interest to seek order and cooperate through avoiding security discourse, holding tightly onto the reins of how outside expertise is integrated with policy, and avoiding linking such spaces with changes in the international security environment. This work has generalizable implications for how actors interact when they don't agree on shared context in regions with strong norms.

Table 5: Cases & Explanations

	Structural Geopolitics	**Types of Security**	**Role of an Expert Community**	**Level of Unsettledness**
Svalbard	Largely kept separate from geopolitical changes	Environmental Economic Military	Small community of experts	Low
Greenland	Closely linked to winds of geopolitical change	Environmental Societal Economic Military	Active and larger community of experts	Medium
Maritime Shipping Routes	Linked closely to regional changes	Environmental Military	Disparate communities,	High

	rather than global	Societal Economic	if any community at all	

I focus of three cases of unsettled spaces. This number of cases was selected to balance different types of unsettledness across the Arctic that allowed me to mediate across the different possible IVs outlined below: 1) structural geopolitics, 2) type of security, and 3) the role of an expert community. While I am not focusing on Arctic states themselves as cases, I aimed to choose cases of unsettledness across a continuum between complete intersubjective understanding and complete unsettledness to maximize the number of Artic states incorporated in the cases. The universe of Arctic states is eight. My three cases of unsettledness incorporate Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States – encompassing five of the eight possible states. I chose a multi-case study as multiple cases are often considered more robust and compelling (Yin, 2018, p. 54). Moreover, I use these cases as the intensive and descriptive study of degrees of units of unsettledness that can be generalizable across a larger set of units such as the high seas, outer space, or de-facto states (Gerring, 2004). The three cases all represent critical cases of unsettledness where there are differences of how each space is narrated and actors disagree on core characteristics. Here, this represents Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) as all three cases are unsettled in their nature (exhibit the DV) but have different underlying conditions (Tarrow, 2010). The three cases also act as variation in studying different levels of their integration with geopolitical security occurrences and the role of the expert community. While Greenland is closely linked to geopolitical winds of change, Svalbard is largely kept separate, and maritime shipping lanes appear to be more closely linked to regional changes in security rather than global ones. Similarly, the expert community is very active in Greenland, Svalbard possesses a quite small community, and the community of experts that focus on maritime shipping lanes is very

disparate – practically invisible in Russia and spread across different disciplines in Canada. Svalbard represents the lowest level of unsettledness where governance structures and norms exist, but sovereignty disputes persist. Greenland illustrates a medium level of unsettledness as its geopolitical status is actively evolving. Arctic shipping lanes exhibit the highest level of unsettledness, as their physical boundaries are constantly changing, which leads to changing in their discursive framing. These cases allow me systematically test the degree to which unsettledness influences state strategies.

The first case of Svalbard illustrates a higher degree of intersubjective understanding and lowest level of unsettledness between Russia and Norway given their long-standing practice of co-existing together on the archipelago and the many legal agreements that exist between the two states. However, there is still an enduring lack of consensus to the space. While Norwegian sovereignty of Svalbard is not contested, there are different interpretations of sovereignty, particularly surrounding the Fisheries Protection Zone (FPZ), and consistent rhetoric from Russia that questions Norwegian laws and regulations. There are also clear differences in the type of security at play – even if they did not show up in the documents under analysis – namely the conflicting incentives between environmental and economic security on the archipelago. Climate change also has led to physical changes in the nature of Svalbard, making it more accessible. This has led to changes in discursive framings and governance. In this case, I analyze the policies of Norway and Russia, as two central actors regarding Svalbard that have different views of the archipelago and again represent one state clearly engaged in strategic competition (Russia) and a second state that does not do so (Norway).

The second case of Greenland is a clear mid-level case of unsettledness. While the U.S., Denmark, and Greenland have largely historically agreed on Greenland's status, how states understand its changing nature through constitutional measures and changing actorness in the international system means that the degree of unsettledness in Greenland is somewhat in flux. One key example of this is Trump's multiple offers to buy Greenland, which clearly illustrate the vast differences in intersubjective understandings between actors. It is also a case in which structural geopolitics has publicly been linked, with China's attempted purchase of an abandoned naval base and later airport which caused the U.S. to offer to buy Greenland. In other words, the U.S. clearly understands Greenland through the lens of its pacing competition with China. In this case, I look at the policies of the United States, Denmark, and Greenland. By analyzing the three proximate states surrounding the unsettled case of Greenland, I hope to interrogate both the policies of a great power engaged in strategic competition such as the United States, an actor like Denmark that has intra-realm pressures, and Greenland itself. Climate change is clearly influencing how states are making policy around the island. All three states have different understandings and prioritization of Greenland in the Arctic and thus their inclusion allowed me to maximize a distribution of how actors could change their policies around the space.

The third case of maritime shipping lanes presents the highest level of unsettledness as the physical characteristics of the space are quite literally in flux, with the degree of sea ice changing every year and the degree of shipping and activity also quite fluid. The physical changes of both routes have led to changes in how other actors perceive the space – leading to differences in intersubjective understandings of it. Both the Northern Sea Route and the Northwest Passage are possible shipping routes through the Arctic, but neither is open throughout the year. The physical

characteristics of sea ice affect their ability to be navigated and their legal status illustrates differences in how states understand both routes. For the case of the Northern Sea Route, I was interested in how an expert community could operate in such an authoritarian state context, particularly when the route is discursively painted as essential to Russia's national economic future. I saw the expert community surrounding the Northwest Passage, in particular, as an opportunity to interrogate the extent to which legal-political scholars could engage with the Canadian policy more than other cases, given the legal technicalities. Across all three cases and Arctic security broadly speaking, there is a large and active community of practice that collaborates across state borders and meets at conferences. This active community in the Arctic broadly played an important role in allowed me to interrogate the existence of the expert community in these limited cases and draw distinctions between a larger community of practice and specific areas of study. In the case, I focus on Canada and Russia as they respectively deal with the Northwest Passage and Northern Sea Route as the primary state actors with proximity to the maritime route in question.

Interviews

Interviews are an essential qualitative research method that is used as part of a broader strategy to gather in-depth insights from participants on their perspectives on particular issues. Interviews represent a research partnership between the researcher (interviewer) and respondent (expert or policymaker) (Weiss, 1994, p. 65). Semi-structured interviews are one such approach of this method that use pre-determined open-ended questions that are designed to address key research objectives, while allowing space for follow-up questions based on the responses. This key

characteristic of flexibility is what allows the researcher and participant to follow the conversation where it leads.

To conduct a well-planned elite interview, it is essential to conduct homework before the interview – for example, finding information about the interviewee and their place of work (Berry, 2002). In preparation for the interviews, I followed key literatures in sending a recruitment letter in advance to all interviewees as well as a set of guiding questions (Goldstein, 2002). I also utilized the personal advantage I had of knowing many of the interviewees beforehand and using these relationships to gain access and scheduling these interviews in advance. Other scholarly debates over interviews lie between recording an interview by memory, taking notes, or using a tape recorder (Peabody et al., 1990). When possible, I recorded interviews using a separate recorder and took notes simultaneously. This allowed me to focus on the conversation in full and highlighting key notes I wanted to follow-up on during the conversation. However, I did have two interviews where the interviewees did not consent to a recording and I had to solely take notes. One challenge that the interview methodology faces is that of gaining access. While I had personal connections to draw upon, it was often challenging to get responses from political elites, who either would not respond to emails or state their interest and then not follow up. To address this problem, I opted for a strategy of polite persistence (Peabody, et al., 1990). One strategy that I found particularly useful was that of gaining rapport. In tandem with work by Leech (2002), I used the first third of the interview to ask probing questions about the interviewee's general work and role in the Arctic space, not only to get general information, but more so to sooth the interviewee into being reflective about their experience. The question of anonymity in interviewing is a similar issue that is a core question of the methodology. In my research, I used anonymity to ensure that

interviewees felt comfortable sharing their views with me without feeling restricted about being quoted (Woliver, 2002). That said, I faced challenges when thinking through whether I should or could share personal anecdotes from 'ministerial representatives' from a particular ministry if I only interviewed one individual, which could undermine their anonymity. Contextual and cultural differences also play an important role in the interview methodology. This came up multiple times in my work where I often had to modulate how I paused in my questions or waited for an interviewee to finish answering a question in a different cadence when either in Canada, Denmark, Greenland, Norway, Russia, or the United States. I unexpectedly found that a North American cadence of speaking was easier to follow than that of a European cadence and it was a skill that I had to develop across my interviewing practices.

Over the course of the dissertation, I interviewed 54 individuals from Canada, Denmark, Greenland, Norway, Russia, and the United States. For each case, I aimed to interview not only key scholars and academics, but also individuals in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defense, Justice, and other relevant departments. By examining key think tanks, research clusters, conference agendas or had spoken about the case to the media, I was able to gather lists of relevant individuals. I also relied on my interviewees to provide me with additional tips and suggestions for others to interview using a snowballing method (Weiss, 1994). The community of practice surrounding each case was relatively small, which made reaching a vast majority of relevant individuals attainable. After conducting and recording each interview, I transcribed the interview and took notes and then anonymized responses. The interviews operated as necessary data for understanding the knowledge ecosystem of each case and also provided a useful check for the discourse analysis. While I went into each interview with a set of pre-arranged questions, I also

was open to additional questions and new lines of inquiry that became clear during the interview process.

Most of the interviews for the maritime shipping case were conducted on Zoom from January – May 2024 and were mostly made up of individuals spread across Canada. However, the interviews conducted for the Svalbard and Greenland case were conducted in-person in Oslo from 1-23 September, 2024 and Copenhagen from 4-23 May, 2024 respectively, although some additional interviews were conducted on Zoom as well. I also conducted limited interviews for the Russian case on Zoom. The interviews offered an excellent opportunity to substantiate discourse analysis research – as described in depth below – and address the third possible explanation of the role of the expert community. My questions thus focused on confirming general findings on desecuritization and low-tension approaches taken by states and handled each interviewee's experience at the interface of government and outside expertise.

Discourse Analysis

The second method that I used was that of discourse analysis. I understand discourse as "systems of meaning production that fix meaning, however temporarily and enable actors to make sense of the world and act within it" (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 4). These meanings are often produced in certain ways and suggest possibilities for how to represent a phenomenon and create policy while also precluding others. There are many different approaches to the study of discourse (Fairclough, 2003; Haworth, et al., 2000), but my emphasis took an open-ended approach that began with a descriptive reading of each document with the aim of mapping the terrain around how each case (the unsettled space in question) was narrated in the document (Milliken, 1999).

My selection of documents followed this open approach and I chose as many documents that could include the case as possible including national security policies or Arctic policies as a "single sources cannot be claimed to support empirical arguments" (Milliken, 1999, p. 233). I was interested in questions of continuity, change or rupture. In short, would the case remain narrated in the same way over time (continuity), was it changing (change), or were there specific rupture points that happened in tandem with geopolitical occurrences (rupture). Documentation and discourse are useful sources of evidence because it is broad, specific, unobtrusive, and stable (Yin, 2018). Using the theories of desecuritization and narratives implies a further focus on discourse analysis, as it is through discourse that meaning is made and thus how security itself is made.

For the dissertation, I used both official Arctic state policy documents and additional documents found on national websites such as legislative bodies, ministerial offices, and archives. I used NVivo and DeepL to both code and translate documents across all cases to determine the presence of my case in broader state documents on foreign policy and security, how security and the case itself was framed, as well as the role of structural geopolitics. The full list of the documents can be found in the appendix for each chapter and is reiterated in the bibliography. I began by looking at broad foreign policy documents for each case such as foreign policy statements or security strategies and where visible, Arctic-specific documents or case-specific policies. This was variable by case. Each country under analysis had different norms of how foreign policy and security was outlined. For example, while the United States and Russia both had overarching national security and foreign policy strategies that were examined, countries like Canada did not. Further, Norway had specific White Papers on Svalbard while Denmark did not necessarily have Greenlandic policy, but rather its approach to Greenlandic politics was divided among different

ministries. All states had Arctic policies that I similarly relied upon as sources. In all cases, I utilized as many documents as I could find. Each document was translated using DeepL, as necessary, then uploaded to NVivo. I used both inductive and deductive discourse strategies. First, I began with a series of broad topics that I coded for such as references to global moments of insecurity such as the Ukraine crisis or COVID and particular words such as 'threat' or 'security,' Second, I looked for how the case was framed, using an inductive approach to highlight as many narrative framings as referred to the case and became apparent. When documents were in Russian, I relied on both DeepL's translation of Russian as well as my own knowledge of the language to ensure that the translation was accurate. I also double-checked my translation and understanding of key sections of other foreign language text with native speakers. Please see Appendix 4 for a full list of topics, codes, word counts, and interview questions and answers.

Importantly, for all documents and cases in general, I adopted a scoping approach that focused on gathering as much data surrounding the case as possible. Thus, documents were coded based on availability rather than relying on a pre-determined set of dates. This resulted in cases having different time scopes that are driven by events around the case. For example, the Greenland case is more scoped towards events after the Cold War whereas the research on the Northwest Passage by nature falls more in the 1980s due to the important events that occurred in that time. Methodologically, this resulted in my gathering of documents in as wide a scope as possible (i.e., post-World War II across the Cold War and until the present day). While the scope of time is particularly broad, I have endeavored to draw attention to when and why the temporal context played an important role in the document analysis and resulting analysis.

CHAPTER 5. SVALBARD

Introduction

While the Svalbard archipelago is not well known outside the region, it is a significant set of islands that plays an important role in the Arctic. Not only is the archipelago a central concern for Russia's secondary strategic nuclear deterrent force, it is also centrally situated in Norway's history and wider understanding of Arctic security, identity, sovereignty, and climate change in the region. This chapter focuses on and how Svalbard exhibits the lowest level of unsettledness on a continuum of complete intersubjectivity to complete unsettledness, exploring how Norway and Russia may engage in debates of how to define its position and role in the region. In short, Svalbard is in a state of flux as the physical climatic conditions are changing due to climate change but so too is there an unresolved quality to the archipelago. The archipelago is experiencing some of the most dramatic changes due to climate change in the Arctic with rapid warming, increased precipitation, thawing permafrost, and coastal changes (Arctic Council, 2024). That said, it exhibits the lowest level of unsettledness because while there is an enduring lack of consensus, there are many norms, rules and practices that make understandings of the island relatively stable. For example, Norway is responding to the physical changes due to climate change by integrating new climate policies, risk management measures, and resource management. Yet, its policy on the archipelago as a whole remains stable. As Andreas Østhagen (2024) recently argued, there are "serious geopolitical issues concerning Svalbard; and disentangling misconceptions and misunderstanding about these is a continuous endeavor." In short, the unsettled nature of Svalbard – while acknowledging that Norwegian sovereignty is undisputed and the Svalbard Treaty holds answers to most legal ambiguities – continues to permeate how the archipelago is understood. It

is, as one interviewee stated, “shrouded in mystery” in the broader public opinion. I begin by describing Svalbard and the debates that exist between Norway and Russia on the archipelago. I then turn to the findings of the case.

First, I find that Svalbard policy is extremely resilient to shifting geopolitics. In the documents under analysis, Svalbard is barely linked to global trends and tensions that emerged in the literature did not come up in Norwegian and Russian documents. That said, there have been shifts in this rhetoric in press releases since Russia’s full invasion of Ukraine in 2022 as well as the most recent Svalbard White Paper. While we might have expected both Norway and Russia to mention shifting geopolitics to find order in unsettledness, in this lower degree of unsettledness states clearly do not feel the need to do so. In fact, the changing nature of the geopolitical environment actually disincentivizes states from linking Svalbard to the broader international system, as this might lead to competition rather than cooperation. Second, I similarly find there are different framings for how Svalbard is understood over time, particularly relevant being increasing accessibility from the Norwegian side, and mutually beneficial economic cooperation from the Russian side. These framings illustrate that the space is in a state of flux, showing the changing nature of projections around the archipelago. Third, rather than any documents or framing that might suggest securitizing or politicizing language, both Norwegian and Russian documents avoid security language in general, choosing to prioritize cooperation and environmental protection. Russian documents barely mention Svalbard at all, but when they do so it is through a desecuritizing lens. Norwegian documents heavily reiterate sovereignty and Norwegian presence; however, the emphasis is on domestic politics and the balance between economic and environmental priorities rather than drawing attention to geopolitical considerations.

These desecuritizing approaches are part of a broader risk avoidance strategy that both Norway and Russia engage in. Fourth, I find that in the Norwegian case, experts are largely kept separate from the policymaking process around Svalbard. As the area is a sensitive one for Norwegian policymaking and illustrates characteristics of unsettledness, I find that Norway – while nominally experts have relations with policymakers – is not invested in outside political expertise on Svalbard. This is linked to wanting to avoid potential risks, politicization, and lack of control over how external individuals might narrate Svalbard.

The chapter will explore the phenomenon that although the literature on Svalbard might suggest heightened tensions between Russia and Norway on variety of different issues, the norm is desecuritization from both states as part of a strategy to avoid future risks. The archipelago is rarely linked to global security concerns and Norwegian documents emphasize its domestic nature rather than its role in international security. To explain these findings, I use a combination of discourse analysis of key public-facing documents and 15 interviews with Norwegian scholars and policymakers from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Justice and Public Security.

The texts under analysis are listed in full in Appendix 1 and consist of essential security and foreign policy documents surrounding Svalbard from Russia and Norway. For Norway, I collected all six specific White Papers that describe overall Norwegian policy towards Svalbard from 1975 to 2024, and searched Svalbard on the Norwegian Parliament and Government main pages. I also gathered five diplomatic notes between the Soviet Union and Norway on Svalbard, with the assistance of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and National Service Archives of Norway. As there were not specific Svalbard policies from Russia, I instead conducted a broad

review of their foreign policy and security documents from 1999 to present including National Security Strategies, Foreign Policy Concepts, Maritime Doctrines and their Arctic-adjacent documents to better understand how Svalbard was narrated in these cases. I also searched the Kremlin and Ministry of Foreign Affairs website for how Svalbard was framed.

Background

Figure 1: Svalbard Archipelago. Source: Encyclopedia Brittanica

The Svalbard archipelago – alternatively referred to as Spitsbergen – is a territory sitting between northern Norway and the North Pole including "Bear Island […] all the islands situated between 10 and 35 longitude East of Greenwich and between 74 and 81 latitude North […] together with all islands great or small and rocks appertaining thereto" (Svalbard Treaty, 1920; Arlov, 1994; Østreng, 1997). The territory possesses important strategic meaning for Russia as it falls near the main passage that Russian nuclear submarines and warships take to the Kola Peninsula (Østhagen et al., 2023). Because Russia's secondary strategic nuclear deterrence forces are located on the Kola Peninsula and the Northern Fleet requires this passage to enter the high seas, it is particularly key for Russian security considerations (Todorov, 2020). For Russia, maintaining its historic economic presence on Svalbard helps ensure the archipelago cannot be used against Russia (Withers, 2018). While economic issues around fishing and hydrocarbon extraction are also important for Russia, the basis of Russia's concern is NATO. By contrast, Norway has a much wider remit for how it understands Svalbard's security including climate security, Arctic security, its exercise of sovereignty, and even food security (Moe & Jensen, 2023). However, there is an interesting tension in Norwegian policy on Svalbard, as it sits uncomfortably between Norwegian domestic and foreign policy. The Svalbard Treaty gives Norway sovereignty but the security and economic interests that emanate from it have foreign policy implications that cannot be ignored.

The archipelago is a particularly interesting case for understanding unsettled spaces in the Arctic (for detailed background see: Østreng, 1977; Ulfstein, 1995). Not only is it a microcosm for environmental security where it falls on the front lines of climate change, it is also subject to geopolitical pressures including East-West tensions and particularly the behavior of Norway and Russia – making many debates include question of traditional security logics (Lanteigne, 2023).

Svalbard also falls in an interesting place across time where Norway and Russia did cooperate on Svalbard during the height of East-West tensions as the archipelago has remained on the periphery of Norwegian and Russian security policy. Yet, the island is clearly understood by both Norway and Russia as geopolitically important. Other types of security logic also play a role in Svalbard, including economic security relevant for activity on the island and its surrounding waters, leading to much debate around first mining, and later fishing and hydrocarbon extraction.

On Svalbard itself there are also many issue areas with a variety of stakeholders, which have become more complex than in the past. Whereas historically, Svalbard issues for the Norwegian government had to do with coal extraction and the relationship with the Soviet Union, they now include questions of tourism, environmental regulations, international relations, tensions with Russia, and many other issue areas that collide with one another. Within an Arctic context, Svalbard sits somewhat strangely alongside the changes in Norway's High North policy which ranged from optimism to more sober security predictions prefaced on a grim recognition of increased great power competition in the High North (Østhagen, 2023). Svalbard clearly sits within Norway's understanding of the Arctic and is important when considering its broad Arctic policy but remains separate from the rest of the High North policy and even has its own White Paper. Yet, low tension is a central part of how the Norwegian government makes policy on Svalbard in tandem with its overall Arctic approach. However, rather than explicitly promoting low-tension as the narrative, Norwegian governmental interviewees suggested they emphasize local solutions to issues on the archipelago rather than engaging on state-to-state negotiations.

Svalbard's unsettled nature comes back to sovereignty and the Treaty of Spitsbergen (Ulfstein, 1995; Ayaydin, 2024). Originally signed in 1920, the Spitsbergen Treaty gave Norway sovereignty over Svalbard (Article 1) (Jensen, 2020). The treaty is based on six principles of international law: internationalization, equal treatment, demilitarization, the local use of revenue, the rights of old claimants, and the principle of sovereignty (Østreng, 1977). Articles 2-3 give equal rights to nationals of treaty parties to engage in fishing, hunting, liberty of access and entry as well as freedom for maritime, industrial, mining or commercial activities (Pedersen, 2020). By recognizing its *terra nullius* status in this way to some degree, the treaty gives commercial rights to other states that have agreed to the treaty (Koivurova & Holiencin, 2017). Article 8 limits the Norwegian government's ability to tax the islands and requires that all taxes and duties must be devoted exclusively to the island. The demilitarization clause (Article 9) is perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the Svalbard Treaty, which states that Norway cannot establish naval bases or construct fortification on the island for warlike purposes. While Norway understands this clause to *not* include other types of military activity such as visiting naval and coast guard vessels, Russia interprets this as full demilitarization – leading to the possibility of tensions that this chapter will explore.

There are challenges to Norway's' exercise of sovereignty including contestation between Norway and Latvian shipping firms over fishing for snow crabs (Pedersen, 2020), the capacity to conduct research (particularly by China), and extensive complaints and challenges from Russia on fishing, oil and gas extraction, and demilitarization (Østhagen, 2020; Molenaar, 2021). Most recently, there have been concerns raised about Svalbard's vulnerability to hybrid attacks (Baudu, 2023), including a 2022 severing of an underwater cable line connecting Svalbard to the

Norwegian mainland. Some understand these tensions through a realist lens, that Norway has been delicate in its handling of Soviet and Russian issues due to its small state status while others draw attention to the domestic Norwegian politics at play (Pedersen, 2008). However simultaneously, there has been much cooperation between Norway and Russia such as the 2010 Treaty Concerning Maritime Delimitation and Cooperation in the Barents Sea and Arctic Ocean as well as long-term fishing, maritime safety, and SAR cooperation (Østhagen, 2018). Although these tensions are certainly present, they do not – for the most part – materialize in high tensions between Norway and Russia, who largely agree to disagree.

Discourse Analysis Findings

A Lack of Global Insecurity

While it might seem intuitive that global insecurities would be reflected in how states like Norway and Russia talk about Svalbard, in the documents under analysis Svalbard is not linked to geopolitical trends until 2022. Tensions surrounding the accusations of dual-use technology of satellites and radar stations (Atland & Pedersen, 2008), the incident of the *Elektron* vessel (Atland & van Bruugaard, 2009), and tensions regarding the Fisheries Protection Zone (Pedersen, 2008; Atland & Pedersen, 2008; Østhagen, 2018; Todorov, 2020) are almost invisible in the documents.[3] Although fishing is certainly a topic, security language and reference to these known sources of tension are absent and are instead referred to in the language of fisheries management policy. In fact, the many traditional security concerns related to global insecurity were not visible.

