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### A New Military and Political Landscape in the Arctic: China Perspective

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**Abstract.** The Arctic is becoming another node in a series of geopolitical contradictions between Russia and the West, where Moscow and Beijing speak largely from the same positions. This trend has become more relevant after the start of the Russian special military operation in Ukraine, which was also well understood by Chinese scientists and experts. In this work, the author has attempted to analyze the Chinese academic discourse, which considers the current geostrategic situation in the Arctic and substantiates the possibility and necessity of military and political cooperation between Russia and China in the Arctic region. Chinese scientists and experts identify a number of new trends in NATO’s Arctic policy and conclude that the adjustment and new trends in the Arctic policy of the North Atlantic Alliance closely interact with the international political situation and the Arctic geopolitical game and correspond to the transformation and expansion of NATO’s strategic functions in recent years. As for the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on the Arctic, China believes that it is mainly reflected in changing the geopolitical structure of the Arctic; undermining the foundations of international cooperation in the region; negatively affecting the process of economic development of the Arctic; and increasing pressure on the Arctic climate environment. A general analysis of the military-political situation in the Arctic in the context of China’s interests leads Chinese researchers to the conclusion that it is necessary to strengthen Russian-Chinese interaction and cooperation in the region. This conclusion allows them to formulate specific recommendations: facing new challenges in the Arctic and its increasing militarization, China and Russia need to define a program of security cooperation and increase its level.

**Keywords:** Arctic, Russian-Chinese relations, Northern Sea Route, NATO, military-political cooperation, joint patrols

### Introduction

Russian-Chinese co-operation and interaction in the Arctic has been going on for several years. Traditionally, it has been considered to be of a purely economic nature (energy, infrastructure projects) and, according to Russian experts, there was no reason to believe that in the foreseeable future the interaction between the two powers in the Arctic would take a military direction <sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Trenin D. Rossiya i Kitay v Arktike: sotrudnichestvo, sopernichestvo i posledstviya dlya evraziyskoy bezopasnosti. Rossiyskiy sovet po mezhdunarodnym delam [Russia and China in the Arctic: cooperation, rivalry and consequences for Eurasian security. Russian Council on International Affairs]. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/comments/rossiya-i-kitay-v-arktike-sotrudnichestvo-sopernichestvo-i-posledstviya-dlya-evraziyskoy-bezopasnost/> (accessed 20 November 2023).

However, Russia has also noted another trend: within the strategic triangle of Russia–US–China, the Arctic has become another node in a series of geopolitical contradictions, where Moscow and Beijing are largely united in their positions. Problems in the Arctic region have been accumulating, which promises increased political uncertainty in the medium and long term<sup>2</sup>. Russian researchers have also noted that the growing contradictions among the AC members began in the 2010s as a result of the intensifying rivalry for control over the Arctic's natural resources and transport communications. During this period, all Arctic countries in one way or another strengthened their military presence in the region [1, Zhilina I. Yu., p. 68].

This trend became more relevant after the beginning of the Russian special military operation in Ukraine, which was also well understood by Chinese scientists and experts. That is why the author aimed to analyze the Chinese academic discourse, which examines the current geostrategic situation in the Arctic and substantiates the possibility and necessity of military and political cooperation between Russia and China in the Arctic region, as well as to evaluate some proposals of Chinese experts in this area.

### *Chinese analysis of the geostrategic situation in the Arctic*

Chinese researchers have noted that as conflicts between the United States, the West and Russia deepen, especially after the escalation of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the Arctic, which is equally important in terms of strategic and military value, has been drawn into the centre of geopolitical competition. At the end of August 2022, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, during his visit to Canada, said for the first time that “cooperation between Russia and China in the Arctic region is not in the interests of NATO countries”, and therefore NATO will strengthen its presence in the region.

