

THE ARCTIC – THE MIDDLE KINGDOM'S AREA OF INTEREST

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Abstract. Arctic region is one of areas of interest of China and it is connected with politics and economy as for now. Recognizing emerging options especially in the latter domain the country is looking for possibilities to ensure national interests in the long-term perspective. It is linked with using variety of tools to engage regional actors bilaterally and in organizational framework without involving military instrument of power. Parallel, China is developing technologies necessary to operate in the Arctic allowing competing with other players. It includes research and investments in the region. Natural resources, sea lines of communication, opportunities for fishery are among factors requiring preservation of national benefits and it is achievable only by grounded presence in many dimensions.
Keywords: Arctic, China, natural resources, sea lines of communication, climate change, international relations.

Introduction

Climate changes have been shaping global environment transformations for several decades. Their importance for individual states in terms of external and internal security was quickly recognised as a threat, but also as an opportunity. This required developing national strategies and preparing tools to counteract their negative effects, but also to make use of emerging opportunities to achieve one's own goals. Among these, the cyber dimension has become very important, cosmic space has grown in importance and innovative concepts for unmanned systems have emerged. Out of the new geographical areas, the Arctic has gained new importance as the climate warmed. China's interest in all these dimensions and areas has gained momentum this century because of their usefulness, potential benefits, national prestige and the need to prepare responses to threats they present. At the same time, an assessment has been made of their potential use for individual non-military and military purposes, especially as other countries have recognised this potential. The Arctic has become one of the foreign policy vectors, particularly in terms of achieving long-term economic benefits.

Julian Skrzyp explained, "great game is currently being played over to gain access to and transport of these raw materials, called by some the geopolitics of the

pipelines or geoeconomics. I feel that tomorrow's geopolitics is a global conflict over strategic raw materials, mainly oil and gas".¹ Such the statement is supporting possible scenarios toward Arctic, which is a priority for Russia, but also a region of great importance for Canada and the Scandinavian countries. The competition there has been joined by the United States; it started to be an area of interest for Japan and, for several years, for China. The role of geopolitics in geography is discussed by Jakub Grygiel, who revealed that it is the geographical distribution of raw material centres and communication lines "assigning significance to particular locations in accordance with their strategic importance".² If raw materials from the Arctic are combined with the possibility of their distribution by sea, it is certainly an element that influences geostrategy of states, as a "geographical direction of state foreign policy "dictating" where a state concentrates its efforts through the projection of force and targeted diplomatic efforts".³ Today, the Arctic has also become such the geographical destination.

The aim of this article is to assess the strategy and dimensions of China's presence in the Arctic. The preliminary assessment shows that by engaging in bilateral cooperation with the 'Arctic' countries and within regional organisation, Beijing is building the image of a reliable partner, which will facilitate greater involvement there as a part of a national long-term project. The article presents the dimensions of the Middle Kingdom's involvement, especially in economic, scientific and political spheres within the last two decades. Some areas of regional and bilateral cooperation engaging partners and initiated by Beijing are highlighted. An assessment has been made of the role and importance of the Arctic for other region-focused states and beyond, paying particular attention to Russia's dominant position. This allowed drawing conclusions in the context of possible directions of Chinese approaches in the coming years and as an element of the global role shaping policy to be applied over the next decades.

The importance of the Arctic for Beijing

For Beijing, the Arctic importance has grown as it opens new opportunities along with progressing global warming and the expected opening of new shipping routes, potential extraction of raw materials and vast fishing areas. The ice cap

¹ J. Skrzyp, *Geopolityka „wczoraj, dziś i jutro”*, Instytut Geopolityki, „Przegląd Geopolityczny” Vol. 2, Częstochowa 2010, p. 23.

² J. Grygiel, *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change*, the John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2006, p. 22.