[3] The only presence of disputes around the Fisheries Protection Zone are present in diplomatic notes between the Soviet Union and Norway in 1977 that had to be specifically requested from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see Soviet Union diplomatic note handed to Norway on 15 June 1977) where there are clearly tense relations in regards to Norway's unilateral declaration of the zone.

There are some exceptions to this trend, but they are notable in how limited they are. For example, the 1999 White Paper references that great power competition during the Cold War era shaped how Svalbard policy was made and discusses the Cold War détente and the Soviet Union (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Police, 1999). Similarly, there is one reference in the 2008-2009 White Paper that describes how there is increasing interest in the Arctic – likely having to do with Russia's 2007 planting of a flag on the Arctic seafloor – and calling for an avoidance of conflict in the region (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Police, 2009). While not a Svalbard piece, per se, a January 2022 press release describes how the security situation in Europe has changed, meaning that more border checks in Svalbard will have to happen with an increasing focus on foreign intelligence (Government of Norway, 2022). By contrast, there are more mentions of outside happenings in Russian documents, but they only come from Kremlin public statements rather than specific Russian Arctic or security policy documents and have only occurred as tensions have risen between Russia and the West. For example, in 2015 and 2022 statements from the Kremlin's website describe how increasing restrictions of Russian activity on Svalbard is part of broader 'anti-Russian hysteria' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2015; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2022). There are a few additional references to Svalbard on the Kremlin's website but while they mention Svalbard in connection with perceived Western military buildup in the Arctic – they are desecuritizing in nature. In short, they emphasize that the Arctic – but specifically Svalbard – needs to be separated from influences from outside the region.

That said, the ability to separate Svalbard from the rest of Norwegian-Russian dealings has been difficult, particularly since Russia's full invasion of Ukraine in 2022. For example, in 2022,

Russia accused the Norwegian government of using sanctions to block food shipments to Russian miners, releasing a statement that provocatively questioned Norwegian sovereignty over Svalbard. That same year, Russian officials raised a Russian Navy flag in Svalbard's waters and in 2023 a Russian diplomat staged a Navy Parade supporting Russian actions in Ukraine in Svalbard's waters. The Russian deputy prime minister of Far Eastern and Arctic affairs stated "none of the rights and benefits acquired by Russia can be reduced or infringed. We do not have the right to move even a single step backwards" (Staalesen, 2024). Norway has announced it plans to increase its control of infrastructure on Svalbard (Reuters, 2024). The 2024 Svalbard White Paper does mention the changing security situation in its introduction describing how "the security situation globally and in our neighboring regions is characterized by greater seriousness and unpredictability… [including] increased geopolitical tension" (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2024, 6). Moreover, the White Paper describes how the security situation necessitates stronger measures to safeguard Norwegian national security such as increasing border controls.

Although this discourse is new for Svalbard documents, it is a small part of the Paper that does not continue to be reiterated. Moreover, interviewees suggested that although the 2024 White Paper acknowledges these geopolitical realities more than in the past, there is "no real change in the way that Svalbard policy has changed" (Interviews). Instead, what has changed is the national policy on security issues and the bilateral relationship with Russia. These issues may impact Svalbard but they are not Svalbard policy. Instead, what has changed is the Norwegian ministries – particularly the Ministry of Justice's – mindset on Svalbard policy. Interviewees acknowledged that the Norwegian-Russian relationship on Svalbard has been long-standing and predictable for

many years but they are now more aware of the potential for unpredictability. This indicates that traditionally Svalbard – while being unsettled – had a higher degree of intersubjectivity that allowed policymakers to rely on predictability. Now, an increasing lack of intersubjective agreement has led to a higher degree of unpredictability. Many interviews additionally pointed to the fact that the 'low tension' described by Norwegian documents regarding the Arctic – and specifically Svalbard – is no longer a reality, but an aspiration. This question of low tension is also explicitly related to Norwegian-Russian relations where it has been Norway's geographical reality that it must handle Russia as a neighbor via deterrence and reassurance.[4]

Although fully separating Svalbard from this type of global security issue might be difficult, particularly post-2022, these instances have not changed the overall direction and scope of Norwegian or Russian policy to Svalbard – they demonstrate performative displays (Nilsen, 2024) rather than any significant change in policy (Østhagen, 2024). This is not to say there have not been adaptations to Norway's approach to Svalbard, such as increasing restrictions on research policies – particularly clear in the 2024 White Paper – but the basics of Norwegian Svalbard policy have not changed. Recent work has explored concerns about hybrid threats in Svalbard, suggesting that while outright confrontation between Russia and Norway over Svalbard is unlikely, hybrid operations may be triggering in the region (Stensrud et al., 2024). Largely, Svalbard has been kept separate from the narrations of the international security environment. This has allowed both Norway and Russia to avoid potential politicization in a situation where there is unsettledness, but it exists at a lower level. When we see increasing levels of decreasing intersubjectivity between

[4] One interviewee noted that Norwegian-Russian relations are actually a way of structuring how Norway makes Arctic policy at large. While outside the scope of this dissertation, it begs important questions about how states with larger neighbors can ever really divorce regional policies from the reality of great power politics with larger neighbors.

Norway and Russia, instead, we see an increase in linkages to the geopolitical environment – suggesting that as unsettledness increases, there is a wish to find order and avoid future risks.

Svalbard Framings

Rather than framings that indicate any type of securitizing or politicizing undertone, Norwegian and Russian documents have a striking similarity in how they avoid security language but instead prioritize cooperation and environmental protection. As above, there is a vast amount of literature that explores the traditional security centrality of Svalbard to Russia given their Bastion concept, as well as the traditional security benefits of Svalbard for Norway (Grydehoj, 2020). However, none of these rationales are in the documents under analysis. Given that Svalbard is Norwegian territory under international law, it is not surprising that there are a series of dedicated White Papers and policies that explain Norway's approach to Svalbard. By contrast, Russia has no documents that are fully Svalbard-centric apart from one secret 1997 concept policy document that isn't possible to access. While Norway's documents have adapted with modern technology and thus have addressed current issues such as research and cruise tourism, they are largely continuous in how they frame the key aspects of Svalbard through a desecuritizing frame. Similarly, although Russian documents do not mention Svalbard for the most part, when they do they are largely desecuritizing. It serves both the interest of Russia and Norway to use low-tension narratives around these spaces (Moe & Jensen, 2023) as neither sees a shift in the status quo as beneficial to their policies. These low-tension narratives illustrate a broader strategy by both Norway and Russia to cooperate even in the face of unsettledness and avoid potential future military risk.

As Svalbard has grown more accessible since the end of the Cold War, Norwegian documents have begun to emphasize how increasing interest in Svalbard implies that the Norwegian government must be prepared for increases in tourism, traffic and emergency preparedness. For example, in the 1975 and 1985 White Papers, the primary themes dealt with protecting the natural environment, the importance of research on Svalbard, and cooperation with the Soviet Union during the Cold War (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Police, 1975; 1985). By 1999, however, other themes began to emerge such as the advent of increasing interest in the island, the impacts of increased shipping and tourism but nonetheless still concern and prioritization of environmental issues and peace on the island. Keeping the peace is a central part of Norway's strategy, with the 2008-2009 White Paper even emphasizing how Norway wished to keep Svalbard out of the interest of great powers. This small shift aside, the priorities of Norway's Svalbard policy have been the same since 1975 with every White Paper. Even the most recent 2024 White Paper continues this trend of emphasizing cooperation regarding economic activity and environmental issues as well as the increasing interest in Svalbard is the most important aspect of politics in Svalbard that must be considered. This continuity strengthens Norway's consistent and relatively desecuritizing approach to Svalbard which prioritizes Norwegian presence, cooperation with other parties on the island, emergency preparedness, and environmental protection. It is clearly the view of the Norwegian government that geopolitics and security have no place in Svalbard, as this helps to preserve a sense of normalcy (Østhagen, 2024). Part of this lack of security discourse also relates to the Norwegian government's wish to gain more control and sovereignty over the archipelago, which it does via increasingly stringent environmental and research policies, that are not overtly security-based but have security outcomes. For example, recent new environmental regulations emphasize that climate change is causing pressure on

Svalbard and tourism is a contributing factor. However, the undertone of these regulations is in reference to the growing international population on Svalbard, which Norway sees as a threat to its sovereignty. This is not to say that environmental and research regulations do not serve their own stated purposes, but rather that they also help Norway obtain sovereignty and security objectives (Interviews).

While Russia does not have formal or dedicated policies towards Svalbard, their documents that do mention it are also consistently peaceful over time. They tend to emphasize mutually beneficial economic and trade cooperation. For example, the 2010 and 2011 Russian statements from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs frame Svalbard as a place of opportunities and economic cooperation, trade and additional cross-regional cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2010; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2011). The terminology of "mutually beneficial" is also used in 2014 and 2020 Russian statements as it has to do with economic cooperation and scientific cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2014; Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic, 2020). Even as recent as 2019, a Russian statement continues to emphasize how central bilateral political dialogue is for Svalbard between Russia and Norway (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2019). While Russia will always have a permanent interest in preventing Svalbard from being used militarily against it and in maintaining its special status on the archipelago, such interests are served through these low-tension narratives. This is not to say there are not moments of tension, such as complaints from Russia regarding Norwegian regulations on Svalbard or tensions surrounding fisheries, but such threats are not understood as serious.

Moments of tense rhetoric can be correlated to broader tensions between Russia and Norway. As one example, in the 2015 Kremlin statement, some tense language suggests that although Norway owns Svalbard, Norway doesn't have the right to restrict Russian free access on the island (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2015). This is specifically in reference to a trip that Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Dmitry Rogozin took to the island when there were sanctions against him. Another moment of tension came in 2017, when a Russian Ministry of Defense document claimed there were problems cooperating with Norway and that Norway had rejected Russian dialogue (Kommersant, 2017). This document did describe Norway as a threat in reference to the Svalbard Treaty, stating that Norway was attempting to claim full sovereignty over Svalbard, which would have consequences for the Russian population living there (Spansvoll, 2023). However, this is likely connected with diplomatic upset that Russia was expressing when Norway stated it would host NATO's Parliamentary Assembly on Svalbard. Similarly, in 2020, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called for Norway to engaged in bilateral consultations on Svalbard's management. When rejected, there was an information offensive that targeted Norwegian authorities (Staalesen, 2024).

Desecuritization is the norm

Both Norway and Russia desecuritize Svalbard. There is little security language across the documents under analysis. While Norwegian documents tend to reiterate sovereignty, avoid contentious issues found in the literature, and focus on domestic policies and the economic vs. environmental debate, Russian documents rarely mention Svalbard. When they do, it is often also through a desecuritizing lens that emphasizes low tension and risk avoidance.

Norwegian documents constantly reiterate Norwegian sovereignty over Svalbard, with almost every White Paper repeating the story of how Svalbard fell under Norwegian control and the 1920 Treaty. This repetition is paired with discourse around maintaining Norwegian communities on the archipelago in order to emphasize and make material presence. However, rather than framing this presence and sovereignty as aggressive, the discourse is matter of fact and simply states the facts on the ground such as the phrase that appears in every White Paper that "Norwegian sovereignty over Svalbard is undisputed" (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2024). This is part of the overall message that, according to interviewees at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Svalbard isn't as interesting as people believe that it is" (Interviews). In short, the goal of Norwegian Svalbard policy is that it is consistent, firm, predictable, and resilient to global geopolitics.

No Norwegian documents make aggressive reference to any of the contentious issues found in the literature such as the demilitarization clause in the Svalbard Treaty, the Fishing Protection Zone, visits by Norwegian armed forces vessels to Svalbard and any other. Even when such issues are mentioned, such as the demilitarization clause or the Fishing Protection Zone, the Norwegian position is stated just as fact rather than as a tense dilemma (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Police, 1975; 1985). This is largely because for Norway, the structural conditions of the Cold War led to a Norwegian policy around Svalbard that emphasized non-interventionism and low-tension. This is not to say that the Ministry of Defense does not factor Svalbard into Norwegian defense planning. They emphasize cooperation and shared Russian-Norwegian values. As one example, the 1999 White Paper mentions the changing geopolitical situation given the fall of the Soviet Union but purely through a lens of cooperation (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Police, 1999).

Scholars have recently explored different ways in which the Norwegian government has used different mechanisms to reinforce its sovereignty on Svalbard including through environmental regulations (Hansen, 2024), research regulations (Hansen & Moe, 2024), and interrogated the very nature of Norwegian sovereignty expression (Chuffart et al., 2024).

Interestingly, the White Papers almost entirely focus on domestic issues. Perhaps this is not surprising given that Svalbard is a domestic area for Norway and thus the Svalbard White Papers are straightforward and internal domestic policies. Day to day issues are thus not questions of great power competition but rather traffic laws and research regulations. The 1975 White Paper, for example, has no mention of tension with the Soviets over Svalbard (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Police, 1975). The 2009 White Paper centers attention on domestic activities such as maritime traffic, knowledge production, and maritime safety (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Police, 2009). The 2015 White Paper does mention the break of the Svalbard subsea cable, highlighting the dependence that Svalbard has on these cables, but is again framed through the necessity for better emergency preparedness on Svalbard rather than an international security approach (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2015). Even the most recent 2024 White Paper largely addresses community creation, businesses, the creation of a family society and electricity and heating as well as emergency preparedness. Interestingly, the 2024 White Paper focuses on security of supply as a large challenge for the domestic populace in Svalbard, emphasizing the need for a plan for water and energy. The lack of security language does not preclude that there might be risks from neighboring states such as Russia, but Norwegian policy makes it a point to avoid security language and instead may use language such as fisheries or ocean management.

Norwegian documents do emphasize the difference between economic and environmental issues, claiming in multiple documents that environmental interests always take precedence over economic ones. However, security language that might imply environmental vs. economic security interests is not used. Instead, the discourse frames this debate as one of policy priority rather than of security. That said, Norwegian documents do acknowledge environmental threats such as climate change and pollution on Svalbard that come from increased traffic and tourism. For example, the 1975 White Paper describes increasing concern for the natural conditions and ecological balance, which is followed by concern around environmental protection in the 1985 White Paper (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Police, 1975; 1985). The 1999 White Paper touches on how pollution and traffic will lead to safety risks in the region (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Police, 1999). The 2008 White Paper frames climate change as a challenge and paints Svalbard as vulnerable to disasters and environmental toxins (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Police, 2008). The 2015 White Paper describes climate change again as particularly damaging to Svalbard (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2015). The 2021 White Paper again highlights climate change, increased traffic, and accessibility but describes climate change as the threat multiplier (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2021). A recent proposed amendment to environmental regulations in Svalbard describes climate change as creating "great pressure" on Svalbard's nature and wildlife (Government of Norway, 2024). The 2024 White Paper increasingly uses threat and risk language to describe climate change describing climate-related incidents as a "danger to life and health" and shipping accidents and acute oil spills as "one of the greatest threats to ecosystems in the Arctic" (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2024, 48 and 57). However, such threats are always paired with desecuritizing language

that brings to light continuity and predictability. For example, the 2015 White Paper describes how even though climate change might be exceptional, Norway's Svalbard policy should be characterized by continuity and predictability (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2015).

The few Russian documents that do mention Svalbard tend to do so in the context of Russian-Norwegian relations. Thus, Svalbard is never under threat and Russian documents do not use security language when talking about Svalbard. Rather, it is an object that occasionally appears in reference to Russia's overall Arctic policy. For example, the 2001 Russian document describes how Russia needs to counteract Western military build-up on Svalbard (Russian Ministry of Transport, 2001). But the majority of Russian documents tend toward desecuritizing language to avoid potential costs of militarization.

In 1951, when the Soviets accused the Norwegians of bringing Svalbard under the purview of NATO and in 1970 when the USSR raised disagreements about Norway's reading of the Svalbard continental shelf as being Norwegian rather than falling under the Svalbard Treaty – both disagreements are found in diplomatic notes rather than public-facing documents (Arkivverket, 1951-1953; Arkivverket, 1970-1977). Even during times of tension, such as disagreements surrounding the Russia's fishing vessels in 1998, two diplomatic notes emphasize the history of Norwegian-Russian cooperation and the importance of working together (Soviet Union diplomatic note handed to Norway 17 July 1998; Soviet Union diplomatic note handed to Norway 19 August 1998). The one counter-example to this de-securitizing language during the Cold War is in diplomatic notes between the Soviet Union and Norway in 1977. As one example, the Soviet note

states that creation of the Fisheries Protection Zone around Svalbard "as a new step by Norway towards the illegal expansion of Norwegian rights in the Spitsbergen area" (Soviet Union diplomatic note handed to Norway on 15 June 1977). However, even this tenser language was followed in the following year by a maritime grey zone agreement between Norway and the Soviet Union and further diplomatic notes that called for non-discriminatory measures to manage fish stocks in the Svalbard area cooperatively (Soviet-Norwegian communique 16 March 1978).

In a 2001 Diplomatic Note from the Acting Representative of the Russian Federation in the Joint Russian-Norwegian Fisheries Commission, A. Yu. Manzhosov, described "the good neighborhood and cooperation in fisheries, as well as to the purposeful work associated with the realization of the potential for the Russian-Norwegian interactions in the sphere of fisheries based on the objectively existent identity of interests of Russia and Norway" (Russian diplomatic note 3695/2ED handed to Norway on 23 April 2001).

In 2011, for example, there was a fishing disagreement and, in a question-and-answer session, Lavrov said "nobody wants confrontational approaches" and "I wouldn't call it a conflict" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2011a, 2011b). This conflict avoidant language also happened in 2015 when, in a discussion about the visit of Rogozin to Svalbard, the Russian document uses the word "perplexed" in describing Norway's reaction (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2015). Not only does the verb 'to perplex' not have negative or security connotations, but the discourse is around Norwegian-Russian relations rather than Svalbard. Even in 2019, when relations had degraded between Russia and the West, a Russian document emphasizes cooperation as key for Svalbard, specifically attempting to preserve the

Arctic as a peaceful space (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2019). In 2022, a Russian document describes how it is harder for Russian companies and scientists to work in Svalbard due to discriminatory and unjustified conditions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2022). While this language is much sharper, it does not use security connotations to describe military reactions. Most recently, MGIMO, one of Russia's top universities, published a report that highlighted findings and perspectives on Svalbard up until 2033. As above, although the report certainly highlights how geopolitical rivalry and escalating tensions between Russia and the West are impacting Svalbard, there are still opportunities for Russian and Norwegian cooperation including environmental protection, search and rescue activities and tourism, science, and culture. Although the report outlines two possible scenarios – Norwegian militarization of Svalbard or the normalization of relations – it emphasizes that there will be no conflict on or about Svalbard (Скандинавский Клуб НСО МГИМО, 2023).

Ministerial Politics, the Knowledge Ecosystem, and the Role of Experts[5]

Due to the clear interests that drive Norwegian and Russian policymakers to desecuritize Svalbard, it asks important questions about the agential power of experts. How should we understand sub-national actors as potentially influencing how states maintain continuity around unsettled spaces? Do they have agency in how the Norwegian or Russian governments frame and discursively create Svalbard as a low-tension and desecuritized space? It is key to mention that the majority of interviews attained for this chapter were Norwegian, given the structural challenges in talking with Russian experts. Below, I outline key inter-ministerial politics that are important factors in understanding the government-expert interface before turning to the knowledge

[5] This section is largely sourced from interviews from both government actors as well as Norwegian experts on Svalbard conducted while in Oslo for fieldwork.

ecosystem that exists between different key research institutions before turning to the role of experts. Finding a smoking gun for the third possible explanation for how and why states maintain policies around unsettled spaces – namely the role of political experts – was difficult if not impossible, but analysis of the knowledge ecosystem helps build context as to why such influences are hard to locate.

Inter-ministerial politics

Svalbard is Norway's main headache in the Arctic, while simultaneously being essential for Norwegian Arctic identity, security, relations with Russia and resources. Because of this, policy competences surrounding Svalbard is spread across different ministries but are largely consolidated in Oslo at the level of the state. The primary ministry that writes and publishes the Svalbard White Papers is the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. This ministry is particularly focused on maintaining the Norwegian reading of the Svalbard Treaty and ensuring this reading is kept steady across how the other ministries make policy surrounding Svalbard. Among interviewees, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security was framed as a reticent actor that neither wanted any attention on Svalbard in public settings nor wanted politicians to discuss Svalbard to avoid potential misinterpretations of Norway's position. Although the Ministry of Justice and Public Security is the primary coordinator and facilitator of Svalbard policy, only nine people work on the Svalbard portfolio. The reason for this small size is that almost every department has its own Svalbard representative. Thus, a large, centralized department dedicated to Svalbard is unnecessary. While the Ministry of Justice and Public Security is explicit in that it does *not* deal with Arctic security issues, some documents make clear its understanding of security on Svalbard. In 2022-2023 Report to the Storting *National control and cyber resilience to safeguard national*

security, a sub-section on Svalbard is clear that "Svalbard is of great strategic importance for Norway's scope of action in the High North" (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2022, 47). Security here refers to the emphasis on enforcing Norwegian sovereignty on Svalbard, which the government can achieve via state ownership of companies to "manage Svalbard for the good of the public" (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2022, 48).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) deals with questions regarding foreign policy and relations with Russia. The ministry's legal division is particularly important as the individuals who work there are primarily responsible for interpreting the treaty and have the last word on treaty interpretations. However, only three people in this division work on Svalbard and, even then, their portfolio is not 100% concentrated on Svalbard. While the MFA is a key actor how Norway acts surrounding Svalbard, according to interviews, this involvement is largely in an advisory capacity. In short, many matters regarding policy on Svalbard come to the MFA to determine whether it is related to foreign policy or having to do with the Treaty. If they do, the MFA plays an important role and if not, it is referred back to the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. In short, Svalbard is not an area of foreign policy, but there are foreign policy dimensions of managing the archipelago such as the long relationship with the Soviet Union and today with Russia.

Beyond these two primary actors, other ministries also deal with other aspects of managing Svalbard. For example, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) addresses defense issues and the Ministry of Environment and Climate address environmental issues. Historically, the Ministry of Industry played a much larger role on Svalbard due to the importance of coal and mining on the island, however, as the mines have closed, the ministry has become much less prominent. The number of

ministries involved and Norway's strict reading of the Treaty can lead to strange divisions of labor in dealing with certain policy areas. For example, the Fisheries Protection Zone is not regulated by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security as – according to the Norwegian reading of the Treaty – it is not a part of Svalbard, but r is dealt with through the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries although it clearly part of Norwegian Svalbard policy. These disparate ministries are brought together under The Interministerial Committee on Polar Affairs, which is a consultative and coordinating body that encompasses many of the above ministries and deals with Svalbard among other polar issues. This Committee is a tool for facilitating broad consensus on ministerial polar policy. Interestingly, the Ministry of Defense is not within this Committee as Svalbard has no – according to the Ministry of Justice and Public Security – place in foreign and defense policy. That said, the Committee meets ten times a year and its makeup is predominantly ministerial representatives, the Governor of Svalbard, and the Norwegian Polar Institute. The Committee does invite experts to present information to them, but the vast majority of invitees come from the hard sciences and not foreign policy experts.

Both the MFA and MoD have largely conservative views on Svalbard and their overall aim is to keep Svalbard separate from High North policy. In brief, High North (Arctic) policy is understood to mean softer security issues including the Arctic Council, governance, UNCLOS, the development of northern Norway, climate change and Indigenous issues. While the MFA deals with these softer issues, the MoD handles geopolitical and traditional security questions such as the role of NATO, particularly the Core Area Initiative. However, within all the ministries there is an understanding that Svalbard is a geographic domestic case of concern for Norway in the Arctic but does not have a serious place in larger High North policy. Although Svalbard as an issue area

stretches across many ministries, the number of individuals who work on it in the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, MFA, and MoD is relatively few.