China also drew attention to the fact that in October 2022, the United States adopted a new strategy for developing its presence in the Arctic until 2032, *Regaining Arctic Dominance*. The strategy includes plans to strengthen the American military presence in the Far North. The document identifies Moscow and Beijing as the main threats and challenges. Much attention in the strategy is paid to Finland and Sweden joining NATO. It is assumed that after this, significant Arctic territories will fall under the scope of Article 5 of the NATO Charter on Collective Defense, which will encourage new members of the community to strengthen their defense capabilities<sup>3</sup>.

However, Lǐ Míngwáng and Zhēn Gǔdì believe that Denmark and other Northern European countries have a “relatively ambivalent attitude towards China's participation in Arctic affairs”. On the one hand, China's advantages in capital and markets can provide an important impetus to the economic development of the Arctic region, encourage China to participate in Arctic affairs, and

<sup>2</sup> Kadamtssev A. Rossiya, SShA i KNR usilivayut pozitsii v Arktike [Russia, the USA and China are strengthening their positions in the Arctic]. URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/29418> (accessed 20 November 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Arktika stala zonoj protivostoyaniya Rossii i SShA. Pochemu ona tak vazhna dlya sil'neyshikh derzhav planety? [The Arctic has become a zone of confrontation between Russia and the United States. Why is it so important for the strongest powers on the planet?]. URL: [https://lenta.ru/articles/2023/04/08/arctic\\_usa\\_russia/](https://lenta.ru/articles/2023/04/08/arctic_usa_russia/) (accessed 20 November 2023).

balance the forces of the United States and Russia in the Arctic region. On the other hand, given the fact that the United States views China as its main strategic competitor, the attitude of these countries towards China will inevitably suffer<sup>4</sup>.

Chinese scientists and experts (Zhào Níngníng, Gōng Zhuō, etc.) highlight the following new trends in NATO's Arctic policy:

- Climate issues, such as sea level rise caused by global warming, have had a significant negative impact on NATO's regional and global action capabilities. Melting polar ice and permafrost could pose numerous threats to NATO allies' Arctic warning stations and other critical infrastructure. To adapt to climate change, NATO allies have formally included defense planning, capability development and military exercises in the NATO 2030 Agenda. NATO also committed to strengthening exchanges with partner countries and other international organizations dealing with climate change and security issues. In July 2021, NATO announced the Nordic Environment Vision 2021 plan, co-funded by NATO's Allied Command Transformation Office, which aims to improve visibility of the Arctic region and help NATO countries understand the impact of climate change on national defense security and safety [2, Zhào N., Gōng Z., pp. 37–50].
- NATO is increasingly focusing on military exercises and capacity building in the Arctic. In terms of the scale of exercises, the number of participating NATO member states and their weapons continues to increase.
- International public opinion about the “Chinese Arctic threat theory” is being purposefully formed. In June 2021, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg said that while focusing on trade and engagement with China, it was also necessary to contain China's economic growth and investments in military power in various areas, especially with regard to the Arctic and the Cyberspace invasion.
- In April 2021, the US “Strategic Competition Act” unilaterally attempted to extend domestic American legislation to the Arctic region and the territory of Arctic countries, which reflects the US intention to strengthen its control over the Arctic governance system. The change in orientation of the US security strategy in the Arctic influenced the Arctic policy of other large NATO countries [Ibid].
- Chinese experts believe that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict will give NATO an incentive to further advance its participation in Arctic affairs and will have an important impact on the process of Arctic governance, as well as on the strategic expansion and functional transformation of NATO. In particular, in an international context where NATO deliberately creates and provokes the “Chinese threat theory”, increasing NATO's involvement

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<sup>4</sup> Lǐ Míngwáng, Zhēn Gǔdì. Huán shí shēndù] běijí, huì chéngwéi běiyuē duì é xīn zhànchǎng ma huánqiú shíbào [Will the North Pole become NATO's new battleground against Russia?]. URL: <https://m.huanqiu.com/article/49U1uxhusgJ> (accessed 20 November 2023).

in Arctic affairs, directly or indirectly, will pose a serious challenge to the protection and expansion of China's Arctic rights and interests.