³ Ibid.

melting,⁴ as an ongoing process, continues to increase the possibilities of using the new exploration area for the countries concerned. China is aware of other nations' interest in the region, especially dominant role of Russia, which is intensively and multidirectionally developing its potential there. Canada's ambitions and the USA's growing attention to development of the situation is also noticed. Those nations involvement is asking for taking decisive steps toward other actors in Arctic, as while at present the possibilities for using Arctic resources are limited, it will change in next decades. One of reasons is the North East-North West Route – NE-NWR (see Figure 1) as it reduces sea transport times to Europe by about one third speeding trade. The vulnerability of current maritime routes, especially the Strait of Malacca, which is a prerequisite for a stable supply of raw materials and import-export, is a very sensitive chokepoint for China's energy security. Any option, which makes goods' flow faster and undisturbed by potential adversaries reducing dependence on this maritime route, is a solution worth of consideration for Beijing. Arctic shipping is currently very limited, but "China's long-term plans are that between 5% and 15% of container vessels will use the sea router by 2020 via the North Pole Circle"⁵. These are important figures worth of investments given the possibilities of supplying energy resources using NE-NWR directly from the Arctic⁶ and a potential destination area for fishing fleets. In the context of the growing needs of the national economy, this is an important area for exploitation if the proper conditions are safeguarded. Therefore, a comprehensive approach is needed to establish credible presence in this "new" geographical region. The food is another aspect as of growing Chinese population as the Arctic Ocean and its seas are offering significant opportunities for fishing boats. The vast area is allowing them to operate without affecting the

⁴ For the state of the ice cap melting process see L.W. Brigham, *Think Again: The Arctic*, Washington, 16 August 2010, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/16/think_again_the_arctic [accessed: 22 July 2017]; Y. Uutiset, *Pohjoisnavalla vähän jäätä (A little ice at the North Pole)*, The Finnish News Agency Yle 1 Uutiset, Luonto 17 January 2014 http://yle.fi/uutiset/pohjoisnavalla_vahan_jaata/7037199 [accessed: 22 July 2017] and J.C. Comiso, D.K. Hall, *Climate trends in the Arctic as observed from space*, WIREs Climate Change 2014, Volume 5, pp. 389-409, doi: 10.1002/wcc.277 [accessed: 14 May 2017].

⁵ A. Parfieniuk, *Chiński interes na Arktyce. Topniejące lody zbliżyły Państwo Środka i Islandię*, Wirtualna Polska 29 July 2015, <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1027191,title,Chinski-interes-na-Arktyce-Topniejace-lody-zblizyl-Panstwo-Srodka-i-Islandie,wid,17577777,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=114f6a> [accessed: 31 July 2017].

⁶ The data on the Arctic's natural resources differ, compare: D. Trenin, P.K. Baev, *The Arctic A View from Moscow*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, 2010, p. V, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/arctic_cooperation.pdf [accessed: 22 May 2017] and S. Borgerson, C. Antrim, *An Arctic Circle of Friends*, New York, 28 March 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/28/opinion/28borgerson.html?_r=0 [accessed: 12 June 2017] and *Circum-Arctic Resource Appraisal: Estimates of Undiscovered Oil and Gas North of the Arctic Circle*, U.S. Geological Survey report USGS Fact Sheet 2008-3049, Washington 2008, <http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2008/3049/fs2008-3049.pdf> [accessed: 15 June 2017].

Exclusive Economic Zones of the countries having coastlines in this area.⁷ That aspect is asking for creation of infrastructure in cooperation with regional actors to provide logistics and fish processing capabilities. The exploration of the resources (oil, gas and fish) may however influence the natural maritime environment and the whole region by damaging it in the short time.



Fig. 1. North East–North West Route and the location of the “Yellow River” Research Station

Source: *Physical Map of the World 2015*, January 2015, http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/world_maps/world_physical_2015.pdf and *Arctic Region (Political) 2012*, https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/islands_oceans_poles/arctic_region_pol_2012.pdf, Maps as of courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin; additional information provided by the authors [accessed: 10 April 2018]

Recognising attempts to block access to resources by non-Arctic states, such as the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration, the state presented its position stating, “the Arctic belongs to all the people of the world and no country has sovereignty over it”.⁸ Therefore, “China must play a role in the exploration of the Arctic, as it accounts for one fifth of the world’s population”.⁹ Such expression of interest was important because of Beijing fears that once all the territorial disputes in the region will be resolved, the area of international waters, i.e. those available for research and exploitation, will be considerably reduced. China has drawn attention to its formal

⁷ A.-M. Brady, *China in the Arctic*, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States, Wilson Center, 13 June 2017, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/china-the-arctic> [accessed: 14 October 2017].