Knowledge Ecosystem

The knowledge ecosystem of research groups in Norway is relatively small in reference to Arctic as well as Svalbard issues, and exists in a middle ground inside and outside of the Norwegian government. For example, the Norwegian Polar Institute is Norway's government institution for polar and Arctic research but exists directly within the Norwegian government and wears two hats. First, it acts as a directorate within the Norwegian government for polar issues under the Ministry of Climate and Environment, and second, it is a knowledge producer for research policies in the Arctic. The Norwegian Polar Institute has fluctuated in terms of its influence in the Svalbard scene. For example, when it had more an outgoing and policy-organized director, the institute played a more significant role than it does today. Two internal defense groups also exist within the Armed Forces: 1) the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies (IFS) – part of the Norwegian Defence University College and 2) the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI). Both IFS and FFI are independent research institutes. IFS has an emphasis on research work for the Armed Forces and also operates as an educational center. By contrast, FFI provides direct expert advice to political and military Norwegian leaders. It is fully funded by the Ministry of Defense and hosts around 800 employees, although most work on technological research. Researchers at FFI give direct input into defense planning processes through scenario planning, analyzing recent developments for defense, presentations to the Ministry of Defense, and regular meetings and roundtables. The director of FFI is a direct advisor to both the Minister of Defense and the Chief of Defense.

Another example is the Norwegian Institute of Foreign Policy (NUPI) which conducts independent foreign policy research. While NUPI deals with broad foreign policy issues, it has an important Arctic pillar that deals with security issues but get much of their funding from different Norwegian ministries. Currently they have three Arctic projects funded by the MFA. Formally, NUPI is a state administrative body and subordinate to the Ministry of Education, which provides it with annual funds. It also applies for project funding from the MFA and MoD. Recently, NUPI has begun receiving more funding from external contracts rather than internal ministry-based ones. That said, this internal government actorness means that there is a much closer proximity between NUPI and the different ministries. This emerges in how NUPI has a closer relationship in regards to seminars and closed-door meetings with ministries where there are more informal dialogues between researchers and ministry employees.

Another actor is the Fridtjof Nansen Institute (FNI), which is very much outside of government. There is no consultation between FNI and the Norwegian government on Svalbard regarding security and defense issues. As an independent foundation, FNI creates independent research and its funding comes from projects directly funded via the MoD and MFA as well as the Research Council of Norway, the European Commission, and other public and private institutions. Being a research organization outside government comes with more scholarly autonomy but also some restrictions on interfacing with government. There are also universities that do research on Svalbard and the Arctic, as well as more locally grounded organizations such as the Svalbard Social Science Initiative. However, because of the smallness of Svalbard policy, there isn't really a community of Svalbard researchers. Many of those who study Svalbard do not have it as a central

research topic but rather situate it as a case within oceanic politics, environmental politics or Norwegian-Russian relations.

Role of Experts

While experts appear to play an important role in how the Norwegian government makes Arctic policy, they seem to be kept at arm's length in how Svalbard policies are created. In an Arctic context, experts have played important roles in Norway's Arctic Council policies, research cooperation and Norwegian-Russian relations. Key Arctic scholars described that they are in constant dialogue with the Norwegian ministries – particularly the MFA and MoD – on general Arctic security issues. Similarly, there are other examples of consultation regarding regional development in northern Norway and in Svalbard on population, climate, and other areas – but not in the area of defense or geopolitics. In fact, one interviewee stated "there is no systematic interface between outside experts and the ministries." Although outside experts engage in seminars, reports and media briefings – there is no direct consultation with the ministries. Moreover, the relationship is personality dependent and relies on governmental actors reaching out rather than a two-way relationship. That said, other interviewees suggested that actors from the MFA were interested less in gaining information from outside experts but rather wanted to exchange views with them and often were interested in "testing out phrases and views" when they attended seminars. This more open perspective of engaging with outsiders did change, however, after 2014. According to some interviewees, the MFA had a much more solidified and set Arctic policy after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea.

Experts who focus more on geopolitics and security explained that they have a closer relationship with the MoD given their shared emphasis on these topic areas. This closer relationship between the MoD and outside researchers makes up part of, according to ministerial representatives, a broader assemblage of information that employees need to make decisions and policy including previous policies and white papers, internal comprehensive analyses, institutional memory, and intelligence channels. Not only does the MoD fund projects on a regular basis, it also understands the relationship with outside researchers to be an important part of improving the public's understanding of security and defense issues. Today, these projects include topics such as dealing with the consequences of climate change in the Arctic, the Chinese-Russian relationship in the Arctic, and Finnish and Swedish accession to NATO. Beyond projects, the MoD regularly invites representatives from research organizations such as FNI and internal FFI to present information and describe the community of Arctic security researchers as a "great asset" to Norway's security policies (Interviews).

Even if their suggestions are not taken directly for policy, governmental employees stated that they agreed with these outside experts' opinions. Experts disagreed on whether they thought there was a governmental tradition in reaching out for expertise in Norway. Some suggested it was random and irregular, whereas others pointed to the stability of state-level funding from the Norwegian Research Council and direct funding from ministries into research institutions as examples of a different type of tradition of creating an independent research body of individuals that could be contracted to answer questions when needed. Interviewees across different research institutions suggested that while there might not be a systematic way of reaching out for political expertise, the Norwegian Government was interested in reaching out for expertise such as those

matters concerning AI, cyber issues, and technological issues. By contrast, the MoD described how often it sought outside knowledge on Arctic issues, even while recognizing that this expertise was one of many channels of information.

By contrast, there are firstly very few individuals who actually study Svalbard in serious depth. The community of experts who write and speak to the media on Svalbard and the treaty is limited. Even those who are recognized as having expertise often described themselves as being Russian experts or international law experts who then worked on Svalbard in a limited context. Similarly, no experts interviewed were able to point to examples of direct consultation or input into Svalbard security policies. For example, the Norwegian Research Council never has Svalbard as a topic area for political scientists. In fact, some interviewees stated that when they published on geopolitical and traditional security issues on Svalbard, they got pushback from the MFA which saw it as drawing unwanted attention to the archipelago as a security concern. One interviewee shared an anecdote that the Ministry of Justice and Public Security has been a perennially hard actor to work when organizing seminars on Svalbard as they perceive any public speech on Svalbard as opening a door to debates on the core nature of the Treaty.[6] This reticence has been even more exacerbated since 2022 and some interviews pointed to a tacit understanding that research on Svalbard – particularly legal and geopolitical issues – won't be seen in a positive light. Similarly, others stated that the "MFA is largely closed on this issue." Interviews with the MFA confirmed this, stating that there is no real need for outside expertise on Svalbard. Instead, they

[6] Interestingly in interviews with the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, interviewees suggested that they invite experts in regularly often, but that these interactions are largely with hard scientists rather than foreign policy or political issues as those are the remit of the MFA.

seek broader Arctic analyses such as detailed research on how other countries make Arctic policy or how they interpret Norwegian Arctic policy.

That said, interviewees acknowledged that they were not excluded because of these views – but rather that the government still considers the work of experts as providing an important service in informing the Norwegian public about the realities on Svalbard. Given that there are not many who focus on Svalbard as their primary research area, having some individuals who do have expertise is important. Limited examples exist where outside experts provided seminars on key reports on Svalbard to employees of the MFA, MoD and the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. As one concrete example, a report published on the degree of Russian influence on Svalbard was presented to employees of all three ministries. A second concrete example of this interface is an article that was published in 2024 on Svalbard, in which the author reached out multiple times to the MFA to circulate drafts of the piece and ultimately received positive responses from the ministry due to this close and continued contact.

Concerning Svalbard itself, many experts pointed to high degree of institutional and historical expertise within the different ministries themselves. This inside knowledge is – according to some – often more up-to-date than the information that outside researchers and scholars have, particularly regarding implementation and processes. Thus, often even when experts speak with governmental employees, they are not often providing new information but rather are able to confirm research. Other interviewees suggested that ministries – when they reach out for information, which is already rare – will rely on Norwegian academics more than foreigners, although others disagreed.

The problem with existing in this liminal space for researchers working at the science-policy interface is that, as one interview put it, "it is difficult to shape views when the policy is already set." In short, Norwegian Arctic and Svalbard policy is consistent and set, meaning that there is little to no need for outside expertise. There are still ways to contribute. For example, new developments can pose opportunities for experts to engage on questions of Russian-Chinese cooperation in the Arctic or bringing a longer-term perspective on political developments. However, experts need to bring something new that goes beyond punditry and – without them knowing – must agree with or supersede knowledge that the ministries obtain from internal and intelligence-based sources.

Norwegian experts described particular strategies they use for interfacing at this nexus of expertise and government, including communicating their knowledge through public news media and attending events that bridged the gap between government and research institutions. Others suggested that being persistent and direct through many emails and deliberate engagement and inclusion was necessary to be successful in engaging the government. This could be via seminars, conferences, and creating space for dialogue between researchers and the different ministries. However, many interviewees suggested that the science-policy interface in regards to security is geared less towards policy recommendations but rather more academic-based research that is sometimes used by policymakers and other times not. Other interviewees provided more concrete recommendations such as using and presenting longer term qualitative studies and observations that go beyond data rather than engaging in punditry.

From the viewpoint of those working in the ministries, interviewees suggested that academics seeking to research Svalbard should directly come to the MFA to provide comments or corrections on research. This individual willingness to engage with individual researchers is notable and suggests again a politics of familiarity between some government employees and the few researchers that do write and research on Svalbard and the ministries. A second suggestion from the ministerial employees was that to simply ask them for documents related to Svalbard rather than assuming they are secret. Ministerial interviewees also suggested that researchers should understand the inherent complexity in dealing with Svalbard issues, and that creating policy on Svalbard is ultimately a balancing act between many different ministries and topic areas. A third suggestion was that ministerial employees rarely have time to read long academic articles and summarizing these for presentations to the ministries themselves may be a strategy for engaging more directly with them.

Russia

I was unable to speak to Russian experts on how experts were situated within the Russian knowledge ecosystem, particularly regarding Svalbard as it was a sensitive area to discuss, according to interviewees. As written in the next chapter on maritime shipping lanes including the Northern Sea Route, Russian academics acknowledged that there was a clear separation between academia and policy in the Russian space. This highly centralized type of foreign policy making is a hallmark of the Russian system, although there are some spaces where natural scientists do interface with governmental bodies. While indirect options exist for Russian experts to engage with the national government including the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, the Valdai Club, and the Russian International Affairs Council, Svalbard is a very sensitive area for the Russian

government. Because of this, there are almost no writings on Svalbard and none in recent years. When it is described, it is through a generalized lens of cooperation with other states including Norway and third parties such as India. In short, there is no clear examples of experts working closely with the Russian government on Svalbard policy, and assuredly not security policy.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored Svalbard as a case of a low degree unsettledness in the Arctic. While sovereignty over Svalbard is not under question, different actors have different interpretations of the Svalbard Treaty, which can lead to tensions. The archipelago exists in a state of flux, where there are changing projections of Svalbard. Yet states maintain policy continuity around the archipelago as part of a broader strategy to avoid risk. I find that Svalbard is largely resilient to shifting geopolitics. Documents from Norway and Russia do not mention global trends and tensions that commonly emerged in the literature surrounding fishing, mining, or other disputes. This lack of connection between Svalbard's unsettledness and global geopolitics suggests it is in both Norwegian and Russian government interests to avoid linking the two for risk of potential militarization. That said, there have been shifts in rhetoric since 2022 and references to the changing geopolitical environment in Svalbard's most recent 2024 White Paper. However, importantly the policy surrounding Svalbard has not changed and interviewees both from ministries and outside experts reiterated that the practice of Norway and Russia has not changed. This lack of connection illustrates that even in conditions of unsettledness – low though they may be – states have an urge to avoid future risks and costs of changing policy. It seems that references to global geopolitics occur when there are moments of a decrease in intersubjective agreement.

Svalbard is also desecuritized by both Norway and Russia. Both countries largely avoid security discourse at all, choosing instead to prioritize cooperative discourse, environmental protection, and other words such as fisheries and maritime management practices. In fact, Russian documents rarely mention Svalbard at all, but when they do so, it is largely through a desecuritizing lens. Again, this seems telling towards how powers engaged in strategic competition may choose to largely not narrate unsettled spaces as it does not serve their larger interests of geopolitical gains and only refer to them when they fit into the broader picture of hegemonic competition. By contrast, Norwegian documents heavily reiterate Norwegian sovereignty and presence on the archipelago and domestic concerns rather than foreign ones. The avoidance of security discourse by both Norway and Russia is part of a larger strategy to avoid cooperation and avoid potential future militarization, even when unsettledness makes it impossible to reach.

When exploring the role of experts, the knowledge ecosystem and interministerial differences came to the fore in this case. The different research groups largely agreed that Svalbard was an area of competence where the ministries – both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice and Public Safety – did not seek outside expertise. While they did work together on broader Arctic security issues, Svalbard is a very sensitive issue. In other words, it is the ministries themselves who are experts on Svalbard rather than outside experts. Because policy on Svalbard is set, the Norwegian state does not feel a need to mitigate this unsettledness through seeking outside expertise. Similarly, in Russia, because Svalbard is considered an issue only dealt with by the government, rather than political scientists, there is no incentive to seek outside expertise to settle questions. Even though there are familiarities between the different individuals located at the nexus of expert-government interactions in Norway and everyone knows one

another, there is also a tacit understanding that Svalbard projects regarding security and geopolitics will not be funded. In short, as a case of low unsettledness, Svalbard is resilient to the role of geopolitics, both Norway and Russia use desecuritizing framings to mitigate risk, and experts play an unimportant role.

CHAPTER 6. GREENLAND

Introduction

Often described as a hybrid space when it comes to sovereignty and political identity, Greenland plays a particularly important role in the Arctic (Jacobsen et al., 2024). Its dynamic nature given changing geopolitical circumstances and its own internal political transition offer a unique case to understand how this unsettled space is depicted and framed over time. This chapter focuses on Greenland and its unsettled nature, coming from its current state of flux. As it has gained more authority through the Self-Government Act and changing relations with Denmark, so too has its ability to act on the world stage changed. In other words, Greenland's spatial status is fluid as political processes change how it can act and how other actors understand it. Greenland's unsettledness is mid-way on the continuum from complete intersubjectivity to complete unsettledness. For the most part, Greenland has settled norms and rules and practices surrounding it, but there is still an unresolved quality that makes other states change their projections, particularly clear in Trump's 2024 pronouncements about buying Greenland. Moreover, Greenland is experiencing serious physical changes due to climate change. Not only is the Greenland Ice Sheet losing tons of ice per year, Greenland is also warming at nearly twice the global average. Changing temperatures are also destabilizing coastal communities and leading to erosion. Such changes are leading to increased interest by outside actors in extractive industries in Greenland. I begin by describing Greenland's position in the Arctic geographically as well as how it is understood from Danish, Greenlandic, and American perspectives. I then undertake a brief history of Greenlandic-Danish relations before turning to the findings of the case.

First, I find that Greenland is – out of all three cases – the most sensitive to changing global geopolitics. That said, although language around great power competition and structural rivalry comes up often in Danish documents on the Arctic, Greenland itself is often not placed within these insecurities. US documents rarely mention Greenland at all. When Greenland is connected to more global concerns, it is often in reference to China and how a US-China rivalry might impact Danish interests in Greenland. Second, I find various frames are used to describe Greenland that highlight its changing military actorness and describe it as a tool of great power rivalry. These different frames illustrate the degree of unsettledness. However, third, there is a general lack of securitizing and security language used to depict Greenland as part of a strategy from all actors to mitigate future risks. Although there are some instances where Greenland is understood as being threatened by climate change and in limited instances due to great power competition, the overall scope is a discourse that reinforces and narratively creates Greenland as a space in a low-tension environment when it comes to China's rising interest and an emphasis on societal and environmental issues – but these are framed as challenges rather than threats. This avoidance of security suggests that states wish to avoid future costs associated with militarization. This norm has been changing since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine and is particularly clear in post-2022 documents from the Danish Security and Intelligence Service. There are interesting differences between Danish foreign policy discourse from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which tends to promote this low-tension narrative outright, and the Ministry of Defense, which has a different narrative agenda.[7] Importantly, the public-facing strategies under analysis are not the same as intra-

[7] The Ministry of Defence encompasses the Defence Intelligence Service, which publishes the long-standing Intelligence Risk Assessments, and documents from the Royal Danish Defence College. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has much fewer documents, only a few small examples of MFA discourse while Danish Security and Intelligence Service is located under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice.

Realm politics, thus this analysis draws on Denmark's discourse rather than Greenlandic discourse, a detailed analysis of intra-realm practice, a detailed analysis of parliamentary debates or where there is more recognition that promoting a low tension narrative may no longer serve Danish interests.[8] While there is a lack of security language in the public documents under analysis, there is a clear interest by Denmark to discursively create a low-tension environment even if in practice, this may not be the case.

[8] There is a strong literature on sovereignty games that Denmark and Greenland play from scholars including Ulrik Pram Gad, Marc Jacobsen, and Rebecca Adler-Nissen.

Background

Figure 2: Greenland. Source: Encyclopedia Brittanica

Greenland, an autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark with self-rule, is situated in the North American Arctic between Iceland and the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. It is the world's largest island – taking up more than 24 degrees of latitude, with a population of only 56,000 as of 2023. An interesting case for exploring unsettled spaces in the Arctic, Greenland plays

a unique role in the region. Geopolitical concerns about Chinese influence as well as ballistic missile defense meet environmental concerns, particularly surrounding the role of Greenland's Ice Sheet in the global climate system (Kristensen & Mortengaard, 2024), and its potential for critical mineral mining. These contrasting logics of security all happen in the context of the Greenlandic quest for independence, complicating how different actors may strategically use securitizing and de-securitizing language to achieve their goals. In short, both Denmark and Greenland may choose to strategically deploy either securitizing or desecuritizing language to gain more power and dominance in their fluctuating relationship.

For Denmark[9], Greenland represents its Arctic identity, as it is through the territory that Denmark claims its Arctic status. At the end of the Cold War, Danish perceptions of Arctic security was closely tied to Greenland's strategic location, its role in East-West tensions, and how Greenlandic independence would constrain Danish Arctic policy (Petersen, 1988). As recent as 2016, the Arctic even became one of Denmark's top five foreign policy priorities – inherently including Greenland (Jacobsen, 2021). However, today some argue that it centers the island as part of its Arctic strategy within a broader goal to maintain its Arctic identity and regional strategy. Importantly, the current Arctic strategy is quite outdated. Part of this has to do with Greenlandic discontent with not being sufficiently acknowledged as the true Arctic member of the realm. Denmark must balance managing the complex security relationship with the United States and keeping the Kingdom together given Greenlandic wishes for independence, all while reckoning with the centrality of Greenland for the conventional defense of North America.

[9] The rest of the chapter refers to the Kingdom of Denmark as Denmark for ease of reading.

For Greenland, security is often defined through a more local, daily, and nearby understanding of security – although such 'securitizations' are not complete securitizing moves. Public opinion shows the largest challenges for Greenlanders are the economic situation, higher living costs, and unemployment, not geopolitics (Ackren & Nielsen, 2021). Moreover, most Greenlanders do not see security threats as being particularly high. This suggests that the security logic at play for Greenlanders is not military or traditional in nature, but more localized. For example, Greenlandic pro-mining interests in the early 2010s used economic security logics to promote Greenlandic independence whereas others used environmental security logics to argue that the negative impacts on Greenlandic traditional occupations were simply too great a cost (Kristensen & Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2018). Similarly, others have written about food security and climate change using environmental security logics (Goldhar & Ford, 2010).

However, rather than rely on securitizing measures, Greenland uses a desecuritizing strategy to downplay security and defense aspects of independence and highlight economic self-sufficiency and identity politics (Gad et al., 2024a; Gad et al., 2024b). For example, narratives around hunting traditions (Sørensen, 1991; Thomsen, 1996), the Greenlandic language (Langgård, 2003), and a nature centered politics (Pedersen, 1997) use societal security logics – that all three of these objects should be protected from external threats in order to uphold Greenlandic society (Gad, 2009). Moreover, different actors are painted using particular narratives such as using a politics of embarrassment for Denmark (Kristensen, 2004), or China as a partner on Greenland's road to independence (Gad et al., 2018). The securitization-desecuritization dynamic is referred to as a sovereignty game, where both Denmark and Greenland use different strategies to either securitize to gain more control (Denmark) or desecuritize to move towards independence

(Greenland) (Adler-Nissen & Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2008; Jacobsen, 2015; Gad, 2016). The current structure of the Realm is such that Denmark is ultimately in control of Greenland's foreign, security, and defense policies – which means that Denmark inherently has interests in securitizing issues to move it towards its competences, while Greenland has the opposite incentive to desecuritize.

The United States sees Greenland through an obliquely strategic lens. During the Cold War, the United States considered Greenland a key part of its global nuclear strategy. This was clear through the construction of Thule Air Base (now Pituffik) and the naval considerations paid to the GIUK (Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom) gap (Pedersen, 1997). Today, the United States' concern around Greenland is focused on the role of Chinese interests on the island. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the US offer to purchase Greenland in 2019 in response to growing Chinese interest (Rasmussen, 2019). Such strategic considerations will likely not change in the future. American interests in Greenland, and by proxy the Arctic, have been historically episodic in nature and followed a boom-bust pattern related to interests in the Cold War and economic possibilities across the region. This is changing with the recent 2022 Arctic Strategy and subsequent Implementation Plan that takes a more expansive view of the region and understands the Arctic as not being separated from the rest of the world but becoming more global in nature. Given the US's emphasis on global security writ large, it is perhaps not surprising that its interest in Greenland and the Arctic more generally speaking comes and goes. Trump's recent pronouncement that he seeks to purchase Greenland from Denmark clearly illustrates this episodic pattern.

Brief history of Greenland-Denmark

Although colonized in 1721, Greenland has been of interest to many actors, including Denmark, Norway, and the United States. In the 1860s, the United States considered purchasing Greenland and Iceland. In a separate 1933 case at the Permanent Court of International Justice, Norway settled with Norway (Taagholt & Hansen, 2001). While Denmark was occupied by Nazi Germany, the Danish Ambassador to the United States signed 'The Agreement Relating to the Defense of Greenland' with the United States in 1941. The document recognized Danish sovereignty over Greenland but gave the US the right to establish and operate defense areas and military bases until present threats to the US continent had disappeared (Taagholt & Hansen, 2001). This document and its later iterations have shaped US-Denmark-Greenland relations (Udenrigsministeriets, 1969; DUPI, 1997). After World War II, Denmark wanted the United States to leave Greenland, but instead there was a negotiation to ensure that the United States continued to have a strategic foothold in Greenland – eventually leading to the 1951 defense agreement. During the Cold War, Greenland was a key outpost for the United States for storing nuclear weapons, leading to an accident in 1968 when a B-52 bomber accidently crashed near Thule Air Base.

When the Danish Constitution was revised in 1953, Greenland went from a colony to an actual county of the Danish Kingdom. This also provoked a change in Danish policy towards Greenland, specifically moving it to a modernization strategy. However, in Greenland, this modernization was understood as 'Danification' – a top-down policy built to destroy Greenlandic culture (Keskitalo, 2004; Heinrich, 2018). In tandem with modernization, Greenland's turn towards independence can be traced to Danish membership in the European Economic Community

(EEC) in 1973 (Jacobsen, 2020). While most Danes wanted to join the EEC, most Greenlanders did not, specifically due to fisheries regulation. This kickstarted the political process in Greenland towards a more autonomous future. In 1979, Greenland received Home Rule, making the island a self-governing country of the Kingdom of Denmark (Nielsen, 2021). This shift to home rule had already been completed by the Faroe Islands in 1948. Greenland increased its say in its own security as well in 2004 when it signed the Igaliku Agreement, which made it party to the amended 1951 defense agreement as well as the 2003 Itilleq Declaration (Kristensen, 2005). Thus today, we speak of the Kingdom of Denmark or Danish Realm as having intra-Realm relationships between Denmark proper, and the two autonomous parts of the Kingdom: Greenland and the Faroe Island.