Chinese scientists and experts conclude that the adjustment and new trends in NATO's Arctic policy closely interact with the international political situation and the Arctic geopolitical game and correspond to the transformation and expansion of NATO's strategic functions in recent years. They believe that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine will accelerate NATO's involvement in Arctic affairs, and competition for security in the Arctic between the seven Arctic countries and Russia will become increasingly obvious, which will worsen the external environment for the development and maintenance of China's Arctic rights and interests [2, Zhào Níngníng, Gōng Zhuō, pp. 37–50].

As for the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on the Arctic, China believes that it is mainly expressed in four aspects.

- Firstly, the geopolitical structure of the Arctic has changed. A pattern of confrontation between Russia on the one hand and the United States, Canada and the five countries of Northern Europe on the other has been formed in the Arctic region.
- Secondly, the foundations of international cooperation in the Arctic have been undermined. Russia was excluded from most Arctic governance mechanisms as part of Western sanctions against Russia, which greatly reduced the effectiveness of these governance mechanisms and even stalled them.
- Thirdly, the Ukrainian conflict influenced the processes of economic development of the Arctic. Western countries introduced unprecedented economic sanctions against Russia, which caused a certain negative impact on these processes. Due to the impact of Western sanctions on Russian shipping companies, the suspension of cooperation between Western and Russian shipping companies and the cancellation of Russian membership in the International Association of Classification Societies, Chinese scientists and experts admit a decrease in the international coefficient of use of the Northern Sea Route by Russia.
- Fourthly, pressure on the Arctic climate environment has increased. International cooperation in the Arctic has faced additional challenges, including research cooperation between Western countries and Russia in the field of Arctic climate and environment <sup>5</sup>.

According to Wáng lì, Ilú Lánfēn, Wáng Xù, Chén Zinán, three factors will determine the general direction of further development of the situation in the Arctic in the long term:

Firstly, new changes in the situation in the Arctic are inherently the result of a long-term accumulation of negative consequences of the inadequate policies of the United States and NATO countries in the Arctic region.

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<sup>5</sup> Wáng Chénguāng. É wū chōngtú duì běijí chǎnshēngle nǎxiē yǐngxiǎng [How the Russian-Ukrainian conflict affected the Arctic]. Grandview Analytical Center. April 2022. URL: [https://brgg.fudan.edu.cn/articleinfo\\_4795.html](https://brgg.fudan.edu.cn/articleinfo_4795.html) (accessed 20 November 2023).

Secondly, various sanctions imposed on Russia by Western countries after the Russian-Ukrainian conflict are the direct cause of the fluctuating situation in the Arctic. The Arctic is located at the intersection of the three main regions of Northern Europe, North America and the Asia-Pacific region, and Russia is directly connected with Western countries. Thus, according to experts, “the shock from Arctic management has the characteristics of being short-term, widespread, and deep”.

Thirdly, the Arctic is not the main zone of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, but a territory affected by the conflict. This sets a clear upper limit to the instability of the situation in the Arctic: the existing basic mechanisms of regional governance cannot be disbanded, and the likelihood of direct military conflicts between the countries of the region is low. The general trend of shifting the situation in the Arctic from a focus on economic cooperation to a focus on security games will not change for some time, but the duration and degree of fluctuation of the situation will be determined by factors such as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the general relationship between Russia and Western countries <sup>6</sup>.

Security management in the Arctic is entirely dependent on the overall climate of relations between Russia and NATO and becomes more vulnerable to fluctuations in the geopolitical security situation outside the region. Stimulated by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, a new situation may arise in which the “security dilemma” will intensify, and the “alliance dilemma” will be superimposed on it.