In 2009, Denmark and Greenland negotiated the Self-Government Act which gave Greenland significantly more autonomy in health, education, fiscal matters, and authority over mineral resources and mining licenses.[10] Greenland's foreign policy competencies are based on the Constitution of Denmark, and the Act of Greenland Self-Government. However, foreign policy and defense are still ultimately competencies that fall to Denmark, although they are open to sovereignty games. For example, Greenland has a seat in Denmark's defense budget negotiations even though it is not within the juridical frameworks because Denmark increasingly acknowledges Greenland has agency in this case. In doing so, this increases Denmark's legitimacy as an Arctic state. The question of what is foreign policy and defense versus what is energy policy is an open question, as evidenced by a variety of different instances. From 2009-2016, for example, there were disagreements between Greenlandic and Danish officials on whether uranium mining counted as energy policy or foreign policy (Rasmussen et al., 2017; Kristensen & Rahbek-

[10] Greenland's new responsibilities included 33 new areas in total.

Clemmensen, 2018). If it were qualified as energy policy, it would fall under the responsibility of Greenlandic authorities. By contrast, if it was foreign policy, Danish officials would have authority. A separate incident arose in 2017 when a Chinese company and the Greenlandic government were in serious talks for this company to offer a bid to build airports in Greenland (Bislev et al., 2018; Sejersen, 2024). While the Greenlandic government saw these as economic policy issues, Copenhagen understood the choices as foreign policy – making it their prerogative to respond to possible security concerns. In 2018, a similar incident occurred when a Chinese company offered to buy an abandoned naval base in Greenland (Andersson et al., 2018). While Greenlandic politicians sought the deal for increased foreign investment as part of an economic policy, Danish officials understood the sale through a lens of foreign policy. Some suggest that these struggles are evidence of Danish securitization to gain more control over Greenland (Interviews). Further, the question of praxis leaves much open to interpretation (Jacobsen, 2020). For example, hybrid threats and emergency management are a challenge for this debate of competences. While Greenland has competence for emergency management and safety issues, hybrid threats cross into foreign policy and defense, leading to uncertainties regarding where governance for these issues will fall.

To address this uncertainty, Greenland desecuritizes its foreign policy by emphasizing trade and economic aspects and using para-diplomatic tactics to engage in the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), and paradiplomatic representation with Iceland, Denmark, the US, and the European Union (Ackren, 2014; Jacobsen et al., 2017). However, further steps towards independence are largely impeded by the financial dependence that Greenland has on Denmark. Greenland receives a yearly block grant of around 500 million euros per year (roughly USD$511

million) that makes up approximately 50% of Greenland's GDP (Kristensen & Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2018). Without significant income from other sources such as mining, fishing, or tourism income, Greenland's independence seems stymied (Wang & Degeorges, 2014).

This chapter explores the three general explanations for how and why the United States, Greenland, and Denmark have maintained relative continuity on their policies towards Greenland: 1) the role of structural geopolitical conditions, 2) the prevalence of low-tension discourse to avoid future risks, and 3) the role of experts. To explain these findings, I undertake a combination of discourse analysis of key documents and 19 interviews with 14 Danish scholars and policymakers, three Greenland-based scholars and one policymaker, and one American policy-adjacent scholar.

The texts under analysis are listed in full in the Appendix 2 and consist of essential security and foreign policy documents for Denmark, Greenland, and the United States. For the United States, I collected all documents relating to the Arctic including the national strategies on the Arctic, the service-level strategies, key memoranda on Greenland regarding historical events such as the B-52 bomber situation, and relevant MoUs between the United State and Greenland. For Denmark, I gathered relevant agreements between Greenland and Denmark from 1941, 1951, and 2004, and all Danish Defence Agreements since 1989, Danish foreign policy strategies and policies, relevant statements and reports from the ministries, and yearly reports from the different security services that included reference to Greenland. For Greenland, I collected the 1979 Home Rule, the 2009 Act of Greenland's Self Government, key strategies regarding mineral usage, Greenlandic growth, relevant agreements between Greenland and Denmark on issues of foreign policy, and a foreign policy poll.

Discourse Analysis Findings

Structural Geopolitical Conditions

Of all three cases, Greenland is perhaps the one most sensitive to the changing winds of geopolitics and insecurity. That said, although great power competition emerges often in Danish documents, there are only a few limited instances in which Greenland is framed within this narrative. US documents rarely mention Greenland at all. Nikolaj Petersen (1988) describes how US interest in Greenland, rather than being reflected in the documents under analysis, comes instead from structural geopolitical conditions such as the Cold War. Greenland was of interest to the US in terms of its aerial capacity via the early warning and radar system and later an offensive maritime strategy. While Petersen suggests there is only simple correlation rather than causation between international tensions and US interest in Greenland, his arguments are similarly reflected in the lack of mention of Greenland in US documents and when mentioned, it only having to do with strategic concerns over China. One example of this is the US's multiple attempts to buy Greenland. Such attempts only appear when there is global geopolitical pressure that causes the US to want additional continental security through the purchase of Greenland. However, great power competition clearly influences how the US interest wanes and waxes around Greenland, at least in how Danish documents understand the US. In the 2014 *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessment*, Greenland is framed as being at a turning point, both in terms of increasing Chinese interest and given Russia's 2014 invasion of Crimea (Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2018). This language of Greenland being at a turning point in "defense and security policy" is repeated in the 2014-2023 *Defense Agreement.* A 2020 report from the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) notes how emphasis on the US interest in Greenland rises in tandem with great power competition, particularly in regard to Chinese interest (Olesen et al., 2020). The clearest indicator that Greenland

is sensitive to concerns about great power competition is the two reports from the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET), whose interest is relatively new. Both reports are the first of their kind from PET titled *Assessment of the Espionage Threat to Denmark* and were published in 2022 and 2023. In a relatively dramatic shift, both describe Greenland as being under "threat from both Chinese and Russian intelligence activities," as well as threats to critical infrastructure (Danish Security and Intelligence Service, 2022, 19; 2023).

The clearest way that Greenland is framed in terms of global security is that of China's increasing interest in Greenlandic natural resources. Danish documents, specifically the *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessments* from 2012 and 2015 clearly suggest that there should be concern around increasing Chinese economic and strategic interests in Greenland. Importantly Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessments come from the Danish Defence Intelligence Service (FE) underneath the Ministry of Defence, which has a much longer interest in the Arctic and tends to use more dramatic language than Danish politicians. By contrast, while language around Russian military buildup is a constant across Danish documents, it is never connected to Greenland. US documents also clearly point to wanting to limit China's ability to influence the Arctic, although Greenland itself is rarely brought into the conversation. Instead, US documents as late as 2020 describe Chinese interest in Greenland in light of its strategic rivalry. This connection to global security is often done through the language of great power competition, and Danish documents often mention how this limits how a small state like Denmark can act on the world stage, in essence implying how the accelerating security dilemma between the US, Russia, and China is leading to less space for a state like Denmark (Kristensen & Mortensgaard, 2022). In the 2022 *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessment,* Denmark describes Greenland as being in

the middle of a missile trajectory – framing it as directly under threat from the consequences of great power competition. However, this language only occurs once across the entire dataset.

In short, geopolitical insecurity clearly impacts how Denmark – specifically documents from the Intelligence Service[11] - talk about the Arctic at large, it is nonetheless still limited in some capacity when it does so around Greenland. Great power competition is unquestionably the global concern that has entered how Denmark frames the Arctic as a region (Jacobsen & Lindbjerg, 2024). Perhaps the best example of this is the 2022 *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessment,* in which the Arctic regional section is titled 'Mere Ustabile Sikkerhedspolitiske Forhold' [More Unstable Security Policy Conditions] and in 2021 was titled 'Arktis Arena for Stormagtsrivalisering' [Arctic Arena for Power Rivalry]. These titles clearly indicate that great power competition as a global geopolitical phenomenon has been fully taken to describe changing conditions in the Arctic. This geopolitical condition is not just clear in Intelligence Service documents, but also in documents created by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For example, some documents such as the *Danish Security and Defense Towards 2035* describe how deterioration in the US-Russian relationship will lead to increasing problems in the Arctic for Denmark. Similarly, the emphasis on Chinese interest in the Arctic, specifically Greenland, is framed through a lens of China's global behavior and how the US-China rivalry might impact Denmark. This is not necessarily because Denmark subscribes to great power competition as a logic for itself but rather recognition that the United States *does* subscribe to such logics and whether Denmark understands it as true, it must react to this mindset given its dependence on American security guarantees.

[11] This raises important questions about which domestic actors get to 'speak security' on behalf of the state. A detailed analysis of the different security actors in Denmark is certainly an important topic but deserves a separate analysis.

Recent Greenlandic documents also emphasize global geopolitics and security. For example, the 2024 *Greenland's Foreign, Security, and Defense Policy 2024-2033: An Arctic Strategy* highlights COVID-19, the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and Brexit as key moments that have shifted how Greenland can behave on the world stage (Naalakkersuisut, 2024). The strategy states "conflicts and security policy issues have a global impact and … require precautionary and security measures" (Naalakkersuisut, 2024, 41). Although the majority of the 2024 Policy's contents are not security-based in nature, the emphasis on global geopolitics is framed as clearly important to the writers.

Security Language and Framings of Greenland.

The framings around Greenland shift significantly across the documents under study. This is likely because Greenland itself has agency as well as its relationships with Denmark and the United States have changed drastically since the 1970s, and that the documents under analysis come from ministries in Denmark with different goals. For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasizes the importance of a low-tension narrative, but such an emphasis is not always shared by the Defense Ministry. While, as above, great power competition is a clear way that Denmark and the US talk about the Arctic, Greenland rarely comes into the picture as being under threat. That said, the documents under analysis illustrated a real diversity of ways that Greenland was framed. For example, maritime traffic and navigation emerged as a common topic alongside other issues such as tourism, environmental protection, and mineral extraction. As increased Arctic interest has emerged globally, so too have many topics grown in importance.

Another topic that I expected to emerge more in the analysis that did not was that of deterrence. While mentioned in the 2019 Department of Defense Arctic Report and once in the *Danish Security and Defense Towards 2035* document, the lack of deterrence was surprising given the vast literature on how key Greenland is for North Atlantic defence (Petersen, 1992). However, four broader themes clearly come across in the analysis: 1) security language surrounding sovereignty enforcement from a Danish perspective, 2) Greenland's changing role as an actor on the world stage, and 3) Greenland as a strategic location for the United States. These themes illustrate how states have changing projections surrounding how to narrate Greenland, illustrating its higher level of unsettledness.

Unsurprisingly, security language often emerged in Danish Defence Agreements, but used a dry militaristic tone across most Danish documents and sources from the Ministry of Defence. Rather than outlining threats to Greenland or Denmark in securitizing or politicizing language, the discourse instead clearly states facts such as "there is an Arctic Command in Nuuk Greenland" and outlines the competencies that Denmark has such as sovereignty enforcement and surveillance (Danish Ministry of Defence, 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017). Because Denmark has defense competency over Greenland, maritime surveillance is a key part of enforcing its borders and territory. A lack of surveillance over Greenlandic air space means reduced warning time for the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). Given the heightened access to the Arctic and interest from foreign states, a 2012 *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessment* highlights that sovereignty enforcement and surveillance is increasingly required. Rather than outlining direct threats, many Danish documents instead use risk language and do not generally suggest the risks are high or will occur in the near future. For example, the 2022 *Danish*

Intelligence Service Risk Assessment highlights that Russia could attempt to cause unrest between Denmark and Greenland, that Greenland could be a valuable military target given increased US presence and maritime lines of communications, and that Greenland may be an arena for unstable military buildup in the region. Kristensen & Mortensgaard (2022) outline these same concerns in their work. One notable observation here is that as American interest rises in Greenland, Denmark appears to be building its Arctic military capabilities, specifically Greenlandic surveillance in the maritime domain to avoid the US doing so unilaterally (Edvardsen, 2024). Hybrid threats and espionage also emerge as risks in 2021 and espionage is particularly highlighted as a threat (Danish Defence Intelligence Service, 2021; Danish Security and Intelligence Service, 2022; 2023). By contrast, almost none of the Greenlandic documents even use the word 'security,' suggesting that there may have been an unspoken monopoly over the word, until the most recent Greenlandic *Foreign, Security, and Defense Policy 2024-2033: An Arctic Strategy*, where security language occurs much more often.

Greenland's changing actorness is also clear as a theme in the documents from all three actors. While the early defense agreements in 1941 and 1951 clearly illustrate that Greenland was considered by both the United States and Denmark as a dependent actor, this changes after 1979 Home Rule and then the 2009 Self Government Act. This shift is particularly clear in the Danish Defence Agreements, where Greenland's input becomes increasingly important over time. In fact, since 2017, Danish, Greenlandic, and Faroese representatives have met annually to discuss Arctic issues and there has been increased integration of Greenlandic and Faroese officials into Kingdom-wide defense discussions since 2019 (Jacobsen & Lindbjerg, 2024). Further, agreements between the three entities have moved from Denmark-US, to Denmark-US-Greenland, to US-Greenland in

their scope. Interestingly, there is little to no mention of security in the *Joint Plan for Cooperation between the US and Greenland to support our understanding in relation to Pituffik (Thule Air Base),* but cooperation is the primary objective, suggesting that although Greenland is becoming a more important actor security is still the remit of Denmark. Given the competency breakdown between the two – Denmark handles foreign security and defense and it is Denmark's responsibility to defend Greenland and enforce sovereignty – this is not surprising. This changing actor-ness is also present in Greenland's framing of itself. Greenland's 2024 *Foreign, Security, and Defense Policy 2024-2033: An Arctic Strategy* has the subtitle 'Nothing about us without us' – directly asserting that anything involving Greenland must include it. In other words "Greenland must act and adapt, and get involved, especially in matters that affect us" (Naalakkersuisut, 2024, 7).

That said, from a Danish perspective Greenland is often still framed as a tool of great power rivalry. In 2021 and 2022, Greenland was framed as vulnerable due to its proximity to the GIUK gap, maritime communication lines, and Russian interference (Jacobsen & Lindbjerg, 2024). Moreover, it is framed in Danish documents as being a location for US-Chinese tensions to play out. In short, the US sees China's interest in the Arctic in terms of its strategic rivalry with China and thus understands Chinese interest in Greenland as a threat to its ability to maneuver in an area of strategic importance. Greenland is also framed as a tool for Danish relations with the United States, and is specifically called the 'Greenland card' that Denmark can use in negotiations with the United States (Villaume, 1995; Lidegaard, 1996; Kristensen & Mortensgaard, 2022). Much of this relies upon the intra-realm relationship between Denmark and Greenland. Thus, it is not particularly shocking that a dependent relationship is also found in the documents. It is specifically

clear in the background of the renegotiated 2003 defense agreement between the US, Denmark, and Greenland as a co-signatory, the original of which was signed in 1951 between Denmark and the United States. Even Kaj Kleist, the former managing director of Greenland's home rule, acknowledged in an interview that "Now you sit back and think about China and the US and the all the things going on the Arctic … Greenland doesn't have the population to be able to handle it alone" (Nielsen & Lauritsen, 2021).

Finally, US Arctic documents rarely mention Greenland. When Greenland does come up, it is often through a lens of a strategic position.[12] For example, the 2019 Department of Defense Arctic Strategy mentions Greenland through its proximate location to the GIUK gap and increasing access to shipping routes in the Arctic alongside the importance of Thule and concern around Chinese investment in Greenland. Outside of the direct document analysis, Greenland is understood as particularly key for US strategic interests (Interviews). During the Cold War, Thule and thus Greenland was an important aerial support base and strategic outpost (United States & Kingdom of Denmark, 1951). Today, it is a significant maritime support base and a flexible deployment location. In short, the US has had a military presence and interest in Greenland for over 80 years (Kristensen, 2004; Ackren & Jakobsen, 2015). This emphasis on the US-Danish relationship in Greenland is also notable. For example, a report from the *Joint Committee on Atomic Energy* discussing the clean-up around Thule noted "it's worth the extra expense" due to the centrality of the US-Danish relationship from a US perspective. Even if it does not emerge

[12] For example, Greenland does not come up in the 1948 NSC, the 2019 Rovaniemi Ministerial Statement, the 2009 Navy Arctic Roadmap, either of Executive Orders under review, either of the Implementation Plans for the Arctic Council, any documents from the White House, the NSPD 66, the Managing the Future in a Rapidly Changing Arctic Report, the 2019 and 2023 US Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook and Implementation Plan, the 1984 Arctic Research and Policy Act, the 2021 US Army Regaining Arctic Dominance strategy, and the Department of Homeland Security's Strategic Approach for Arctic Homeland Security.

often in the documents themselves, the material impact of the US in Greenland for such a significant amount of time is unquestionable. Marc Jacobsen and Sara Olsvig's work on American securitizations of Greenland reflects this argument, suggesting that Greenland's geostrategic location is highly important for the defense of the United States and while not often found in the documents under analysis, secondary literature suggests this is true (Jacobsen & Olsvig, 2024). Thus, the US rarely discusses Greenland in its Arctic documents, but when it does the topic is often a side issue and becomes a non-issue. This absence from defense documents may be due to the fact that the US's strategic interests in Greenland have not changed since the end of the Cold War, and the conditions that it operates in within Greenland at Pituffik Space Base and closely allied with Denmark mean that it is not worth mentioning. In 2019 and in 2024, Trump has floated the offer to purchase Greenland – illustrating the vast difference in intersubjective understandings around the island.

Greenland facing increasing risk but remains a low-tension area

Given the framings most prevalent across the documents – namely dry military language, Greenland's changing actor-ness, Greenland as a tool of great power rivalry, and Greenland as a strategic location – it is again an overall lack of security language that we see rather than oblique securitizing policies. While it is in Denmark's interest to frame Greenland as a low-tension area for domestic political reasons (Adler-Nissen & Gad, 2014; Rasmussen & Merkelsen, 2017; Rasmussen, 2019), it is also in its national interest to paint the whole region as a low-tension area in the broader scope of Arctic security not only from the perspective of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Denmark, but also the Ministry of Defence. In other words, from a Danish perspective, the increasing risks that Greenland faces are not served by using securitizing or even politicizing

language except for conversations regarding competencies with Greenland. The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs is particularly wedded to low tension terminology which they both use to narratively create low tension as the norm in the Arctic and in Greenland and avoid increasing over-dramatization and military securitization in the Arctic. Until 2022, low-tension was the primary frame through which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs described both Greenlandic policy as well as Arctic wide policy, though this has changed somewhat from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since Russia's 2022 expanded invasion of Ukraine, and is quite clear in the 2022 and 2023 reports from the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (Ministry of Defense) as well as parliamentary debates, where Russia has been described more as an antagonistic enemy. Importantly, the Ministry and Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense have different security perspectives on the Arctic, but have moved closer together since 2022.

That is not to say that Greenland doesn't face increasing risks. The documents clearly illustrate that Denmark recognizes serious risks in terms of China, political interference, environmental issues, increasing maritime traffic, and other types of concerns – but it frames them as not significant threats. China is clearly a main topic under concern, but again low tension is discursively used to balance Denmark's security relationship with the United States and the economic needs of Denmark. Greenlandic documents tend to focus on social security issues. This overall focus on Greenland as a low-tension area reflects Denmark's emphasis on balancing the security relationship with the United States, prioritizing keeping the Kingdom together, and Greenland's needs.

Greenland is clearly framed as facing significant risks across the documents. The most prominent challenge for Greenland across the vast majority of the documents is the problem of climate change (Andrews et al., 2024). However, even with climate change and as early as 2008, security language is not used. Instead, it is framed as a "medføre betydelige forandring" [significant change] that will inevitably lead to different conditions that will impact increasing traffic and extraction (Danish Ministry of Defence, 2008). This same document from the Ministry of Defence references that this increased access requires increasing monitoring, surveillance, and sovereignty enforcement (Danish Ministry of Defence, 2008). In 2022, climate was understood as requiring increasing investment from Denmark to address the changing situation in Greenland – a necessity emerging from a Ministry of Foreign Affairs document (The Security Policy Analysis Group, 2022). Even Greenlandic documents, while recognizing climate change as a challenge, still emphasize its right to economic development and increasing calls for independence rather than framing it as a security issue (Andrews et al., 2024). Coastal shelf disagreements also come up as a risk in documents from the Danish Defence Intelligence Service; they are framed as relatively small risks but do acknowledge the political and military risk of Russia's potential response (Danish Defence Intelligence Service, 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020).

A few Danish documents do suggest that there is a threat to Greenland, but they are few and far-between. For example, the 2016 *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessment* highlights limited domain awareness as a threat to Greenlandic security, the 2018-2020 *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessment* suggests that closer Russian bases such as those at Nagurskoye could present a threat to Greenland, and the 2020 *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessment* suggests that Russia may see exacerbating internal disagreements between Greenland and Denmark as a

weak point for hybrid tactics. These limited mentions of security regarding Greenland are not equivalent to how often security is mentioned when framing the Arctic as a whole. Many of the *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessments* and even the *Danish Arctic Strategy 2011-2020* frame the Arctic as becoming increasingly dangerous due to diplomatic crises and rising strategic interest in the region. That the majority of highlighted risks comes from the Ministry of Defense is not surprising as it reinforces its role as a securitizing actor in Denmark.

That said, even when there are limited securitizations, low-tension discourse continues to be the norm rather than the exception as part of a strategy to avoid future risks. However, this has been changing since 2022. For example, Russia's military build-up and China's rising interest in Greenland were acknowledged as early as 2011. Yet they are always mentioned in the context of claiming that Russia is not a bad actor in the region and there is 'mere samarbejde end konflikt' [more cooperation than conflict]. The discourse also frames China as having concern about its security of supply rather than the Arctic itself (Danish Defence Intelligence Service, 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022). Even in the 2022 *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessment,* Russia is not vilified in the region and the document states that Russia has not changed its policies in the Arctic. Further, Russian military build-up is specifically not painted as a threat to Denmark or Greenland (Danish Defence Intelligence Service, 2010; 2011; 2013; 2016; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022). To navigate this low-tension landscape, Denmark emphasizes the language of risk rather than security and draws together broad risks to the region including climate change, raw materials, competing coastal shelf claims and relationships between Arctic states. The lack of security language is interesting given that security clearly imposes itself on Greenland as central for the defense of North America. The opposing

argument is that security is simply not a central concern for Danish policy on Greenland as there are no big security threats – although this is likely changing with the increase in hybrid attacks. Moreover, one could consider that for financial reasons, admitting to serious security threats might necessities more defense investments in and around Greenland to defend it from these threats. Thus, by not mentioning security language, Denmark is also maintaining its authority on security and defense policy and avoiding future risks around Greenland.

China is a central actor that appears alongside Greenland in Denmark's Arctic discourse with an emphasis on risk rather than security threat, particularly from the Ministry of Defence (Sorensen, 2019; Dubois, 2018). As early as 2011, the *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessment* highlighted the increasing interest that China is showing in Greenland. In 2012, China is discussed as showing serious interest in Greenland, seeing it as a strategic area through which it can obtain raw materials through specific projects (Danish Defence Intelligence Service, 2012; Sorensen, 2018; Yang, 2018; Yang, 2021). From 2013-2015, the *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessments* used language that implies China has shown significantly increased interest in Greenland, both political and strategic. While the documents suggest that China's interest is primarily for commercial interests and its own security of energy supply for China, discourse begins to emerge about Chinese investments in Greenland could lead to political risks for the Danish Realm (Danish Defence Intelligence Service, 2013; 2014; 2015). Increasing investments could lead to increased Greenlandic vulnerability (Danish Defence Intelligence Service, 2013; 2014; 2015). Maintaining that Greenland is not vulnerable to political interference while also painting China's interest as a non-security issue is akin to walking on a balance beam. On one hand, the Risk Assessments imply that Chinese interest is not part of a central state-driven plan to

get control over Greenland. On the other, the word 'debt-trap diplomacy' is used in the Assessments, suggesting Danish policymakers are clearly aware of the potential danger of Chinese economic pressure if it invested in strategic resources. The same type of themes come up from 2016-2020. The 2016 *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessment* describes China's strong interest in raw materials but notes the "particular risks associated with large-scale Chinese investment in Greenland" that could lead to political interference and pressure. The 2017 *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessment* similarly highlights China's sustained interest in Greenland's raw materials, sea routes, and increased influence while also cautioning against too much interference and investment. In 2018 and 2019, the Risk Assessments contained an interesting shift. While they touch on China's interest in increasing Arctic influence, they also note that large Chinese ambitions have not materialized. The 2020 and 2021 Risk Assessments reframe China's interest in the Arctic as concern around great power competition, that China's interest in Greenland is part of its broader strategy to legitimate itself as an Arctic actor. These concerns are met with language around China's economic exploitation and influence but highlight the risks associated with Chinese investments (Andersson & Zeuthen, 2024). The 2022 *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessment* reiterates that there is a risk of Chinese political interference and pressure but Chinese interest was not realized, and thus no threat really exists.

One quote across the Danish documents was one that is almost the same from the 2015 – 2022 *Danish Intelligence Service Risk Assessments.* With some small changes in wording[13], the quote translated to English is:

> As a result of close ties between Chinese extractive companies and the Chinese political system, there are particular risks associated with large-scale Chinese investments in Greenland. This is due to the impact that larger investments will

[13] From 2015-2019, the quotes open the same, and from 2020-2022 the quotes use a different opening phrase.

> have on an economy of Greenland's size. The potential for political interference and pressure increases when it comes to investments in strategic resources.

That this statement is included in every risk assessment in the past seven years is an indication of how central China is to Danish security concerns about Greenland. The only substantive shift in the quote comes in 2021 and 2022, where the phrase "and critical infrastructure" is added after strategic resources. Again, it is notable that security and securitizing language is missing in this quote. Rather than describe danger or an exceptional state of affairs, the documents use risk language to frame Greenland as a low-tension area as much as possible. That said, there is also a question of competency and sovereignty games at play as well. Language such as 'strategic resources' and 'political interference' are a way of maintaining Danish control over these areas of policy. This lack of security-ness reflects how in these public-facing documents Denmark must walk a tightrope between the security relationship with the United States – which clearly has concerns about a Chinese presence in Greenland – and the needs of Greenland's economy, preserving a good business relationship with China outside the Arctic, and intra-Kingdom dynamics.

Greenlandic documents tended to emphasize social security issues in Greenland, although these appear in Danish documents as well (The Security Policy Analysis Group, 2022). However, rather than securitizing framing, social security concerns are often constructed with words like 'challenge.' For example, in the 2020 Foreign Policy Poll, Greenlanders listed the primary challenges to their livelihoods as the economic situation, unemployment, living cost, and climate change rather than hard traditional security issues. Similarly, other issues around Greenland such as disease and maritime safety are used in Greenland documents but do not use security language.

This use of social security language and desecuritization is a hallmark of Greenlandic foreign policy both in its general approach and in the Arctic Council (Olesen, 2018; Rasmussen, 2019; Jacobsen, 2020; Fakhoury, 2023). This emphasis on social security may be a strategy to be ambiguous around how Greenland and Denmark share authority on topics that straddle the line between how they have defined competencies. Other scholars have similarly remarked that the Government of Greenland and Greenland's political parties also largely desecuritize Greenland's security, emphasizing economic and civil issues rather than defense and security (Gad et al., 2024). One example from Gad et al. (2024a) is the way in which the Government of Greenland played down security challenges related to US and Chinese controversies by emphasizing economic self-sustainability and drawing upon a peaceful Inuit identity to call for Greenland to be portrayed as a potential demilitarized zone. Others have argued that Greenland's priorities are autonomy and economic independence rather than more security, which leads to desecuritizing rhetoric and an emphasis on social issues and economic development. Since securitization would make their ultimate goal of independence more difficult, that strategy is not taken (Andrews et al., 2024).

Uranium is a particularly sensitive issue that touches social security, environmental issues, resource development and foreign policy and security. Uranium shows how limited Greenland's capacity as an independent actor is on the international stage. Denmark claims uranium as a security issue – giving it authority while Greenland claims that it is an environmental and economic issue, which would give it responsibility. Thus, many Danish documents do use security language when referring to the uranium issue while Greenlandic documents tend toward societal security discourse. While uranium is not exclusively an Arctic issue, it is a clear example of how these

sovereignty games between the two actors play out (Rasmussen & Merkelsen, 2017; Kristensen & Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2018).

Greenland's *Foreign, Security, and Defense Policy 2024-2033* also emphasizes low tension while recognizing increasing security risks in the Arctic. The strategy begins by asserting "Greenland and the Arctic is an area of low tension" (Naalakkersuisut, 2024, 7) and saying there should be no arms race even giving increased uncertainty. The strategy later states, "as an Arctic country, Greenland has a strong desire to maintain peace and low tension" (Naalakkersuisut, 2024, 41) with an emphasis on multilateral approaches. This call for peace is later reiterated with "We must not waver when it comes to peace" (Naalakkersuisut, 2024, 43) and "we are opposed to non-Arctic countries expanding their permanent military capabilities in the region" (Naalakkersuisut 2024, 43). By contrast, the strategy calls for an emphasis on civil preparedness, search and rescue and monitoring the seas. That said, the policy recognizes that Greenland is facing increasing threats from cyber-attacks and must shore up protection of its critical infrastructure (Naalakkersuisut, 2024, 41). Some scholars have suggested that with its recognition of increasing threats, this Greenlandic document is the most security-forward strategy from Greenland in history (Interviews). It is also worth mentioning it is only the second strategy of its kind. However, the continued prevalence of low-tension as a discursive framing mechanism to avoid risk continues to be front and center.

The Politics of Familiarity in Denmark and Greenland[14][15]

Given the emphasis on keeping Greenland a low-tension area, what is the role of experts? In a world often framed as structured by great power competition and phenomena such as climate change, the role of sub-national actors and specific individuals bears noting. Particularly in the context of unsettled spaces such as Greenland, we might expect that expertise would be increasingly sought after by states. However, the opposite is true. As in earlier chapters, it was difficult to ascertain the smoking gun of whether experts made a difference in how states narrated unsettledness. Instead, this analysis focuses on the knowledge ecosystem in which experts operate to show the difficulty of influencing policymakers. The role of experts in helping to narratively create low tension or their lack of insight into the policy process is particularly important if scholars seek to understand the extent to which their work has resonance, if at all. Most interviewees attained for this chapter were Danish individuals commenting on the state of Danish and to a lesser extent Greenlandic knowledge networks. Given that U.S. institutions rarely mentioned Greenland, my U.S.-based interviewees had little insight into the knowledge ecosystem.[16] Across the interviews, perhaps the most common theme was the small state nature of Denmark and the even smaller environment of Greenland. Being a small state has huge influence on how experts move within it. For example, there are only around 20 people in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs office for Arctic and North American issues. Further, these 20 people are responsible for Arctic issues, intra-Kingdom dynamics between Greenland and the Faroe Islands, and bilateral relationships with

[14] As there were no US experts that solely focused on Greenland and the general lack of Greenland in US strategic documents, I opted to leave out their role in the analysis of expertise

[15] This section largely is sourced from interviews from both government actors as well as Danish experts conducted while in Copenhagen for fieldwork.

[16] The US experts who I did speak to largely considered the role of the Polar Institute, a Congress-funded and appointed think tank based in DC as an example of how experts' interface with government. They often raised questions of 'selling an Arctic vision' and described their task as largely building teams, community, and raising political will through a competition of ideas. In contrast to many other interviewees from Denmark, their strategies were framed as rhetorical in nature, emphasizing body language, rhetoric, and storytelling.

the United States and Canada. This smallness also means that the critical mass for agreement is also much smaller, and knowledge and policy creation happen more often in corridors and over coffee than in formal settings. As one expert described, in many cases both experts and the ministry officials experience the feeling of "butter spread over too much bread." This limited time often means that ministries spend their time putting out fires and don't have time for longer-term strategic thinking. One instance of this was when asked why a second key expert-driven report on Danish security – 'Dansk sikkerhed og forsvar frem mod 2035' – did not occur, the answers emphasized a lack of resources and time on behalf of the ministries. This smallness also creates a politics of familiarity and informality, meaning that people have often known each other for a long time. In Greenland, this sense of smallness is even more acute; according some interviewees, when you walk on the street "you always meet someone you know," which can lead to a loss of critical perspective on particular policies.

On a state level, informality is an important characteristic of Denmark as it allows flexibility in their policies. This means there are only a few, rarely used institutional places where formal expert-government interactions happen. On an individual level, informality implies that back-channel communications and relationships are how decisions are made. While most interviewees agreed there was not a tradition of expert-government interaction, a small community of Arctic security researchers and institutional relationships have created consistent, iterative interactions with policymakers. These interactions have been ongoing for a long time, in some cases for 10+ years where individuals studied together and now have been working together for many years. These personal relationships matter. Because many individuals have known each other so long they are motivated for reputational and personal reasons to maintain a good

relationship. In short, relationships matter, and long-standing relationships seem to drive individuals to behave more constructively with another and talk about matters of Arctic security not only in formalized settings such as workshops but also in hallways and during coffee breaks – creating an environment where policy and ideas are created in settings we might not expect. It is these relationships that drive friendly interactions rather than the lack of opportunities for formal interaction.

Because Denmark's civil service is professionalized, individuals do not come and go with different party victories but rather often stay in an office for a long time. This professionalization leads to less turnover in key staff positions in the ministries which in turn helps to create a more solidified knowledge base of the practice of Arctic diplomacy. These ministerial employees thus gather more knowledge about the region over time as well as create relationships with outside experts at conferences and in their day-to-day working life. Such relationships again lead to a close-knit community of individuals and create a practice of Arctic security that extends both in the ministries as well as to the other institutional research environment locales.

The institutional research environment is a second good example of how, although most interviewees suggested that there wasn't a tradition of expert-government interaction, there is a long-standing institutional relationship between organizations like the Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC), the Danish Institute of International Studies (DIIS), and the Centre for Military Studies (CMS) at the University of Copenhagen – all of which have mandates to give advice to the Danish ministries on slightly different levels. The RDDC is technically part of the Ministry of Defence officially under the Defence Command, however, interviewees disagreed whether they

were purely inside-government-actors or outside. This hybrid ambiguous position comes from the fact that while the RDDC is technically an educational facility for military service officers, it is an also important independent knowledge broker inside the government that additionally has a mandate advise the Ministry of Defense and Defense Command. Beyond just teaching military officers, it provides courses to civil servants on issues such as Arctic social security. By contrast, DIIS is an independent, outside-of-government actor but is also funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a similar mandate to give advice. While the ministry and DIIS negotiate what projects they work on, additional independent research is encouraged, and DIIS remains arm's length from the state. In short, while the ministry may be allowed to ask the question, "they get what they get" in terms of the research answers (Interview). The final important institution is CMS, which is an independent academic body within the University of Copenhagen that exists to provide knowledge for decision makers they might not otherwise get within the government. CMS also has an arms-length policy from the government and produces independent research but given that most of their funding is from the Ministry of Defence, the projects they work on come from the Ministry.

Individuals within these institutions have been involved with decision-makers through giving advice, recommendations, being part of roundtables and panels, informal consultations, and briefings, with the aim of helping policymakers digest research for policy relevant conclusions. While some described the benefits of reaching out to media, it appeared to be an individual choice rather than the norm. Many interviewees articulated when and how their work was read and used by decision-makers. That said, government actors had difficulty identifying specific examples, instead agreeing that experts were very influential. However, when prompted, an interviewee from

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs listed at least five experts in the Danish research ecosystem by name and stated that they reached out to experts on issues such as the upcoming Danish chairship of the Arctic Council on an ad-hoc basis. Similarly, the Ministry of Defense also reached out when relevant, such as in 2019 when the Ministry of Defense gave the RDDC an order to set up a Center for Arctic Security Studies in response to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's 2019 Arctic Council speech calling the Arctic a theatre of great power competition and the US's attempt to buy Greenland.

While some experts pointed to specific conferences such as the North American Arctic Security Workshop organized by a group of organizations including the University of Greenland's Nasiffik Center, others pointed to the influential Zilmer Report. The 2022 Zilmer Report was a report commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized by Michel Zilmer-Johns, a former Danish diplomat and civil servant who served as Permanent Representative of Denmark to NATO, the Chief of Protocol, and the State Secretary for Foreign and European Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. One interviewee referred to Zilmer-Johns as the closest thing Denmark has to a National Security Advisor. When Zilmer was mandated in 2020 to write a report analyzing the security situation for Denmark, he reached out to 75 experts to help to produce background papers then discuss the challenges facing Denmark in 2035. Almost every interviewee mentioned the Zilmer Report as a good example of when experts from many different institutions collaborated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with many articulating it was widely read by ministers and media outlets alike. Moreover, verbatim language was taken from background papers and directly imported into the final version of the report. Another example is a 2017 CMS Report in which specific recommendations were taken by the ministries, and other experts pointed

out particular reports in which verbatim language was similarly used to inform policy. Outside these specific examples, given the nature of DIIS's, CMS's, and the RDDC's mandate, all produce commissioned policy-relevant work for Denmark's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence. Even if reports are not fully read, both experts and government actors suggested that abstracts were often read and the reports acted as a legitimacy card that sometimes could lead to increasing consultations and workshops. Importantly, even while some were able to list specific examples when they felt their work was used, others pointed to moments where they felt as though the policy was already pre-determined and the ministry would only reach out for expert legitimacy rather than actually seeking clarity.

Though there were many direct examples when recommendations were adopted or verbatim language was re-used in government strategies, experts face specific constraints when it comes to Greenland as a policy area. As stated above, time is a serious constraint for experts and ministries but particularly those at the RDDC, who have significant teaching responsibilities. Moreover, actors in the RDDC also fact constraints as they are perceived as government representatives and thus must be cautious about what they state in the media. Terminology and lingo also play a role. For example, whether an expert uses the Danish or the Greenlandic term for minister in reference to a Greenlandic official can cause upset. Existing in this liminal environment between policy and expertise also comes with tension. There are clearly products that serve those wishing to have a career in academia such a peer reviewed publications as wells as outside grants and those products that serve policy-focused experts such as a reputation working with ministries on non-attributable work. Navigating this space – particularly for those who have not decided on a purely academic or policy route – is inherently a challenge.

That said, there are strategies that both experts and government actors suggest for those seeking to work with decision-makers. First, government actors recommend ignoring theory and the ivory tower. Instead, they advise focusing on what ministries actually need, policy implementation, and interpersonal relationships. Second, some say that experts should avoid becoming a political actor and that by doing so, you can inherently build a reputation of objectivity in research. Third, institutional reputation is a calling card in Denmark and Greenland. When one has a key affiliation to RDDC, DIIS, CMS, or the University of Copenhagen, it can come with an 'in' to circles that is otherwise difficult to obtain. In short, the politics of familiarity and informality is a central part of how Danish experts interact with the ministries both through mandated institutional relationships and long-standing personal relationships that play central roles in how individuals interact with one another.

Conclusion

This chapter uses the case of Greenland to explore how different actors surrounding this unsettled space – the U.S., Denmark, and Greenland – maintain their policies over time, unpacking three possible explanations and finding instead, that policy continuity through low-tension discourse can be attributed to a broader risk avoidance strategy. Greenland's narration is highly contingent on changing global geopolitics. While Greenland itself is not often framed as an object under threat, it is often referenced when describing U.S.-China rivalry in the Arctic and how this may impact Danish interests. The vast majority of U.S. documents do not mention Greenland at all, illustrating that it is not a central issue for American policymakers, but rather is illustrative of episodic American interest in this unsettled space – only reemerging when global geopolitical

concerns come up. This is telling as it shows that great powers, rather than trying to promote hegemony everywhere, do not directly address these unsettled areas unless they come to their attention from larger dynamics of geopolitics. Across the document analysis, Greenland is framed in a variety of different ways including a recognition that Greenland's actorness is changing on the world stage – particularly relevant since the 2009 Self-Government Act as well as a tool of great power rivalry. However, importantly, there is a general lack of securitizing language – showing that in unsettled spaces, states seek general risk avoidance strategies. Although there are limited examples of Greenland being under threat from climate change and great power competition, the overall discourse frames Greenland as a space that exists in a low-tension environment.

This norm of low-tension – which has been long-standing across the Cold War to now – has been changing since 2022. While there are limited documents published since then, the Danish Security and Intelligence Service has released a few reports that do highlight some securitizing language around Greenland, and Greenlandic documents reiterate some security discourse. Within the Danish ministries, there are differences between how the Ministry of Defense and Foreign Affairs promote different narratives of low-tension. One important caveat is that the documents under analysis were public-facing, and thus a detailed analysis of intra-realm practice may find a different set of findings. The question of the role of Danish experts in influencing how Denmark maintains its policy around Greenland is bound up with questions of familiarity and structural relationships between different actors in Denmark. Because of Denmark's status as a small state, many individuals working in this space know one another well, situating how foreign and domestic policy occurs. Though there may not be a governmental tradition of reaching out to experts, the

close-knit community of Arctic security researchers who study Greenland almost mitigates this need as most attend the same conferences, and their institutions interact closely with one another. Here, Greenland's unsettledness is impacted heavily by geopolitical happenings yet discourse on Greenland is largely structured in a low-tension framing and the familiarity that experts and policymakers share with one another means that they play an important role, if one that is not easy to untangle.

CHAPTER 7. MARITIME SHIPPING LANES IN THE ARCTIC

Introduction

There are many maritime spaces in the Arctic where overlapping and competing conceptions of security are at play. Such spaces include maritime choke points, fisheries access, boundary disputes, and the legal status of transnational shipping routes (Østhagen & Schofield, 2021). This chapter focuses on shipping routes because they have a particular unsettled character due to the fact that their physical characteristics are in flux. Sea ice shifts every year making routes more passable during some parts of the year than others – meaning that states surrounding them must also behave and narrate the space in constantly changing ways. While there are norms and rules around these routes, the norms differ depending on which state you ask, and the practices surrounding them continue to be unresolved. In short, maritime shipping lanes have the highest degree of unsettledness out of the three cases in this dissertation. Both the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and the Northwest Passage (NWP) also rely on different legal interpretations of internal waters vs. an international strait (Lackenbauer & Sergunin, 2022). The Russian and Canadian governments claim the NSR and NWP as internal waters, respectively, meaning that both claim the right to govern access to the waters by foreign ships – although the actual legal rationale is quite different for each. By contrast, the United States and other states see these straits as international, meaning foreign ships have a right of peaceful transit (Lalonde, 2023).

This chapter briefly outlines a background on the NSR and the NWP I then outline the findings for both cases. I find that Russian policy on the NSR is not reactive to changes in global security, apart from exceptions in 2022 and 2023. Rather than finding security language, I find that

desecuritization is the norm for Russian public-facing documents that reference the NSR as part of a risk avoidance strategy. Limited interviews with Russian experts suggested that the community of social science experts who study the Arctic are kept quite far from decisionmakers, while the hard sciences are more incorporated into how regulations are adopted. In short, even a state like Russia that understands itself in opposition to many other states in the international system is still incentivized to find areas of cooperation in this unsettled space. It also seeks to avoid conflating the NSR with global geopolitics and thus avoid security discourse, and holds tightly onto the reins of expertise. For the NWP, I find that it is also not reactive to changes in global security, but does react to the policy of the United States. While there are examples of security language that reference a sovereignty crisis that involves the potential internationalization of the NWP, the norm remains desecuritization for Canadian public policy as part of an approach meant to avert potential risks with the United States. My interviews with experts also offered key insights into why it is difficult for Canadian experts to have a role in policy surrounding the NWP, significant constraints they face, and some notable examples of influence and strategies that may have lessons for all experts. Again, rather than being marked by disorder, this highly unsettled space is actually marked by Canada seeking to create order through the above practices. To explain these findings, I use discourse analysis on key documents as well as 21 interviews with Canadian Arctic and maritime scholars, Canadian civil servants, an American policy-adjacent scholar, and two Russian scholars.

The texts under analysis are listed in full in the Appendix 3 and consist of security and foreign policy documents surrounding both the Northern Sea Route and the Northwest Passage from the Russian and Canadian cases, respectively. For the Russian case, I collected policies in

reference to the Arctic region at large such as development strategies and Arctic strategies, specific policies on the Northern Sea Route, and overarching foreign and security policies from 1999 to present. As there is no specific policy governing the NWP, I relied upon specific Arctic policies, fishing, and maritime strategies that dealt with the route and secondary sources that collated Canadian Arctic documents. When texts were not in English, I translated them using DeepL and, when possible, read them in Russian.[17]

The Northern Sea Route (NSR) is a series of shipping lanes that stretch from Novaya Zemyla to the Bering Strait covering around 2200-2900 nautical miles. There is not one set channel, but rather a route that goes through the Kara, Laptev, East Siberian, and Chukchi Seas that connects the Pacific and the Atlantic (Brigham et al., 1999). The NSR is not set because the ice conditions change from year to year and its shallowness, harsh ice, and climate conditions make it difficult to navigate. Russia's legal justification for claiming the NSR as internal waters is three-fold. First, Russia claims sovereignty over the enter sector of the Arctic extending from Russian territory to the North Pole based on the Soviet sectoral approach to the Arctic. Second, Russia has drawn straight baselines around the islands in the Kara, Laptev, and East Siberian Seas to enclose the NSR in internal waters, covering large sea regions. Third, Russia argues that the ice conditions of the NSR make the route subject to Article 234 of the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), allowing coastal states to regulate navigate in ice-covered waters for environmental protection. However, the U.S. and other Western nations dispute this claim and consider the NSR an international strait, which would give all foreign ships transit passage rights.

[17] For Russian documents, I read the English translation and for relevant sections, read them again in Russian to ensure that the meaning was translated properly.

During the Cold War, the NSR was hugely important to Soviet security (Nieminen, 1991; Østreng, 1999). In the 1980s, more than 400 Soviet ships annually were active in the passage primarily as a key interconnected transport system for northern Russia. Not only was the route imperative for economic reasons it was also essential for Russia's rear deployment strategy in the placement of key strategic naval forces such as nuclear submarines in the 1970s and 1980s north of the GIUK gap. The hegemonic dynamic of the Cold War was such that civilian issues such as research, resource exploitation and economic benefits were all subsumed under strategic and security interests (Brigham et al., 1999). Gorbachev's 1987 speech rhetorically 'opened' the NSR but in practice, the route stagnated for most of the 1990s because of the internal Russian economic crisis, revelations of radioactive dumping in the Arctic, and changing Russian security policy of the time. Since the 1990s, Russian regulation around the NSR has been relatively piecemeal. While legislation comes from different ministries, over time, the legislation has mandated increasingly higher navigation standards (Cheng & Barltrop, 2019). Three actors have been the most relevant since the 1990s: 1) the Russian Ministry of Transport, 2) the Northern Sea Route Administration, and 3) the Marine Administration of individual ports on the route. Since 2018, NSR policy has been divided between two actors: the Rosatom State Nuclear Energy Corporation and the Russian Ministry of Transport. While the Ministry of Transport handles navigation, regulations, and international cooperation with the Polar Code and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), Rosatom, a Russian state corporation specializing in nuclear energy, handles the infrastructure operational level such as port infrastructure and icebreakers (Rosatom, 2024).

In 2013, the Russian NSR strategy was geared more towards internationalization, but by 2020 strategies had shifted toward domestic natural resource extraction. However, since 2022,

Russia passed a new law regulating the navigation of foreign warships in December 2022 (Todorov, 2023). Some argue the NSR is essential for Russia to re-establish itself as a great power through a more traditional security lens but that economic development is also important, raising the question of whether economic or traditional security conceptions overlap in interesting ways (Sergunin & Gjørv, 2020). In other words, how do narratives interact with one another, specifically 1) the NSR as key for economic and food security for the Russian Arctic, 2) the NSR as a route for Western attack on Russia, and 3) the NSR as addressing civilian defense and environmental issues. In today's geopolitical competition, China has also expressed how key the NSR is for its interests in the region (Xing & Bertelsen, 2013; Lanteigne, 2015; 2019; Centre for High North Logistics, 2024). Climate change is also presenting challenges and opportunities for Russia's policies around the NSR. As sea ice conditions change, the NSR is ice-free for longer periods in some years, opening opportunities for increased shipping. However, this dynamic is not linear. Further, even though the NSR is becoming more navigable, extreme weather conditions brought on by climate change remain a serious challenge. Moreover, rising temperatures in the Russian Arctic are damaging Russian Arctic ports, pipelines, and roads. These changes are leading Russia to invest more heavily in the NSR as an economic asset, and seek to use it as a policy area over which to cooperate with China.