Currently, Arctic countries such as Sweden, Finland, Norway and Canada have made it clear that they will increase their defense spending and strengthen their security and defense capabilities in the Arctic region. The Arctic countries have actually decided to ease the burden of the “security dilemma” in the region by strengthening their defense capabilities. But in reality, such behavior will only increase the level of security threats faced by all parties, make all countries more insecure, and ultimately provoke a regional arms race.

Besides, it is difficult to restore the Arctic military communication mechanism. After the Crimean incident in 2014, the mechanism of meetings of the leaders of the armed forces of the Arctic countries was suspended, it led to the long-term absence of a large dialogue platform at the level of military security management in the Arctic region. Before and after Russia assumed the rotating chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2021, it repeatedly proposed the gradual resumption of the mechanism of meetings of the commanders of the armed forces of the Arctic countries and even formally included this mechanism in the framework of the Arctic Council, but all of them were opposed by the Biden administration. After the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, military confidence and security measures within the framework of the NATO – Russia Council and OSCE meetings were actually interrupted one after another, and a dangerous pause arose in the Arctic security

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<sup>6</sup> Wáng lì, Ilú Lánfēn, Wáng Xù, Chén Zínán. É wū chōngtú duì běijí dìqū yǐngxiǎng pínggū [Assessing the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on the Arctic]. Aisixiang Analytics. July 2022. URL: <https://www.aisixiang.com/data/133945.html> (accessed 20 November 2023).

management mechanism. The level of mutual trust in the field of politics and security in the Arctic may continue to decline, and the restoration of appropriate dialogue mechanisms may take a long time<sup>7</sup>.

At a time when “Arctic countries’ governance cooperation has been undermined, economic development has been hampered, and security relations are at odds”, non-Arctic countries should play a more active role and work together to restore dialogue and cooperation, Chinese experts say. The observer states of the Arctic Council should promote dialogue between Russia and other Arctic countries and contribute to practical cooperation in rescue operations, disaster response, scientific research and other aspects within the Arctic Council. The observer states should “perceive the current situation as an opportunity to create a mechanism for regular consultations for the observer states, to deepen communication and coordination of positions of all parties, and to play a constructive role by jointly protecting the legitimate rights and interests of the observer states in the Arctic region, contributing to the development of the Arctic governance system in a fair, reasonable and well-ordered direction”<sup>8</sup>.

### ***Is military-political interaction between Russia and China possible in the Arctic region?***

Assessing the possibility and feasibility of military-political interaction between China and Russia in the Arctic, Chinese authors proceed both from their assessments of the current strategic situation in the region and from the resulting need to protect Chinese interests in the Arctic.

According to Chinese researchers, the United States is exaggerating the expansion of Chinese influence in the Arctic; new trends in the US Arctic strategy and its impact on Arctic management show that the US is “wary of” cooperation with China, trying to “introduce ideological factors into competition with China in economic, technological and other areas”. The new version of the US National Strategy for the Arctic region once again exaggerates Russia’s military capabilities and its plans to increase its military presence in the Arctic, which further intensifies competition for security in the Arctic [3, pp. 7–80, 84]

Thus, analyzing the Arctic strategy of the Biden administration and the prospects for its implementation, Associate Professor of the Faculty of politics and international relations of the Central China Normal University Zhào Níngníng [4, pp. 35–48] points out that, given the dual status of the United States as an Arctic state and a hegemonic state, adjustments to its Arctic strategy will undoubtedly have a profound impact on Arctic geopolitics, governance structure, and the protection of China’s Arctic rights and interests.

In this regard, Zhào Níngníng proposes the following Chinese “countermeasures”:

- Strengthen the scientific basis for Arctic engagement. Since the United States, Russia and other Arctic countries enjoy geographic advantages and Arctic identity advantages

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<sup>7</sup> Wáng lì, Ilú Lánfēn, Wáng Xù, Chén Zínán. É wū chōngtú duì běijí dìqū yǐngxiǎng pínggū [Assessing the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on the Arctic]. Aisixiang Analytics. July 2022. URL: <https://www.aisixiang.com/data/133945.html> (accessed 20 November 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

and have a long history of activities in the region, China needs to “strengthen scientific research on the Arctic high seas and strive to participate in relevant international joint scientific research projects” [4, pp. 35–48].