The Northwest Passage (NWP) also has no set route but has a high degree of variation due to geography. The route has not been fully hydrographically charted, but its depth is irregular as too is the thickness of sea ice (Griffiths, 1987). Canada's legal justification for claiming that the NWP is internal waters has three facets. First, Canada argues that the NWP has historically been under Canadian control, using the Inuit as evidence of continuous occupation of the waters for

centuries. This falls within the historic water doctrine, which suggests that states can claim a waterway as internal if they can demonstrate long-standing, continuous, and effective control over the area. Second, Canada argues that the NWP is part of the internal waters of the Arctic Archipelago. In 1985, Canada formally enclosed the Arctic Archipelago using straight baselines – which by default covers the entrance to the NWP. Third, Canada suggests that there are environmental and security considerations that require the NWP to be considered internal waters. However, neighboring states including the U.S. do not accept this claim of internal waters. The U.S. considers the NWP an international straight where foreign vessels including warships have the right to transit the passage under international law.

Canada has long considered itself a maritime country with many vital interests encompassing marine transportation and trade, protection of the ocean environment, resource development, marine science and technology, and security and sovereignty (Crickard, 1995; Lackenbauer & Greaves, 2021). Canada's primary interest in the NWP emerged in the late 1960s when oil was discovered in Prudhoe Bay, Alaska (Franckx, 1993; Solski, 2021). Disagreements on the legal status of the NWP between the US and Canada are longstanding. The unauthorized passage through the NWP of the USS Manhattan in 1969 and the USCG Polar Sea in 1985 led to the eventual passage of the Arctic Waters Pollution Protection Act (AWPPA) and the Territorial Sea and Fishing Zone (Huebert, 2011; Exner-Pirot & Huebert, 2020). Canada used the AWPPA to assert its right to regulate shipping, which it then lobbied to successfully include in Article 234 of the 1982 UNCLOS convention (Lackenbauer et al., 2020). The law passed in 1970 also amended the Territorial Sea and Fishing Zone Act to authorize the establishment of new fishing zones, giving Canada to capacity to set up control zones and close the entrance to the NWP over

conservation concerns. Both the 1969 and 1985 U.S. passages through the NWP also led to increased rhetoric around defense and Canadian Arctic identity (Elliot-Meisel, 1999). In 1969, the USS Manhattan, an American oil tanker navigated the NWP as an experimental journey to see whether the route could be used as a passage for Alaskan oil. The U.S. did not request Canadian permission, leading to then Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to announce new anti-pollution laws, which asserted Canadian claims to regulate Arctic waters to protect the environment. The crisis was defused when Canada granted an icebreaker escort for the USS Manhattan. This incident led to the passage of the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act (AWPPA) in 1970, claiming jurisdiction over 100 nautical miles from its Arctic coastline. While the U.S. did not recognize Canada's claim, Alaskan oil companies concluded that the route wasn't viable, leading to the crisis to fade into the background. In 1985, the USCGC Polar Sea, a U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker crossed the NWP as part of a scientific and navigation mission without seeking permission. While the U.S. notified Canada in advance, they did not seek consent for the passage. In response, Canadian policy was set with Joe Clark's speech in 1985 announcing that Canada would draw baselines around the outer edge of the Arctic Archipelago, de facto claiming all waters within as Canadian internal waters. Although some tensions have arisen around these more traditional security logics of sovereignty defense, the United States and Canada have largely agreed to disagree (Lackenbauer et al., 2020). In addition, there have always been some traditional security concerns about both the passage of American submarines in the NWP – although Canada would always allow them – as well as Soviet submarines during the Cold War. Today, such concerns are less notable but instead new threats have emerged such as illegal immigration and terrorist groups accessing Canada through the NWP (Pharand, 2006). As with the NSR, the NWP is also significantly impacted by climate change. Similarly to the NSR, the NWP is also

experiencing longer ice-free periods per year. While certainly not on the scale of the NSR, the NWP is also experiencing increased commercial shipping. Further, rising temperatures are leading to melting permafrost and disruptions to the human security of those living in the Canadian Arctic. While Canada has not changed its policy towards the NWP in response to these climatic changes, there is recognition that Canada must clarify and strengthen its governance mechanisms around the NWP to account for environmental challenges.

Both cases are impacted by climate change as a driver for increased maritime traffic (Sharp, 2011; Bevenridge et al., 2015). Because both passages are narrated as being more accessible to vessels, their legal statuses seem to be under more contention (Byers & Lalonde, 2009; The North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network, 2020). Increasing accessibility leads to increased economic interest for cruise ship tourism and natural resource projects, both of which have varying interpretations of threats, risks, and opportunities from a vastly increasing number of interested stakeholders (Stewart et al., 2015). Beyond economic and climate security drivers, there is also a traditional security understanding that takes into account Chinese interest in the Arctic and possible Sino-Russian collaboration over the NSR (Sukhankin, 2021; Gricius, 2021).

The Northern Sea Route (NSR) and Russia

Figure 3: Northern Sea Route. Source: Arctic Portal.

As a state often defined as a challenger to the international system, one might expect that Russia would be very reactive to changes in the international system in how it frames the NSR, and that most concerns would be framed in the language of national security or at the least use securitizing rhetoric to protect this key area from outside interference. However, this is far from the reality. In fact, Russian national policies and documents rarely reference the NSR.[18] When they

[18] Most documents under analysis did not mention the NSR such as the 1993 On the State Border of the Russian Federation, the 1995 On the Continental Shelf of the Russian Federation, the 1998 *On International Sea Waters, Territorial Sea, and Contiguous Zone of the Russian Federation*, the 1993 Foreign Policy Statement, the 1997 National Security Concept, the 2000 National Security Concept, the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept, the 2009

do, Russian frames of the shipping lane prioritize how it is central to Russia's economic future as a national transport line while also prioritizing infrastructure. Infrastructure can refer to the modernization and construction of terminals, icebreaker modernization, and shipping. By contrast, there is little to no reference to the NSR being under threat and limited instances where Russia felt as though the US and its allies wish to weaken Russian control – and these instances only occur after 2017. Thus, desecuritization is the norm with Russia emphasizing the rules of shipping in the NSR, environmental issue, and infrastructure rather than national security. These discursive practices illustrate that even in this heightened degree of unsettledness, Russia seeks to create a stronger degree of intersubjective desecuritizing understanding through avoiding security discourse and mentions to the international security environment. In short, the NSR is highly important for Russia and thus avoiding possible risks and costs that could come with militarization leads to a desecuritizing narrative.

This desecuritizing language suggests a variety of different implications. For example, this emphasis on rules and lack of security language ostensibly imply that we can take Russia at its word that it is modernizing infrastructure due to interest in developing the NSR as an international shipping route. Such an explanation would imply that Russia values the NSR as an economic route. If there is no perceived threat, then it makes little sense for Russia to securitize the route. Alternatively, we could understand desecuritizing and legal language act as obfuscation for Russia to deny its militarization of the region (Buchanan, 2023). Much scholarship on Russian Arctic strategy describes its behavior as dual-use, inherently taking into consideration national security but often building capabilities behind a smokescreen of economic development (Buchanan, 2023).

National Security Strategy, the 2010 Military Doctrine, the 2014 Military Doctrine, or the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept.

From the perspective of an American or Western security mindset, any Russian buildup in the Arctic is read through the lens of the security dilemma, leading countries to respond to a perceived Russian military threat (Atland, 2014; Byers & Covey, 2019).

Discourse Analysis Findings

A Lack of Connection to Global Security

There is little evidence that shows that Russian NSR policy changes across time surrounding key moments in its history such as the end of the Cold War, the invasion of Ukraine in 2014, or such as the Russian flag planting in 2007. The only large shift to Russian NSR policy occurs in 2022 and 2023 when language shifts regarding import dependency and concerns about hybrid threats. For example, in two separate 2022 updates (first on 28 June 2022 and second on 5 December 2022), regulations first stipulated that all foreign-flagged ships in the NSR must comply with Russian legislation regarding navigation and satellite communications, ships must have Russian pilotage, and give a 90-day notice of transit. Further, such regulations no longer just apply to foreign warships but also state-owned non-commercial vessels and all vessels flying the flags of foreign ships (Federal Law 155-FZ, 1998; Federal Law No 510-FZ, 2022). This points to heightened concerns about how other states – particularly the United States – might seek to use loopholes in the Russia's NSR regulations to get close to Russia's border, particularly introducing a restriction that no more than one foreign warship could pass through the NSR at once (Todorov, 2023). Moreover, Russia's 2022 Maritime Doctrine also references efforts by states to weaken Russia's control over the NSR as a threat to its security (Russian Ministry of Transport, 2022, 7).

In Russia's update to its *Foundations of the Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic for the Period up to 2035* (updated 21 February 2023, 5), there is updated language that references the importance of import independence for shipbuilding, specifically "ensuring the import independency of the shipbuilding complex, developing and modernizing shipbuilding and ship repair facilities' capabilities for construction and maintenance of vessels navigating the waters of the Northern Sea Route." Such language again captures a shift towards how the NSR is being constructed by Russia.

Consistency in Russian NSR Policy

What marks Russian NSR policy is the consistency in its language describing the importance of the NSR to Russia's economic future, and a focus on infrastructure. As early as 1998, the *On International Sea Waters, Territorial Sea, and Contiguous Zone of the Russian Federation* document took into account the security and defense of the Russian Federation while drawing attention to the preservation and conservation of the marine environment. Further, the policy emphasizes how the NSR is a historically established nationally unified transport corridor – marking its centrality for Russian policy in the years moving forward. By 2001, Russia's *Basic Principles of the Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic* also highlighted the importance of the NSR for Russia's economic future. The 2001 Russian *Marine Policy* confirms this – describing the NSR as important for Russia's sustainable development. Russia's 2008 *Basic Principles of the Russian Federation's State Policy in the Arctic* similarly outlines the importance of modernizing infrastructure including ports on the NSR and preserving it as a single national transport highway.

Russia's 2013 *Foreign Policy Concept* repeats the refrain that the NSR is Russia's national transportation line in the Arctic but uses language that frames international shipping as being "of great importance to the region." The 2013 *On the Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and National Security for the Period to 2020* also emphasizes the importance of modernizing the NSR's infrastructure and the NSR as a "national sea highway." The 2015 *Maritime Doctrine* uses much the same language, describing how the NSR is Russia's national sea line. The 2019 *Maritime Strategy* similarly describes infrastructure modernization of the NSR as essential and underscores the problem of insufficient navigational and hydrographic support in the passage. By 2020 in Russia's *Basic Principles of Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic,* the NSR continues to be described as a "competitive national transportation passage." Particular focus is again drawn to infrastructure modernization, icebreakers, and seaport modernization. The lack of infrastructure – particularly for communications – is described as a risk in the 2020 *On the Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and National Security*. Even as late as the 2022 *Maritime Doctrine,* the NSR is primarily described as a national transportation passage that is key for national sea lines of communications and competitive for international use. The two documents that point the most to this emphasis on infrastructure development and ambitions for the NSR to be a competitive international shipping route are the 2019 and 2022 Development Plans for the Northern Sea Route (Russian Federation, 2022). These documents again emphasize the centrality of port infrastructure developments, safety and navigation capacity, icebreaker construction, and stimulating increased international transit of the route (Vasiliev, 2021). While we might not anticipate outside factors such as geopolitical tensions to be visible documents such as these, the increased importance of the NSR for Russia is particularly clear within them. Both strategies outlet a three-step plan for developing the NSR. The

first stage from 2019-2024 focuses on developing the western portion of the NSR; the second covers organizing year-round shipping from 2025-2030 and the final stage is the creation of a competitive international and national transport corridor from 2030-2035 (Arctic Way). These two documents were recently supplanted by a 2023 update calling for even higher increases in cargo ship traffic and an emphasis on resource extraction (Russian Federation, 2023). Today, experts have argued that the NSR is the epicenter of policy for Russia, not just in the Arctic but from a national perspective. Such consistency suggests that Russia aims to create order in this case of heightened unsettledness and seeks to avoid future risks through the maintenance of a desecuritizing narrative.

A Lack of Security Language Paired with Desecuritization

Although rare, concerns about security do emerge, although there are none in which the NSR itself is under threat. Language revolving around threat occurred in four instances across the documents under analysis. First, as mentioned above, in the 2017 *Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Operations,* there is concern framed around how the US and its allies had goals to "weaken its [Russia's] control over the Northern Sea Route." This same framing and language were used in a Russian Ministry of Defense document, referenced in a Kommersant article that described how foreign states wanted to put pressure on Russia to weaken its control over the Northern Sea Route. Second, Russia's 2022 *Maritime Doctrine* uses similar language to describe threats to the Arctic including "efforts by a number of states to weaken Russian control over the Northern Sea Route." Third, as above, Russia's update to its *Foundations of the Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic for the Period up to 2035* (updated 21 February 2023) references a change towards moving their shipbuilding industry towards one that is import

independence, and thus able to withstand sanctions. In Russia's 2023 *Foreign Policy Concept,* there is also reference to Russia's need to "counteract the unfriendly states' policy aimed at the militarization of the region and limiting Russia's ability to exercise its sovereign rights in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation."

By contrast, the lack of security language and even desecuritizing rhetoric across the rest of the documents was notable. Most documents describe the rules of shipping, the rules of ice pilotage, pollution and infrastructure rather than securitize the NSR. While there is a sense from experts that there are two competing narratives regarding the NSR within Russia, they are not clear in public-facing documents. Interviewees suggested that there is a civil narrative that emphasizes the NSR as a resource base and a military narrative that emphasizes the NSR as a potential site of military buildup and threat. However, even in 1998, Russia's Federal Law No. 155 FZ 'On the Internal Maritime Waters, Territorial Sea, and Contiguous Zone of the Russian Federation' described Russia's behavior as "tak[ing] place in conformity with generally accepted regulations and norms of international law." This language is again used in the 2012 *The Federal Law of Shipping on the Water Area of the Northern Sea Route* policy*,* when describing how Russia creates NSR policy, specifically adding the phrase "…applied with a view of ensuring safety of navigation and prevention, reduction and monitoring pollution of the marine environment from vessels." This emphasis on environmental protection rather than national security is a consistency in Russian NSR policy. It is also seen in the 2013 *Rules of Navigation in the Water Area of the Northern Sea Route,* that describes policy, specifically ice pilotage of ships, as done "to ensure safety of navigation of ships … as well as the protection of the marine environment in the waters of the Northern Sea Route." Such language is repeated in the 2020 NSR *Rules of Navigation* document.

As late as 2020, Russia's *Basic Principles* policy does not draw upon national security concerns but rather frames the NSR in regard to infrastructure modernization and concern about oil spills. Further, even with some security language as above, the 2023 *Foreign Policy Concept* highlights the importance of "peacefully resolving international issues" in the Arctic while being unambiguous about its claim to the NSR, describing the "unalterability of the historically established international legal regime of the inland maritime waters of the Russian Federation" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023). This desecuritizing narrative does important work in helping Russia avoid future militarizing risks that could come with securitization.

What is the Role of Experts?

The role of experts in NSR policy is difficult to ascertain, particularly given the lack of access to Russian experts in a post-February 2022 world. There is little possibility to interface with Russian experts due to concerns about their safety, however, when possible, I communicated with individuals who provided insight into the academic-policy ecosystem. Literature on the Russian national government suggests there are high restrictions on experts' ability to interface with the Russian government (Sungurov, 2019; Graef, 2023). This was confirmed in interviews where interviewees agreed that there is a clear separation of academia from government, particularly in the social science sector. By contrast, natural scientists do work directly with government agencies in some cases having to do with daily ice monitoring mechanisms and working with the Hydrometeorological Centre of Russia and the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute.

In short, academics have no access to policymakers and experts cannot simply speak to people within the Russian state. This is not to say that there are not indirect routes. For example, the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies may sometimes ask experts for analytical reports. The Valdai Club offers an outlet for experts to write policy memos and essays in a think tank like fashion. Third is the Russian International Affairs Council, which is directly linked to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Even with these avenues of publishing more policy-relevant work, however, interviewees acknowledged that it was hard to say what was used, if at all. Thus, the separation between expertise and government is quite large in Russia, a norm that originates from the Soviet tradition of separating academia from the party. Given the importance of the NSR to Russia's national interests, it is unlikely that outside expertise – particularly social scientists – would be taken into account.

The Northwest Passage (NWP) and Canada

Figure 4: Northwest Passage. Source: Arctic Portal

Canada's proximity and close partnership with the United States significantly conditions how it both reacts to global insecurities and uses security rhetoric. However, rather than being

reactive to *global* insecurity issues, Canada is reactive but very "low key" to how the US behaves regarding the NWP, particularly given the 1969 Manhattan and 1985 Polar Sea passages (Interview). This low-key and soft approach is a hallmark of Canadian foreign policy, meaning that it is non-confrontational and focused on building a cooperative strategy to avoid future risks (Interview). That said, some key Canadian documents do not mention the NWP at all, including the 1994 White Paper on Defence and the 1970 Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act. When the NWP does emerge, it is often framed around three themes and frames: 1) the historic claim to the passage, 2) the need for presence, and 3) the sovereignty crisis. These framings, while consistent across the documents, come with the caveat that there are many different variables that impact how Canada makes policy around the NWP including shipping, Inuit interests, the Law of the Sea, and oil pollution and other environmental concerns. In short, there are different projections and understanding of the space that make it unsettled. More recently, although the NWP hasn't been in the headlines, there has been a rise in Inuit voices calling for more Inuit representation and voice in what comes next for the Passage (Inuit Tapiriit Kantami, 2018). Importantly, the security conversation includes many different types of security such as human security (Inuit Tapiriit Kantami, 2018).

Similar to the Russian policy around the NSR, Canada mostly desecuritizes the NWP, apart from some key moments. There was significant ambiguity around Canadian NWP policy in the early years of the Cold War due to concern about tensions with the United States. However, this changed after 1985 due to increasing outcry about the Polar Sea passage. Since then, Canada's policy has been very clear but desecuritized in how it is conveyed publicly particularly in reference to its relationship with the United States. When Canada does use security language, it largely

revolves around Canada' needing to exercise its presence in the NWP and the necessity for increased surveillance. This language was particularly prevalent during the Harper government and exists more as political rhetoric rather than the policy. Such rhetoric largely has to do with the Canadian Conservative Party appealing to its base rather than any overt changes in NWP policy.

Discourse Analysis Findings

Historic Claims, Presence, and Sovereignty

The NWP is framed in three separate ways across the documents under analysis. First, one of the most common framings is that of a historic claim (Tsiouvalas & Solski, 2023). Many documents from the Harper Government including the Northern Strategy draw attention to how the historic use of the NWP by Inuit forms the basis for Canadian claims to the strait. For example, the 2009 *Northern Strategy* directly references the "long established record of Inuit use" and the Franklin Expedition that solidified Canadian claim. This framing is not surprising, given that Canadian policy has long been functional – building up its claim through consistent statements and administrative rhetoric but no full legislation (Lajeunesse, 2018). Second, the NWP is also correlated with the concept of presence. Different Canadian governments, both Liberal and Conservative, clearly see it as hugely important to maintain presence in the NWP to reinforce Canadian sovereignty. For example, in 1985 then Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark said: "We must come up to speed in a range of marine operations that bear on our capacity to exercise effective control over the Northwest Passage and our other Arctic waters" (Clark, 1987). Such a sentiment is reiterated in 2006 in Canada's *Managing Turmoil,* where the phrase "Canada must continue to have a presence in the Arctic to maintain its strong position" is direct and clear about this need for presence (Government of Canada, 2006). Presence is also referenced in a 2008

Coast Guard report as well as the 2019 *Arctic Northern Policy Framework*. Such language likely emerges over time in response to steadily increasing interest in shipping in the region, although all Canadian documents highlight that although shipping may be more accessible, it is not a linear process of the NWP opening up due to melting ice. Third, language around a sovereignty crisis occurs across all Canadian documents. Although most government documents emphasize that there is no crisis surrounding the actual legal sovereignty, they refer to incidents that may threaten it in the future. (Clark, 1985). For example, the 1969 Manhattan passage, the 1985 Polar Sea passage, and the changing climate all increase the likelihood that Canadian sovereignty needs to be shored up in the wake of potential challenges through presence and surveillance. This sovereignty language is by no means overtly securitizing, because any state needs to be able to see that Canada is demonstrating the NWP is Canadian territory

Another collection of actors who play an important role in framing the NWP is Indigenous peoples in the Canadian Arctic, in which half of the Canadian Inuit live. Their voices tend to focus much more on the changes that climate change is bringing to the NWP and the necessity that their voices should be brought into every discussion on the region as key stakeholders (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2018). While we should not conflate all Indigenous voices on this issue into one, many Indigenous writers focus on the importance on including Indigenous voices on the future of the passage and reinforce the same themes of presence and historic use. However, framings of Arctic sovereignty rely for some – including Mary Simon, a key public Indigenous figure in Canada and currently serving as its 30th Governor General – on the Inuit-Crown relationship.

Security Language

Security language is surprisingly prominent across Canadian sources. There are some sources that describe Canadian control over the NWP to be under threat, specifically that Canada could lose control over the passage. In a 1982 Memorandum 'Status of the Arctic Archipelagic Waters,' the authors clarify that security is a key variable that must be considered when making policy on the NWP in tandem with concerns around shipping, Inuit interests, the (then) Draft Convention of the Law of the Sea, and oil pollution. However, the memorandum goes beyond simply listing security as a variable, stating "the lack of complete control over the waters over the Archipelago opens up the possibility of foreign warships or military-related communications vessels entering the waters." Given the strategic location of the NWP, Canadian security partly lies in ensuring that it controls access to the waters. Such concerns are reiterated in a 1983 Memorandum for the Deputy Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs "Canada-United Consultation on the Law of the Sea and Arctic Baselines" in which the authors state there is serious concern about the erosion of Canadian sovereignty if the NWP is opened up to foreign commercial navigation. This possible threat of the NWP becoming an international strait might be solved, according the 1986 Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Common's Report *Independence and Internationalism,* by equipping the Canadian Navy with diesel-electric submarines for surveillance at both the entry and exit to the NWP (Government of Canada, 1986).

These security concerns did not only take place during the Cold War. In 2005, future-PM Stephen Harper called for the establishment of an Arctic Army Training Centre stationed close to the NWP, and in 2006 called for sensors in the NWP for monitoring submarines (Lackenbauer & Dean, 2016). Existing surveillance, according to a 2006 Interim Report, was lacking around the

NWP and expansion of satellite monitoring needed to be increased to ensure the protection of the NWP. In 2007, Harper gave a speech calling for "new Arctic patrol ships and expanded aerial surveillance" alongside an expansion of the Canadian Ranger program, later promising that "the ships will be able to patrol the length of the Northwest Passage during the months a Canadian naval presence in necessary." Scholars have noted this rhetoric from Stephen Harper was not met with significant changes in policy (Dean, 2022). Security language also comes up in the 2009 Northern Strategy that emphasized the importance of increased surveillance in the NWP, and concerns about increasing navigability is stated in the 2019 *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework*. However, while there might be reference to traditional security concerns in a much more prevalent way, there has not been successful securitizing moves to accompany this rhetoric (Interviews). Some experts claim this lack of securitization has to do with lack of resources but, even more importantly, a lack of policy consensus towards a comprehensive Canadian security policy (Interviews).

Most recently, in the 2023 Canadian Senate Report *Arctic Security Under Threat,* the NWP is mentioned 17 times. The report highlights "security challenges arising from increased shipping" (p. 7) both of a traditional security nature but also just a broad concern about increasing access and threats to local communities in Canada's North. Such concern about increasing access and the need for increased defense capacity in the NWP had already been mentioned in a House of Commons report two months earlier along with a motion to study the security of the NWP in more depth (House of Commons, 2023). However, while security language does appear more in the Senate report, it is met with desecuritizing language – specifically with discourse around how although the US and Canada disagree on the nature of the NWP, they agree to disagree, which is more

important than ever in today's geopolitical context (Senate of Canada, 2023). Further while security threats are outlined in both the Senate and House Report, they are not securitized or painted as existential threats. Some experts such as Dr. Andrea Charron refer to this back and forth as "Arctic Distraction Disorder" – meaning that Canada panics when there is a perceived threat while also forgetting about the Arctic on a regular basis. Thus, while security language may come and go and is often linked to regional shocks, the norm tends to be a forgetting about the Arctic (Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, 2012).

Desecuritization

While there is certainly the presence of security language across the documents under analysis, there is also ample evidence of desecuritization, which one interviewee characterized as an uncomfortable balance between a broadly desecuritizing approach and clear security discursive markers. Before 1985, the Canadian government was relatively ambiguous about its policy toward the NWP. This was because Canada wanted to keep the peace in the early Cold War between itself and the United States (Interviews). While some suggest this ambiguity was poor foreign policymaking by Canada, others such as Whitney Lackenbauer and Peter Kikkert suggest this was a strategy to avoid direct confrontation with the United States. One example of this is the 1969 *USS Manhattan* passage of the NWP. Rather than the transit being a direct violation of Canadian sovereignty, the Canadian government wanted to minimize the political fallout of the transit. Canada actually supported the passage. Although the United States did not ask for permission, the Canadian government was advised in advance of the passage to which it then gave permission (Lalonde, 2023). The passage of the *USS Manhattan* was framed at the time as much more of a threat to Canadian sovereignty, although similarly the US gave advance notification to Canada and

the Canadian government granted permission (Lalonde, 2023). Franklyn Griffiths wrote a seminal column in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper in which he warned that Canadian sovereignty was under threat (Griffiths, 1985). Here was a clear *securitizing* move rather than a desecuritizing one. This piece led to significant criticism and public anxiety in Canada until Clark's 1985 speech in which he clarified the baselines of the NWP and confirmed the strait as internal waters. While there were significant negotiations in the wake of this passage between US President Ronald Reagan and Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, they are largely classified. We do know that three years after the controversial passage of the Polar Sea, the 1988 Agreement was signed between the US and Canada. The 1988 Agreement between the United States and Canada on Arctic Cooperation is a bilateral agreement that established a framework for U.S. icebreaker transits through the NWP while preserving the legal positions of both countries. The agreement reinforces both the U.S. and Canadian divergent positions, namely that Canada considers the NWP internal waters and the U.S. considers it an international strait. However, the agreement states that the U.S. will seek Canadian consent before sending icebreakers through the passage and that Canada will always grant consent. The position neither forces Canada to concede its sovereignty claim nor the U.S. to acknowledge it and in doing so, acts as a risk avoidance strategy.

Canada's desecuritizing strategy started as early as 1969, when a Memorandum for the Cabinet "Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic" stated "the major disadvantage of asserting a claim to the waters between the Arctic islands is the effect it could have on Canadian relations with the United States." This phrasing, even in the 1960s, makes it clear just how cognizant the Canadian government was about the consequences of being too assertive in its maritime claims. In 1976, a memorandum on the so-called Arctic Exception article as part of the Law of the Sea Conference

again articulated that the key challenge and threat was to make sure that the relationship between Canada and the United States would not be chilled due to stating Canada's claim to the waters of the archipelago (Law of the Sea: The Arctic Exception Article, 1976).

This desecuritizing approach is clear not only in Canadian documents, but also how Canada responded to the Polar Sea passage in 1985. In a response to US Note No. 425, Canada responded to the Polar Sea passage by scheduling an icebreaker to accompany it rather than cause an upset through more assertive language. Finally in the 1988 Agreement between the US and Canada, language such as "close and friendly relations" and "desirable to cooperate" reify that a low-key and desecuritized approach to the NWP is not only in Canadian interests but also is central to how they conduct themselves.

The relationship with the United States is by necessity a key part of how Canada conducts its NWP policy. The 2009 *Northern Strategy* suggests this in tandem with its desecuritizing strategy, stating that while the US and Canada may disagree, the disagreement "poses no sovereignty or defence challenge for Canada." That said, this low-key approach is paired with a clear policy that the NWP are internal waters and Canada has "an unfettered right to regulate them, as it would its land territory" (Government of Canada, 2009). While some have argued that Canada doesn't have a desecuritizing approach per se, but rather that there are cycles of securitization and desecuritization over time (Byers, 2009; Huebert 2001), others have suggested that there is no real rationale for securitizing the NWP and the Canadian government prefers to let sleeping dogs lie as there are no traditional military security threats to the NWP (Lalonde, 2021).

What is the Role of Experts?

Given Canada's desecuritizing and relatively set policy towards the NWP, what then is the place of – if any – for experts? I argue here that while there are limited examples of experts making an impact, they are by no means an example of how experts play a sizeable role in how Canada maintains its policy around the NWP. Some interviewees pointed to key examples of how some experts have had a role in influencing Canadian Arctic policy broadly. For example, one interviewee discussed the importance of Franklyn Griffiths, an active Arctic scholar in the 1980s and 1990s, for his role in writing reports for the Canadian Government on the creation of the Arctic Council and for starting the 1985 Polar Sea sovereignty crisis. Others pointed to the importance of Rob Huebert in the early 2000s describing the future threats of climate change and Russia as foundations for how Canada should understand the Arctic in the 21st century. Still others directly pointed to Whitney Lackenbauer's framework of 'Through, To, and In the Arctic' as particularly dominant right now. What makes this framework so usable is that the suggestion was initially published in a short open-access piece that has then been constantly redefined and redeveloped through introducing it via panels and briefs, socializing it to the Canadian government, and making it better over time. In other words, the impact is additive. There are also institutional routes to how experts can influence Canadian defense policy generally such as the Security and Defense Forum from 1994-2011, the Defence Engagement Program (DEP) from 2012-2017, and MINDS (Mobilizing Insights in Defense and Security program (2018 – present), in which the Arctic has been somewhat featured but only tangentially (Juneau & Lagasse, 2020; Greaves & Gricius, Forthcoming).

However, there were only a few examples of Canadian experts having a role in policy surrounding the NWP. One interviewee described how – although they did not experience it – they were told that their insights were being "picked up on inside the government" and that their work was being read around the NWP in the 1980s. Another described a model negotiation workshop that they organized surrounding the NWP between US and Canadian participants (Byers & Lalonde, 2009). The model negotiation was meant to help outline a path for diplomacy between the United States and Canada on the question of the NWP. One interviewee also discussed an experience they had at a meeting of the Arctic Security Working Group and their input on the potential of an international airway above the NWP if it was understood to be an international strait. While most interviewees agreed that the Working Group was useful in its convening ability to bring together representatives from federal, territorial, and Indigenous governments and academia – bringing a sense of familiarity to individuals working on the NWP – it also has been less useful recently due to its lack of problem-solving based approaches. One historic example is that of Donat Pharanad, a Canadian expert on the NWP. Lajeunesse (2016) describes how Pharand wrote a 300-page document for the Canadian External Affairs Department in 1979 that assessed the Canadian legal position regarding its historic waters claim and straight baselines.[19]

There are, however, two exceptions to the general norm that Canadian experts played an important role in NWP policy. The first exception is Franklyn Griffiths. His previously mentioned editorial was an influential example of how an expert writing a publicly facing piece in *The Globe and Mail* had a sizeable impact on Canadian policy surrounding the NWP. His securitizing

[19] Pharand's study was an extensive 300 page document. While the full document remains classified a six page abstract is declassified, summarizing its main conclusions: Donat Pharand, "Conclusions on Canadian Jurisdiction over Arctic Waters," April 10, 1979, LAC, RG 12, vol. 5561, file 8100-15-4-2, pt. 3.

language describing how Canada's Arctic sovereignty was under threat in the NWP can be linked to increasingly high levels of anxiety in Canada surrounding the Passage, which some argue continues to influence ongoing Canadian Arctic sovereignty neurosis today (Inteviews). The second exception is Mary Simon. While she is the current Governor General of Canada, she was an important player in the negotiations for the Arctic Council as both Chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference and Canada's Ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs. Mary Simon is a particularly interesting case as she has been both a national Inuit leader and engaged in government service, straddling the divide between an Indigenous and state-based actor. She coined the phrase "Canada's Arctic sovereignty begins at home" in an important article published in 2009, originally based on a speech given in 2007 where she often references the Northwest Passage (Simon, 2009). The Passage is mentioned within the context that in order to ensure continued Canadian Arctic sovereignty at home, Canada must empower the Inuit with resources to protect their lands and rights.

These limited examples are the result of many different variables, but foremost among them is the nature of the Canadian government, according to interviews. Multiple interviews described how the Canadian government was inherently closed off to experts. This is largely because: 1) the Canadian government has years of in-house expertise on the NWP, and 2) the Canadian government is very sensitive to the NWP and does not want outside work that is not supportive of Canada's legal claim to be published. One interviewee noted that the structure of the Canadian government, such as silos of information and limited mandates, makes it hard for overarching issues like the Arctic and spaces like the NWP that cover multiple jurisdictions and issue areas to have one coherent policy.

Interestingly, although the interviewees all stated that interfacing with the Canadian government is very difficult, the 2023 Senate Report lists specific expert contributors whose comments they clearly found convincing enough to appear in the report, including Suzanne Lalonde, Adam Lajeunesse, Elizabeth Riddell-Dixon, and Michael Byers. By contrast, one interviewee described how it is much easier to build relationships with operators and staffers and another emphasized how working with the Canadian military often tended to be significantly more useful than with Global Affairs Canada. Similarly, interviewees from within the Canadian government suggested that experts can matter in *specific* cases, primarily when technical knowledge is needed such as expertise on international law and regulations. There were other constraints to influence as well. Multiple interviews described how time is a particular concern. Not only do government workers not have time, but it depends on geopolitical timing, government turnover, and it is difficult to tell whether you are making an impact or if the government just picks and chooses those who agree with its position. Moreover, technical expertise tended to be more heard. For example, an expert who specializes in legal matters, environmental impacts of ships or the logistics of how ships might operate in the NWP might be more convincing than a standard policy expert.

That said, multiple experts used phrases such as "I have a responsibility to fulfill my civic responsibility" and clearly saw their attempts to engage governments as a part of their role as academics. Although most expressed general skepticism about having impact on Canadian policy on the Arctic and the NWP, interviewees offered strategies that appeared to be successful. First,

there are many different ways of engaging with government including workshops, testimonies,[20] seminars, direct consultation,[21] personal connections, media engagement, and conferences. The choice of which method to use is deeply personal. However, the overarching agreement between interviewees was that experts played an important role in: 1) providing historical context and framings, 2) correcting misunderstandings and myths, and 3) bringing people together. Second, although it "almost always doesn't succeed" (Interview), some good rules of engagement can involve: 1) being results focused and providing possible solutions,[22] 2) not prescribing policy but asking how can we assist you in your mandate,[23] 3) putting the Arctic in a broader context rather than remaining a niche specialist, and 4) remaining in your lane of expertise rather than trying to be a broad generalist.

Comparative Discussion & Conclusion

Although the NSR and the NWP are two very different maritime routes in the Arctic with different norms of shipping and very distinct governmental systems that create rules around their governance – they are similar in many ways. The higher degree of unsettledness comes not only from the physical state of flux that both spaces exist in, but also how there are many different understandings and projections of the space that make them unresolved in nature. Both Russia and

[20] Almost every interviewee, when asked about testifying before the Senate or House of Commons said they did not feel this type of formal engagement was useful.
[21] There were very few examples of direct consultation by experts to the Canadian government although key exceptions exist.
[22] As one example, one interviewee provided the conference report 'Arctic Maritime Partnerships' that originated from workshop results held with officers from the Canadian, Danish, and US Commands and organized by academics. Citation below:
Lajeunesse, Adam, Cate Belbin, Rachael Wallace, Rory Jakubec, and Josh Kroker. Conference Report: Arctic Maritime Partnerships: Options and Opportunities for Cooperation in the North American Arctic? (Naval Association of Canada, 2022).
[23] One interviewee described how they have talked to the Canadian military and explained how they can help to educate and inform the public as to why the Canadian military takes particular actions.

Canada have been remarkably consistent regarding their policy towards these spaces since the mid-1980s. This consistency illustrates that in spaces that are more unsettled and higher on the continuum between complete intersubjectivity and complete unsettledness, states are more driven to create order and avoid risk when they can. Many Russian policies and documents do not mention the NSR at all. Although Canada was relatively ambiguous around its NWP policy in the early years of the Cold War due to concern about the United States, it has been largely consistent since 1985. This consistency occurs in a few ways. First, Canadian documents rarely reference the NWP in meaningful ways. While more Canadian documents typically do mention the NWP, they often do so in ways that do not convey meaning but rather simply mention it – leading to a largely incoherent policy. This largely appears to be that because there are no traditional military security threats in the NWP, it does not serve the Canadian government to draw attention to or securitize it. Second, neither Canada nor Russia appears to be very reactive to changes in global security to how they discuss these maritime spaces. There are some exceptions to this rule, where Russia has appeared to be changing its NSR policy since 2022 and its invasion of Ukraine and Canada has been reactive to how the United States behaves in the region. However, in spite of these exceptions, it seems to serve both states' interest to keep these maritime spaces outside the realm of security to avoid future risks.

Third, both Russia and Canada desecuritize these spaces, but in different ways. Russia almost never uses security language in proximity to the NSR but seems to prioritize infrastructure, reiterating the economic importance of the NSR to the Russian state, and uses technical language and the rules of shipping to desecuritize and avoid risk. Whether or not this technical approach to the NSR is obfuscation for militarization or observers should take Russia at their word remains up

for debate. Canada uses a "low key" strategy to take a cooperative and non-confrontational approach to how it talks about the NWP. This is not to say that security language does not appear in Canadian documents. Certainly, there is a lot of language around Canadian security regarding the NWP – but it is almost always met with desecuritizing norms. Regardless of these different approaches, this double desecuritization appears to illustrate that it serves both Russian and Canadian national interests to desecuritize these spaces, likely because overt securitization would invite greater external involvement and might weaken their legal position. Desecuritization and low-key approaches here keep both routes largely away from traditional discussions of security and allow for more diplomatic flexibility, particularly in managing relations with the U.S.

Unfortunately, given Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, I was only able to speak to a limited number of Russian experts rather than a broader sample. Those I spoke to emphasized the separation between Russian social science academia and the government, suggesting that while there were informal routes, any degree of influence would only happen by coincidence rather than through strategies. Interestingly, there are ample examples from the Canadian case that show even in a democratic state, such influence is difficult. Many interviewees described how the Canadian government was difficult to work with. Although there were exceptions when experts described their experiences with the military and individual operators and some key broader examples of influence, there is certainly a difference between how experts exist in authoritarian states versus democratic states.

CHAPTER 8. DISCUSSION

Introduction

Before turning to the discussion, I briefly re-outline the puzzle behind this dissertation and my main argument. One might expect that increased unsettledness would lead to states changing their policy alongside changes in the unsettled space. Such an interpretation might lead states to change their policies relatively often. States might seek survival and security through a wish to settle unsettledness by traditional military measures. Alternatively, states might seek to resolve unsettled spaces through strategies such as through economic interdependence or institutionalization. We might also expect that in this context of unsettledness, states would rely more heavily on expertise, as the spaces under question are difficult to define and require political knowledge. However, in all three cases under analysis in the Arctic – a region that I understand as an extreme case of unsettledness under conditions of strong institutional norms – we see none of the above.

Instead, I argue that when it comes to unsettled spaces, states are incentivized to maintain unsettledness through low-tension or desecuritizing narratives or adopt a low-key approach as part of a risk avoidance strategy. It serves their interests to neither securitize an unsettled space nor does choosing to create institutions. In short, in this study, the status quo benefits states that might want to avoid potential costs that could emerge if they were to change their policies. In Svalbard, Norway clearly desecuritizes Svalbard as it wishes to avoid any questions regarding different interpretations of the Treaty and avoid tension. Given its long history with the Soviet Union and now Russia, this desecuritizing is not surprising both as a tactic of dealing with this larger neighbor

but also to achieve predictable relations on the archipelago. Russia similarly has largely desecuritized Svalbard. While there have been some examples of provocative language from Russian officials, official Russian Svalbard documents emphasize a lack of traditional security and geopolitical issues and instead emphasize mutual cooperation between Norway and Russia. Importantly, I also find that for powers engaged in strategic competition such as Russia and the United States, unsettled spaces largely fall outside the scope of their general discourse on the Arctic. This may be because until they matter, such spaces do not fit within the greater narratives of competition.

In Greenland, it serves Denmark to use low-tension language for two reasons. First, in doing so, Denmark aims to avoid increasing militarization of the Arctic and Greenland. This helps to ensure the region does not become an outright theatre of competition between China, Russia, and the United States. Denmark clearly does not want the Arctic or Greenland to be militarized as it would require a vast expenditure of defense resources. Second, this low-tension language also reinforces the status-quo regarding increasing Chinese interest in Arctic. Even though Denmark recognizes the risks that China plays in the Arctic, by using low-tension language it avoids securitizing China's role and forcing a shift in Danish-Chinese relations.

In the Northern Sea Route, Russia desecuritizes the shipping route because of the economic importance of the route. By desecuritizing and using low-tension language, Russia can frame the development of the route as purely economic in nature and avoid accusations of militarizing the region even if other states may suspect this lack of security discourse as not being genuine. In the Northwest Passage, it is also clearly in Canada's interest to use low-tension language. This

language helps to avoid any potential tensions between itself and the United States – with which it does not share a clear understanding of the passage. That said, although Canada does use security discourse, it takes a low-key approach and aims to keep policy around the route low tension.

These findings illustrate that, counterintuitively, even under extremely unsettled conditions states still have an impulse for policy continuity and risk avoidance. In fact, the more unsettled a space is, the more states want order. In a less extreme case, Svalbard, states avoid security discourse and linkages to the international security environment but in maritime shipping lanes – a more extreme case of unsettledness – the avoidance of security discourse, particularly in the Northern Sea Route, is particularly high and mentions of changes in the international security environment are almost zero.

However, the norm of desecuritization has been shifting since 2022, and more recently the states under examination have incorporated more security discourse into their framings and narrations of these spaces. For Svalbard, while Norwegian policy surrounding it has not changed, there is a change in mindset about preparing for the worse, particularly when dealing with an unpredictable Russia. In Greenland, Danish discourse has shifted toward being more cognizant of security issues and threats. There are also examples from the Russian case of increasing discourse around import dependency and hybrid threats in the Northern Sea Route. Even with these more traditional security threats, however, no state in this study has immediately turned to militarizing or using securitizing language. Rather, it seems that aspirations for low-tension in these unsettled Arctic spaces continue to reign dominant and that avoiding risk in the modern Arctic relies upon maintaining low-tension continuity.

While we might have anticipated that experts would have more power and influence in the policies around unsettled spaces due to the importance of technical expertise, this has not proven true in practice. I argue that experts are relatively unlikely to influence policy in these unsettled spaces because states do not want outside expertise. Their emphasis on promoting low-tension narratives and maintaining the status quo tend to make experts outsiders. There is an interesting tension in that although the spaces under examination are unsettled, their policies are not. The policies surrounding the Svalbard, Northern Sea Route, and the Northwest Passage, in particular, are set. This means there is little space for experts to really make an impact. Norwegian experts also noted the lack of openness to outside expertise in the different Norwegian ministries, suggesting that real expertise on Svalbard actually lay within the ministries themselves. Researchers in Norway are held at an arms-length to avoid Norwegian policy being conflated with the opinions of specific researchers. These contextual differences illustrate the importance of country-specific knowledge ecosystems that structure how experts interact with their governments. While there were more examples of influence in Greenland, much of this was attributed to the small state nature of Denmark and the centrality of long-standing personal and institutional relationships. Moreover, Danish policy surrounding Greenland is constantly in motion given its changing actorness, and there is thus more space for maneuver. In Russia, there is very little interaction between experts and the government at large, but particularly in the Northern Sea Route or Svalbard, which are understood to be purely within the competencies of the state. For Canada, many experts noted feeling like an outsider in regards to policy on the Northwest Passage, and that a real impact was only possible through sustained effort.

However, the question of influence is highly contextual and it is difficult to make one universal argument concerning expert-government interaction. Yet, there are notable strategies and constraints that seem consistent across cases. For example, in Greenland, while Denmark's small state-ness has led to a politics of familiarity characterized by back-channel communications and long-standing institutional relations at the heart of foreign policy making, the constraints that experts face are not dissimilar to other cases. For example, experts point to time being the primary constraints both for themselves and the government employees whom they might seek to work with. They also note the challenging balance that outside experts in academia had to navigate between incentives that would benefit an academic career such as peer reviewed publications and outside grant. This is very much in contrast to other approaches that would benefit those seeking to work at the intersection of outside expertise and government such as building a reputation by working on non-attributable work. One final shared constraint was 'cherry picking'. For experts, it was difficult to tell whether the government took their expertise and work at face value or simply cherry-picked what information was useful for their policies.

Some other constraints were contextual. In Norway, for example, constraints largely dealt with the fact that the ministries dealing with Svalbard were not open to outside expertise and largely held the information they themselves needed. For example, for Danish academics, the terminology surrounding Greenland was hugely important. In Russia, there were serious constraints given the centralized nature of Russian policy making. In Canada, constraints had to do with Canada's governmental system such as handling geopolitical turnover, the Canadian government's sensitivity to outside academic work that isn't entirely supportive of Canadian legal claims, and limited silos of information and mandates.

In the Norwegian case, experts highlighted 1) the importance of relationship building and persistence and 2) creating spaces where researchers and ministries could interact with one another. Strategies that experts pointed to in the Greenlandic case were 1) ignoring theory and the ivory tower, 2) focus on what the ministries need, the implementation of policies, and relationships, and 3) avoiding becoming a political actor and instead focus on building your reputation and relationship with government employees. In Canada, experts pointed to 1) the importance of relationship building, 2) asking what value-added work they could add to the policymaker in question, and 3) highlighting venues where representatives from the federal, territorial, indigenous and academic spaces could come together.

Implications

There are six general conclusions from these three case studies that have implications for the broader study of IR and are relevant outside the scope of this research. First, while much literature on great power competition highlights how many disparate areas of policy tend to fall within broader narratives about competition, my research illustrates that it is not the default to subsume unsettled spaces into these broader securitizing narratives. In short, at least in regions like the Arctic where there are strong institutional norms, they are not an inherent security dilemma waiting to emerge. Rather, they might offer opportunities to build upon low-tension narratives; if not for cooperation, then for maintaining a status quo approach to such regions. This dovetails with important work in understanding how and why cooperation can take place despite competition. For example, in the area of space activities, scholars have explored how Russia and China cooperate with one another while competing with the United States (Pankova et al., 2021).

Similarly, others have explored how smaller states must reckon with great power competition (Can, 2024) and learn how to navigate these dynamics in regions such as Central Asia and Southeast Asia (Pirro, 2015). Still others have unpacked how great power competition is leading to increasing cooperation between supranational actors such as the European Union and NATO (Simon, 2019; Chin, 2022; Beeson, 2022). In short, if we understand that cooperation can exist despite this competition and observe how states engage in a world that is more competitive, it raises important questions about how we should think about unsettledness in the context of great power competition. What opportunities do these unsettled spaces offer for smaller states or states engaged in rivalry? Are states that are in proximity to these unsettled spaces or a part of them more able to navigate this modern world? While I generally find that low-tension narratives emerge from a broader strategy of risk avoidance, cooperative approaches may be part of that strategy.

Second, my research can be applied to a broader set of cases beyond the Arctic and the specific cases of Svalbard, Greenland, the Northern Sea Route, and Northwest Passage. Clearly Arctic institutional norms condition states to make decisions in different ways than other spaces that might exhibit characteristics of unsettledness, such as China-Taiwan, Russia-Ukraine, and Israel-Palestine. However, other spaces that exist neither possess the strong aversion to traditional military concerns as holds true in the Arctic nor the tendency to securitization as in the three cases above. For example, the high seas and outer space offer two examples of spaces that are in flux and states do not share an intersubjective understanding about their status. These areas are often framed as areas of competition, particularly in the case of the high seas through the eyes of realist scholars. So too is outer space often narrated through a lens of the next great game and teed up as a competitive space for space-able powers to control (Goswami & Garretson, 2020; Stefanovich

& Porras, 2022; Rashid & Fatima, 2024). Even the realm of cyberspace and de-facto states may apply (Sieniawski, 2024). My findings that highlight the prevalence of low-tension narratives in the unsettled spaces under analysis may have implications for thinking through other spaces. Limited research has explored if low-tension narratives exist in the context of these additional spaces and to whether they are successful. One might argue that given the lack of outright competition and conflict surrounding these spaces is illustrative of the success of these narratives. Who is speaking them and how can we understand the role of these spaces moving forward?