- Use military and civilian satellite navigation systems to enhance awareness and monitoring of the Arctic region. In the context of the United States and Russia strengthening satellite monitoring of the Arctic, a Chinese expert proposes using the Beidou system for all-weather monitoring of the Arctic region, since it “provides an important basis for the navigational safety of commercial vessels and protects the overall interests of national security” [4, pp. 35–48].
- Explore new ways to develop Arctic bilateral diplomacy and seek to restrain the actions of the United States in the Arctic, leaving space for cooperation in Sino-American relations in the region. China should strive to maintain the stable development of cooperation between China and the Nordic countries in the Arctic by deepening bilateral exchanges and scientific and technological diplomacy. Against the background of European and American sanctions, Russia, as Zhào Níngníng believes, “will rely more on the political and economic support of China” [4, pp. 35–48].
- Since China’s participation in Arctic affairs has faced serious negative international public opinion pressure in recent years, Chinese polar affairs authorities should strengthen coordination of the participation of domestic think tanks and scientists in permanent forums on Arctic issues, such as the Arctic Circle Forum, as well as conduct academic dialogues and exchanges with relevant polar research think tanks to strengthen positive perception of China’s Arctic policy [4, pp. 35–48].

A general analysis of the military-political situation in the Arctic in the context of China’s interests leads Chinese researchers to the conclusion that it is necessary to strengthen Russian-Chinese interaction and cooperation in the region. In their opinion, since “in Arctic affairs, Russia no longer faces one Arctic country, but the NATO Arctic Alliance, this may weaken Russia’s position and its interests in Arctic cooperation”. Therefore, “for the development of the Arctic, Russia urgently needs to find reliable partners from non-Western and non-NATO countries”. In this context, China “is the most suitable partner for Russian Arctic cooperation, since it has strong financial and technical power, shows great enthusiasm for the development of the Arctic and has a long-term cooperative relationship with Russia”<sup>9</sup>.

This conclusion allows the Chinese authors<sup>10</sup> to formulate specific recommendations: in the face of the challenges of extreme natural conditions in the Arctic and the influence of the US

<sup>9</sup> Chén Chuān. The Arctic Institute: Sino-Russian Arctic Cooperation in the Context of Arctic Fragmentation [Russian-Chinese cooperation in the Arctic in the context of the Arctic watershed]. The Arctic Institute. Arctic Collaboration Series 2023. URL: <http://www.polaroceanportal.com/article/4612> (accessed 20 November 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Xiè Xiǎoguāng, Dù Dòngguāng: Fángyù xìng xiànshí zhǔyì shì yù xià de zhōng é běijí ānquán hézuò [Sino-Russian Arctic security cooperation from a defensive realism perspective]. URL: <https://www.bfsujournals.com/c/2022-07-13/512805.shtml> (accessed 20 November 2023).

strategy of militarizing the Arctic, China and Russia “need to define a security cooperation program and increase the level of cooperation in this field”. At the same time, Chinese experts emphasize that the Arctic is much more important to Russia than to China because Russia is an Arctic state. Although China is increasingly promoting its cooperation in the region, the Arctic is still not the main priority of Chinese foreign policy [5, Xiè X., Dù D.].

Given China’s well-known concerns about the vulnerability of its southern sea lanes connecting the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea, Beijing views the NSR as a potential alternative trade route to its markets in Europe and the United States<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, Chinese researchers have separately analyzed the problem of ensuring the safety of navigation in Arctic waters, especially in the waters of the Northern Sea Route (NSR). Thus, Zhang Cheng, Professor of the China Institute of Boundary and Ocean Studies of Wuhan University, notes that the number and quality of Russian icebreakers, the development of the Northern Sea Route in cooperation with China and other countries, the development and construction of military airfields and deep-sea ports along the waterway are considered by the United States as a challenge to its national interests. At the same time, the construction of military bases and the increased frequency of joint military exercises have negatively impacted the sensitive and fragile Arctic environment. Influenced by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, international shipping in the Arctic faces new challenges against the backdrop of anti-Russian sanctions. The level and severe shocks of the geopolitical environment around Russia negatively affect the security of Arctic routes, especially the Northern Sea Route.