Third, while my research does highlight low-tension narratives as dominant for the period under study, there are serious indications that this norm has been seriously challenged since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Not only does this raise questions about the nature of resiliency of these narratives given outright war, it also unfortunately leads to pessimistic predictions for how these spaces can withstand heightened geopolitical tension, even in more cooperative regions like the Arctic. It also raises important questions of whether low-tension narratives are still the main tool for risk avoidance strategies in the Arctic. If the spaces under analysis in my dissertation are already showing signs of strain, how should other spaces react as well? This might have implications for a hardening of foreign policy postures by not just those states engaged in competition, but also smaller states who are forced to react to these changes.

Fourth and turning to the role of experts, my work has implications for understanding the role of individuals in politics in a more nuanced light. While research has focused on the limitations that outside experts face in their interactions with governmental actors as well as theorized on the nature of these interactions (Kuus, 2014; Littoz-Monnet, 2017), less work has specifically focused

on structural constraints, knowledge ecosystems, and strategies that experts may face and engage in. My research has implications for understanding these factors in more depth, as well as seeing how they may be applied in a larger set of cases. For example, are the variables of time, the challenge of cherry-picking, and the difficult balance between academia vs. practice prevalent across all expert-government interactions? If so, how are they different under various conditions. Work on the nature of expertise in global governance has long studied this phenomenon (Kennedy, 2005; Sending, 2015), and additional work could examine this in more depth. My research also suggests that even though literature has shown that technical issues tend to offer more space for expertise to operate, a key limitation for experts is that when policy around an area is set and has been consistent for a long time, it is difficult for experts to engage or shift the mindset of policymakers.

Moreover, on a practical level, my work suggests key strategies that IR scholars themselves should utilize if they wish to succeed in the nexus of academia-government. These strategies may not always work, but they provide a good starting place for IR scholars, particularly those interested in a more policy-relevant space that goes beyond the ivory tower. That said, many of my interviewees were self-reflective about how personal preferences drove the degree to which they chose to strategize for involvement around policymaking processes or to which they chose to see their role as providers of knowledge through the lens of duty or responsibility. I am cognizant that developing an overarching theory on expert practices is thus colored by these personal quirks and preferences and perhaps not feasible when handling questions of individual choice.

Fifth, my work makes a theoretical contribution to the literature on desecuritization within the context of the Copenhagen School. While the amount of work on studying desecuritization is quite small in comparison to the vast work on securitization and critical security studies, scholars have theorized how it operates and created ideal types of desecuritization practices (Hansen, 2012). I contribute to this literature by asking how low-tension narratives and low-key approaches fit within this literature. While in some of my cases states were desecuritizing these unsettled spaces, such as how Norway desecuritizes Svalbard, and Russia desecuritizes both the Northern Sea Route and Svalbard, others took a low-key approach, as Canada and the Northwest Passage, and still others adopted a low-tension approach. How should we understand these differences? My original assumption that all states were desecuritizing these spaces was largely disproven in some interviews, yet it raised important questions about how these low-tension narratives and low-key approaches could fit uncomfortably next to desecuritization. I suggest that low-tension and desecuritizing narratives as well as low-key approaches offer an alternative for states who do not wish to desecuritize or securitize these spaces as well as in the broader region at large. In other words, obliquely securitizing and desecuritizing these spaces has consequences not only for the spaces themselves but also for the region of the Arctic. States proactively choose to mobilize these low-tension narratives as a strategy to avoid security discourse as much as feasibly possible. Importantly, this is not the same as politicization as the topics under discussion – Svalbard, Greenland, and maritime shipping lanes – are already matters of political debate. The contribution to the literature is such that states seeking to maintain the status quo will avoid both desecuritizing and securitizing measures but nonetheless move more adjacent to desecuritizing discourse by using low-tension narratives to avoid both. Low-tension narratives, I argue, also do productive work in helping status maintain control over these spaces. Whether states are clearly desecuritizing in their

approach, low-key in their behavior, or toe the line using low-tension discourse is a question of historical context and whose interests are served.

Sixth and finally, my work raises important questions about whether sovereignty discourse can be equated to security discourse. In Svalbard, Norwegian discourse on sovereignty is largely aligned with the Svalbard Treaty and does political work in maintaining the status quo and strengthening Norwegian control over the archipelago in practical terms. The extent to which we should consider this security discourse or not is an open question. For Greenland, Danish discourse around sovereignty does not obliquely mean security. In short, Danish discourse describes the competence of the Danish Armed Forces to enforce sovereignty around Greenland. or Greenland, Danish discourse around sovereignty does not obliquely mean security. In short, Danish discourse describes the competence of the Danish Armed Forces to enforce sovereignty around Greenland. In the Russian case surrounding the Northern Sea Route, the question of whether sovereignty enforcement discourse operates as security discourse is similarly unclear. Because it *is* the Russian prerogative to defend its sovereignty in its waters, the extent to which one can describe sovereignty language as securitizing is not clear or direct. This is akin to the Canadian case. However, some cases clearly seem to indicate that sovereignty discourse does refer to security concerns in a direct way. For example, in Canada and the Northwest Passage – when Canadian policy describes the need to protect Canadian sovereignty, it is often an allusion to security concerns and protecting the idea of the Canadian state.

Thus, this dissertation does not fully explore whether sovereignty and security are the same. However, it asks important questions about how and when sovereignty discourse is used in lieu of

or to purposefully point to security concerns. Recent work has investigated Arctic sovereignty, calling for a scalar concept that takes into consideration different levels and spaces, drawing our attention back to the continual usage of Western representations of political space as moves of power and rulemaking (Wood-Donnelly, 2024). Exercising scalar sovereignty then does not just extend to territorial claims, but also claims in space, over people, and over the discourse and norms that exist within them. The diverging meanings of sovereignty across this dissertation present a future puzzle that scholars should engage more thoroughly in. It appears there is no direct causal link between sovereignty and security discourse, but rather that context plays an important role in determining whether operationalizing the language of sovereignty transforms discourse into securitizing language. The consequences that these discursive moves have for the people living in the Arctic as well as the environment could be further examined through future research.

Conclusion

This dissertation has introduced the concept of unsettledness as a condition within the international system where intersubjective understandings about the status, governance, and territorial meaning of a specific geographic space remain unresolved. I have explored the prevalence of low-tension narratives as part of a risk avoidance strategy in each of the Arctic cases – Svalbard, Greenland, and maritime shipping lanes – as extreme cases of unsettledness and unpacked three possible explanations for why states have maintained policy continuity including: 1) the role of structural geopolitics, 2) differing security discourse, and 3) the role of experts. Do different degrees of intersubjective understanding have implications for policy change? In short, does it matter that states don't have a shared understanding of specific spaces? I argue that counterintuitively, even under unsettled conditions in the extreme in the Arctic, states seek some

degree of order. States – both those engaged in competition as well as smaller neighbors – are not interested in the consequences of either securitizing non-security spaces or de-securitizing them, as it opens the door to possibilities of institutionalization and lack of control. In short, they largely avoid security discourse and narratively linking unsettled spaces to the broader contours of the international security environment to avoid future risks of militarization. This was true across all cases, as was the choice to avoid direct security discourse, even if the strategy through which this avoidance took place varied per case. In a post-February 2022 world, this logic might be changing. In the cases analyzed here, states seem to recognize how the changing security situation impacts their policymaking. However, for now, these remain somewhat separated from broad security discussions. If indeed the more unsettled a space is, the more states want order – it suggests that cooperation can continue to take place in the context of heightened geopolitical competition. It remains to be seen whether states will continue to be incentivized to continue this pattern of behavior or if increased tension will lead to future hegemonic competition not dissimilar to Cold War patterns. Future research could focus more heavily on the differences between great power competition during the Cold War and the modern world, analyzing the extent to which we can learn from the lessons of the past.

The third explanation regarding expertise and the role of experts is particularly prescient given increasing debates on the 'alternative truths' in the context of the United States, and the rise of heightened distrust of scientists and elites. Should we expect experts to play important roles in the making of security policy surrounding unsettled spaces or are they doomed to be relegated to national security interests? My dissertation suggests that while experts continue to play tangential roles in the making of policy on unsettled spaces, knowledge ecosystems may offer a better

explanation for different degrees of influence. The differing type of knowledge ecosystem can better show why some institutions have closer links to ministries and how when policy is set, experts have little to no access to changing policy behavior. However, that said, the similarities between the cases show clearly that some variables are consistent such as the limitation of time, the balancing act that academics must play between the incentives that drive academic or practice-based success, the importance of relationships, and the challenge of government cherry picking information that suits them. Addressing these issues are feasible challenges for individuals to address by being cognizant of them if they seek to create more policy relevant work for policymakers. I offer some key strategies that both experts and policymakers suggested may be useful for those individuals:

1. Ignore theory and the ivory tower
2. Ask *what is needed* by ministries with an emphasis on policy implementation
3. Center relationships
4. Avoid becoming a political actor and instead focus on building a reputation for objectivity
5. Create or be a part of spaces where representatives from different silos (i.e., federal, territorial, Indigenous, and academic) come together
6. Be cognizant of your ethics of knowledge. What work is your knowledge doing in the world?

While many academics may have heard these truisms before, it is worth reiterating them to act as a reminder that what is taught in the academy may not serve those wishing to engage in more policy relevant work. There is no knowledge that comes free of its political situatedness and being

aware of the ethical implications of how knowledge is generated as well as how that knowledge is used in the world remains an important area of reflection for researchers. Future research in this area could conduct experiments that draw upon these strategies and constraints or use survey methodology to interrogate these aphorisms with heightened methodological rigor.

This work has generalizable implications for understanding how actors behave when they don't agree on context. Rather than assuming that decreasing intersubjectivity would lead to heightened competition, my work illustrates that under conditions of institutional norms states want to agree and find areas of shared understanding. Doing so implies that states end up avoiding security discourse, linking unsettled spaces to broader narratives of structural competition, and keep outside political experts out of policymaking. While this dissertation focuses on the Arctic as one regional case, future work will explore additional examples of unsettledness and interrogate whether the findings hold true not only in other regions of the world but also other time periods as well.

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APPENDIX 1. LIST OF NORWEGIAN AND RUSSIAN DOCUMENTS UNDER ANALYSIS FOR SVALBARD CASE

Norwegian Documents

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Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security. (2016). *Svalbard – Melding til Stortinget 32 (2015-2016).*	Svalbard Environmental Protection Act, 2001. *Act No. 79 of 15 June 2001*.
Svalbard Global Seed Vault. (2024). https://www.seedvault.no/	All results from Government.no on Svalbard
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Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (2000). *Foreign Policy Concept.*	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (2008). *Foreign Policy Concept.*
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Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (2013). *Foreign Policy Concept.*	Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation. (2014). *Military Doctrine Policy.*
Security Council of the Russian Federation. (2015). *National Security Strategy.*	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (2016). *Foreign Policy Concept.*
Security Council of the Russian Federation. (2021). *National Security Strategy.*	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (2023). *Foreign Policy Concept.*

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Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic. (2020b). *Strategy for Developing Russia's Arctic and Providing National Security*	Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation. (2017). *Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Operations.*
Russian Federation. (2017). *On a comprehensive assessment of the state of national security of the Russian Federation in the field of maritime activities in 2016*.	Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic. (2023a). *Amendments to Basic Principles of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic Zone until 2035.*
Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic. (2023b). *Amendments to Strategy for Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and Provision of National Security for the Period up to 2035*.	Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic. (2013). *On the Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and Provision of National Security for the Period to 2020.*
Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic. (2008). *Foundations of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic For the Period Until 2020 and Beyond.*	Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic. (2001). *Basics of the Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic.*
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Russian diplomatic note 3695/2ED handed to Norway on 23 April 2001	Soviet Union diplomatic note handed to Norway 17 July 1998
Soviet Union diplomatic note handed to Norway 19 August 1998	Скандинавский Клуб НСО МГИМО. 2023. Шпицберген 2033 Перспективы российского присутствия.
Soviet Union diplomatic note handed to Norway on 15 June 1977	Soviet-Norwegian communique 16 March 1978

APPENDIX 2. LIST OF DANISH, GREENLANDIC AND AMERICAN DOCUMENTS UNDER ANALYSIS FOR GREENLAND CASE

Danish Documents

Denmark-United States: Agreement Relating to the Defense of Greenland. (1941). *The American Journal of International Law*, *35*(3), 129–134.	Government of the United States of America & Government of the Kingdom of Denmark. (2004). *Agreement to amend and supplement the 1951 Agreement on the defense of Greenland*. U.S. Department of State.
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APPENDIX 3. LIST OF CANADIAN AND RUSSIAN DOCUMENTS UNDER ANALYSIS FOR MARITIME SHIPPING LANES CASE

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Russian Federation. (2019) *Strategy for the Development of Maritime Activities of the Russian Federation until 2030.*	Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic. (2020b). *Strategy for Developing Russia's Arctic and Providing National Security*
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Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic. (2008). *Foundations of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic For the Period Until 2020 and Beyond.*	Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic. (2001). *Basics of the Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic.*
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Federal Law No. 5003-1, *On the State Border of the Russian Federation.* (1993). The Russian Federation.	Federal Law No 510-FZ, *On Amendments to the Federal Law 'On Internal Sea Waters, Territorial Sea, and Contiguous Zone of the Russian Federation.* (2022). The Russian Federation.
Federal Law No. 155 FZ, *On the Internal Maritime Waters, Territorial Sea, and Contiguous Zone of the Russian Federation*. (1998). The Russian Federation.	Federal Law No. 187-FZ, *On the Continental Shelf of the Russian Federation.* (1995). The Russian Federation
Russian Federation. (2019) *Strategy for the Development of Maritime Activities of the Russian Federation until 2030.*	Federal Law No. 48-FZ, *On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation.* (2011). The Russian Federation.
	Federal Law No. 132-FZ, *On Shipping in the Water Area of the Northern Sea Route*. (2012). The Russian Federation.

APPENDIX 4. METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

This appendix contains my methodology in more depth including 1) the topics that were coded for using NVivo, 2) all word searches for each case, 3) interview questions, and 4) a list of anonymized interviewees listed with characteristics.

Topics

1. How is the case [Svalbard, Greenland, Northern Sea Route, Northwest Passage] framed?
2. Is the case linked internationally? Are there links to global moments of insecurity?
3. Security Language
4. Policy priorities of case in question

Word Searches and Counts[24]

Case 1: Svalbard

Table 3: How is Svalbard framed?

Code	Count
Societal Security & Emergency Preparedness	28
Cooperation at core of Russian strategy	26
Safety – Cruise Tourism	26
Part of broader Norwegian-Russian relations	23
Environment vs. Economic	10
Statement of Fact	8
Continued Presence	4
Cooperation	4
Domestic Framing	3
Military Security – Deterrence	3
Research and Knowledge	1

[24] Please note that this was not a content analysis but rather a discourse analysis. Thus, counts were not necessarily used as the final analysis indicator. Rather they were used as an exercise in determining the prevalence overall themes, language, and discourses.

Table 4: Is Svalbard linked internationally?

Code	Count
Mention of Global Insecurity (vague)	18
Great Power Competition	3
2014 Crimea Annexation	1

Table 5: Security Language in Svalbard case

Code	Count
Environmental Harm	47
Desecuritizing Language	33
Sovereignty	12
Economic Security	8
Norway is a threat	7
Framing of Russophobia	6
Food Security	3
Svalbard is under threat	3

Table 6: Policy Priorities of Svalbard

Code	Count
Environment	18
Maintenance of Norwegian Communities	6
Stability	4
Sovereignty	3
Svalbard Treaty Compliance	2

Case 2: Greenland

Table 7: How is Greenland framed?

Code	Count
As a valuable partner and actor	25
Tool for US-Danish relations	10
Military support base	9
Complex	7
A part of Denmark, but not independent	7
China vs. the U.S.	3
Increased interest regarding climate and strategic	3
Strategic location	3
Tool of great power rivalry	3
Future Research Hub	2
Key for the United States	1
Limited foreign and security authority	1

Place to examine	1
Postcolonial relation to Denmark	1
Increasing in importance	1

Table 8: Is Greenland linked internationally?

Code	Count
Great Power Competition	39
Russian military build-up	21
Increasing conflictual risk	5
Russian aggression	5
2014 Crimea Annexation	2

Table 9: Security Language in Greenland case

Code	Count
Desecuritizing Language	41
Increasing concern about China's interest in Greenland	25
Climate Change	14
Rising political risk	14
Military security	13
Deterrence & Thule Air Base	9
Societal Security	5
Sovereignty	5
Espionage and Hybrid Threats	4
Surveillance	3
Resource security	3
Limited domain awareness	1
Maritime Lines of communication	1
Search and Rescue exercises	1
Security of Supply	1

Table 10: Policy Priorities of Greenland

Code	Count
Environmental Protection	4
Enforcing sovereignty	4
Resource Security	3
Uranium	3
Maritime Safety	2
Seabed mapping	1
Tourism	1

Case 3: Maritime Shipping Lanes

Table 11: How is maritime shipping lanes framed?

Code	Count
Historically established	21
Emphasis on infrastructure	20
Navigable	14
Significant	12
Shipbuilding	10
Increasing transportation	8
Not Navigable	3
Gas Transport	2
Climate Change changing the routes	1

Table 12: Are the maritime shipping lanes linked internationally?

Code	Count
Null	0

Table 13: Security Language in Maritime Lanes case

Code	Count
Desecuritizing Language	32
Specific security installations around NWP	13
Sovereignty	12
Ability to suspend entry to foreign ships and research if threat to state	6
US as threat to NSR	3
Pressure on Russia to weaken control of NSR	2
Reduction of maritime activities as security concern	1

Table 14: Policy Priorities of Maritime Lanes case

Code	Count
Shipping	35
Monitoring	12
Sovereignty Crisis	8
Presence	5
Natural resources vs. Environment	3
Local Communities	2

Interview Questions

General Questions

- What is your current role and how long have you been in this position?
- How would you describe the role?
- How would you characterize your role within the broader scheme of Arctic security?
- In what capacity, if any, have you worked at the intersection of expert-government?
- Do you think that experts play an important role in how Arctic states make security policy in the Arctic? If so, what type of experts?

Case-Specific Questions

- How would you characterize [case specific] policy on Arctic security in general and [case specific]
    - Is it ambiguous or desecuritizing in any way?
- What type of security do you think is the most important regarding this type of Arctic security policymaking?
- What is your opinion on the [case specific] country's approach to Arctic security, specifically in regards to case under question? Do you think of it as a security problem?

Questions for Experts

- How have you interfaced with national governments or international bodies on Arctic security issues?
    - In the experiences in which you have worked with government, have you found them effective?
    - Have you had different experiences with different ministries?
    - Is there a governmental tradition of reaching outside the government for advice from experts?
- What are the different ways in which experts can have a voice in policymaking?
- Do you think these ways are effective? Why or why not?
- How have experts been the most successful in influencing policy outcomes?
- Do you think in the case, experts are more likely to be successful in changing policy? If so, why?
- In the case, were you involved in the policymaking process?
    - If so, how?
- Is there a distinction between experts inside the country and outside?
- Did you as an expert lead expert-led events or seminars on the cases? If so, did policymakers attend them?
    - If so, do you think their attendance influenced their policies?
- Follow up: You mentioned [x] as one way that experts can have a voice in policymaking. Did you do this in regards to the cases? If so, do you think that it was effective?
    - Example: strategies like strategic exaggeration
- Does anything constrain your behavior? Are there factors that you notice make your recommendations less likely to be adopted? Or types of recommendations that are not accepted? (i.e., geopolitical conditions, predisposition to types of experts, security knowledge, etc.)

    - Are there ideas about Arctic security that you know don't have traction with policymakers?
- Do you think there has ever been a dominant narrative of Arctic security? If so, have you felt pressured to adapt to it?
- How would you describe the different institutions that make up the case-specific knowledge ecosystem and their proximity to the case-specific ministries?

Questions for Policy-making Role

- How have you interfaced with experts in your capacity as someone working in this field?
- What are the different ways in which experts can have a voice in policymaking?
- Do you think these ways are effective? Why or why not?
- How have experts been the most successful in influencing policy outcomes?
- Is there significant intra-ministry cooperation on the case in question?
- Is there a governmental tradition of reaching outside the government for expertise?
- Do you think the case, experts are more likely to be successful in changing policy? If so, why?
- In the case, were experts involved in the policymaking process? What actors were involved?
    - If so, how?
- Did you as a policymaker attend expert-led events or seminars on the cases?
    - If so, did attending make you change the way you thought about the case or the Arctic?
- Follow up: You mentioned [x] as one way that experts can have a voice in policymaking. Did you see this behavior in the cases? If so, was it effective in influencing you?
- Does anything constrain the behavior of experts? Are there particular factors that make you less likely to depend on outside expertise (i.e., geopolitical conditions, predisposition to types of experts, security knowledge, etc.)
- How would you describe the different institutions that make up the case-specific knowledge ecosystem and their proximity to the case-specific ministries?
- What could experts do to make their work more relevant to those working in the ministry?

List of Interviewees by characteristics[25]

List of Interviewees for Chapter 5

Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Safety, 6 years of experience
Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2), 4 years of experience each
Norwegian Ministry of Defense, 5 years of experience
Fridtjof Nansen Institute, 8 years of experience
Fridtjof Nansen Institute, 42 years of experience
Fridtjof Nansen Institute, 9 years of experience

[25] Please note that all interviews were conducted anonymously and below is a list of interviewees with characteristics including place of expertise and years of work

Fridtjof Nansen Institute, 18 years of experience
Fridtjof Nansen Institute, 38 years of experience
Fridtjof Nansen Institute, 20 years of experience
Svalbard researcher, 4 years of experience
Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 31 years of experience
St, Petersburg State University, 40 years of experience
Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 19 years of experience
Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 7 years of experience

List of Interviewees for Chapter 6

University of Greenland, 17 years of experience
University of Greenland, 16 years of experience
Greenland-Danish expert, 12 years of experience
Royal Danish Defence College, 20 years of experience
Royal Danish Defence College, 17 years of experience
Former Danish Ambassador to NATO, 24 years of experience
Royal Danish Defence College, 6 years of experience
Royal Danish Defence College, 32 years of experience
Danish Institute for International Studies, 12 years of experience
Center for Military Studies, 17 years of experience
Royal Danish Defence College, 12 years of experience
Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 years of experience
Danish Institute for International Studies, 21 years of experience
Danish Institute for International Studies, 5 years of experience
Royal Danish Defence College, 8 years of experience
Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 years of experience
Polar Institute, 13 years of experience
Inuit Circumpolar Council Greenland, 16 years of experience
Royal Danish Defence College, 5 years of experience
Polar Institute, 10 years of experience
National Defense University, 31 years of experience
Former U.S. defense official, 32 years of experience
U.S. Coast Guard Academy, 15 years of experience

List of Interviewees for Chapter 7

Western University, 40 years of experience
University of Toronto, 55 years of experience
St. Francis Xavier University, 13 years of experience
University of California, Santa Barbara, 60 years of experience
University of Montreal, 27 years of experience
St. Lawrence University, 40 years of experience
University of British Columbia, 29 years of experience
Polar Institute, 13 years of experience
University of Calgary, 30 years of experience

University of Manitoba, 16 years of experience
Simon Fraser University, 5 years of experience
Project Ploughshares, 49 years of experience
Transport Canada, 17 years of experience
University of Alaska Fairbanks, 12 years of experience
Laval University, 29 years of experience
University of Victoria, 9 years of experience
Trent University, 21 years of experience
St, Petersburg State University, 40 years of experience