Professor Zhang Cheng identifies “factors of the political game that go beyond the assessment of economic benefits”. The West accuses Russia of “improper” management of the Northern Sea Route, which is allegedly “non-transparent” and does not comply with “common international standards”. The resistance of international shipping giants to the use of the Northern Sea Route is obvious. At the same time, Zhang Cheng notes, the development of the Arctic sea route has “irresistible deep economic motives”. “Taking the Northern Sea Route as a starting point, it is necessary to deepen cooperation between China and Russia in the Arctic and create a “Polar Silk Road”, which could become a new starting point for Chinese–Russian partnership in the region” [6, pp. 54–63].

Chinese researchers state that security in the waters of the Northern Sea Route, including the construction of the Polar Silk Road, may be at risk due to American plans to implement the Freedom of Navigation Operations Program (FONOP). The US Navy Secretary said that the country’s navy will begin to patrol Russian shores in the Arctic regularly, drawing an analogy with the situation in the South China Sea, where China and a number of other countries have disagreements over maritime boundaries and areas of responsibility. In August 2021, the US State Depart-

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<sup>11</sup> Nong Hong. China and the United States in the Arctic: Exploring the Divergence and Convergence of Interests. Institute for China-America Studies. October 2022. P. 14. URL: <https://chinaus-icas.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/China-US-Arctic-Report-10.2022-Final.pdf>.

ment Arctic Coordinator stated that “the American government views the Arctic as NATO’s northern flank”<sup>12</sup>.

The US National Guard is also preparing for possible conflicts with the Russian Federation and China in the Arctic, including the possibility of a military clash of Moscow and Beijing with Washington’s NATO allies, according to Military Times. “The National Guard is preparing for possible conflicts in the Arctic with Russia and China... NATO allies such as Norway also operate in the region, which the United States will be obliged to support in the event of a confrontation”<sup>13</sup>.

Back in March 2019, the Russian government approved the rules for passage of the NSR by foreign warships, which stipulate a mandatory 45-day advance notice and the presence of Russian pilots on board. The rules provided for refusal to pass through the NSR and the adoption of emergency measures in the event of unauthorized traffic<sup>14</sup>. A hypothetical refusal of US naval vessels to follow these rules could lead to the risk of naval incidents.

Russia, for its part, has prepared a plan to counter possible provocations on the Northern Sea Route. The plan was developed by the Ministry of Defense, the Federal Security Service and “economic entities of the Arctic”. It includes “building up reconnaissance and defense means on archipelagos and the Arctic Ocean coast, increasing the intensity of flights of the Russian Armed Forces and the Federal Security Service of Russia”. Possible options for action may be the passage of US Navy ships (vessels): transit passage along the entire waters of the Northern Sea Route from west to east or in the opposite direction, passage from the Bering Strait to the Novosibirsk Islands or from the Barents Sea to the Severnaya Zemlya archipelago, simultaneous entry of two ships from the western and eastern directions, accompanied by maneuvering in close proximity to the locations of troops (forces) of the Northern Fleet and the Eastern military district [8, Morozov V.A., Zubarev A.A., Khryapov A.D.].

In this context, Chinese experts are considering the possibility of joint maritime patrols as one of the forms of Russian–Chinese military-political interaction. At the end of April 2023, Russia and China signed a memorandum of cooperation between the coast guards of the two countries and then conducted relevant exercises in the Barents Sea. The theme of the exercise was the integrated use of available capabilities to counter maritime security threats, search and rescue at sea, and environmental protection tasks.

China notes that the Coast Guard, as the “second navy” of the United States, can be incorporated into the naval combat order at any time, turning it into a powerful auxiliary force for US

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<sup>12</sup> SShA nachnut patrulirovanie vblizi rossiyskikh beregov v Arktike [The US will begin patrols near the Russian coast in the Arctic]. URL: <https://iz.ru/1108922/2021-01-07/ssha-nachnut-patrulirovanie-vblizi-rossiiskii-beregov-v-arktike> (accessed 20 November 2023).

<sup>13</sup> Natsgvardiya SShA gotovitsya k vozmozhnym konfliktam s Rossiej i Kitaem v Arktike [The US National Guard is preparing for possible conflicts with Russia and China in the Arctic]. URL: <https://rg.ru/2023/01/30/smi-nacgvardiia-ssha-gotovitsia-k-vozmozhnym-konfliktam-s-rossiej-i-kitaem-v-arktike.html> (accessed 20 November 2023).

<sup>14</sup> Rossiya razrabotala pravila prokhoda Severnogo morskogo puti dlya inostrannykh boevykh sudov [Russia has developed rules for the passage of the Northern Sea Route for foreign warships]. URL: <https://riafan.ru/1157683-rossiya-razrabotala-pravila-prokhoda-severnogo-morskogo-puti-dlya-inostrannykh-boevykh-sudov> (accessed 20 November 2023).

intervention in regional affairs. In response, Chinese experts propose to begin “cooperation to conduct joint patrols in the Arctic region to ensure the presence of maritime law enforcement forces, as well as navigation and rescue of civilian vessels”. They suggest that the patrol route would extend along the Arctic waterway, and the waters of Alaska, an enclave of the United States, would also be included in the patrol zone of the Chinese and Russian coast guard agencies<sup>15</sup>.

It should be noted that Chinese scientists and experts offer a clearly broad interpretation of the above-mentioned Memorandum, referring, for example, to the fact that in August 2023, the third joint maritime patrol of the Pacific Ocean waters by naval vessels of the two countries in the south-western part of the Bering Sea took place, during which the search and destruction of an enemy submarine was practiced. However, it is far from certain that the possibility of joint patrols will be extended to the waters of the NSR, which Russia considers as part of its sovereign space and national jurisdiction.

### *Conclusion*

Thus, the author has shown that Chinese scientists and experts have made timely and thorough review of the evolution and prospects of the geopolitical and geostrategic situation in the Arctic related to the tendency towards militarization of the region and the strengthening of NATO’s military presence there, especially in the context of the Ukrainian crisis.

At the same time, as the author has also shown, the analysis of Chinese scientific discourse on the development of the military-political situation in the Arctic region leads its participants to the conclusion about the expediency and necessity of military-political interaction between China and Russia in the Arctic, including the development of its specific forms. However, such conclusions and proposals clearly need further substantiation and specification, including in the course of joint research and discussions between the expert communities of the two countries.

On the one hand, the Russian expert community has an entrenched perception that Russia is able to independently cope with the tasks of ensuring security in the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF) and the waters of the NSR. On the other hand, many people in Russia believe that military-political interaction with China in the Far East, including the Bering Sea, which is considered part of the Arctic, is largely symbolic in nature and is intended to symbolize the strategic partnership of the two countries, sending a signal to the United States on the possibilities of resisting American expansion.

Therefore, Russia and China have a long way in their joint research of the strategic situation in the Arctic, which will eventually determine the possibility and specific forms of military-political cooperation in the region.

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<sup>15</sup> Zhōng é liǎng guó hǎi jǐng hé bīng yī chù, liánhé xúnháng xuǎn zài měi guójiā ménkǒu [Chinese and Russian coast guards join forces at US doors]. URL: <https://news.ifeng.com/c/8PVL6Yu14Nk> (accessed 20 November 2023).

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