⁸ G.G. Chang, *China’s Arctic Play*, Tokyo, 9 March 2010, the Diplomat, for The Diplomat, <http://thediplomat.com/2010/03/chinas-arctic-play/> [accessed: 8 October 2017].

⁹ Ibidem.

presence in the region and has consequently applied for an observer status in the Arctic Council, which brings together eight countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Canada, Norway, Russia, the United States and Sweden. There have been initially doubts as to significance of the Arctic Council and its legitimacy, the role of the International Maritime Organisation and the legal status of the Arctic¹⁰ but it was recognized there is a need to join them. This proved to be the important decision as the Council's role as a forum for cooperation increased significantly. This was already evident in 2012, when the Chinese representative at the Stockholm Council underlined the need to respect the rights and interests of non-Arctic states, and the Middle Kingdom was defined as a 'near Arctic' state.¹¹ The same year in April, Iceland has become an important partner by providing financial support and the free trade agreement has been signed "giving Beijing a leg up in its drive for expanded influence in the Arctic".¹² Reykjavik supported Chinese attempts to join the Arctic Council enabling it to play a greater role and to follow developments. As a consequence and despite the concerns voiced by the Member States, China joined the Council as a permanent observer at the May 2013 Kiruna Ministerial Meeting¹³ with five other nations in the justified hope that this would allow greater impact on work of the organisation in the future.¹⁴ As the consequence, "China takes its share of Arctic governance as an obvious matter, based on its status of a growing global power"¹⁵. The status of the Arctic Council member has enabled participation in official meetings, in working groups, proposing projects to be implemented within the organisation, including the ones in cooperation with its members. It also allows

¹⁰ For more details, see: S. Rainwater, *Race To The North – China's Arctic Strategy and Its Implication*, "The Naval War College Review", vol. 66, no 2, Newport, spring 2013, <http://www.usnwc.edu/getattachment/31708e41-a53c-45d3-a5e4-ccb5ad550815/> [accessed: 5 October 2017]; N. Van Derklippe, *For China, north is a new way to go west*, The Globe and Mail, Beijing, 19 January 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/the-north/for-china-north-is-a-new-way-to-go-west/article16402962/> [accessed: 8 October 2017] and A. Guschin, *Understanding China's Arctic Policies*, Tokyo, 14 November 2013, the Diplomat, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/11/understanding-chinas-arctic-policies/> [accessed: 6 October 2017].

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² A. Trotman, *Iceland first European country to sign free trade agreement with China*, „The Telegraph” 15 April 2012, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/9995525/Iceland-first-European-country-to-sign-free-trade-agreement-with-China.html> [accessed: 4 October 2017].

¹³ Z. Cheng, *China granted observer status in Arctic Council*, Beijing, 15 July 2013, English.news.cn, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-05/15/c_132384455.htm [accessed: 4 October 2017].

¹⁴ M. Aaltola et al., *Towards the Geopolitics of Flows. Implications for Finland*, the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki, June 2016, p. 116-117.

¹⁵ L. Jakobson, *Northeast Asia Turns Its Attention to the Arctic*, Washington, December 2012, The National Bureau of Asian Research, NBR Analysis Brief, <http://www.nbr.org/publications/issue.aspx?id=275> [accessed: 4 October 2017].

to present position in relation to subject of the meetings and the submission of documents with the consent of the respective chairperson.¹⁶

The country is regularly present at meetings and in 2015, by decision of the President Xi, it was responsible for the preparation and conduct of a special plenary session.¹⁷ During the meeting of the Senior Arctic Official's Plenary meeting in Oulu in October 2015, the Deputy Foreign Minister Zhang Ming delivered a paper entitled *China's contribution: respect, cooperation and win-win*.¹⁸ He stressed that Beijing has been interested in the Arctic for 90 years and once again referred to China as a "near Arctic state". The region has been identified as exerting a strong influence on all areas of the state's functioning, which justifies the intention to strengthen the role as one of the main stakeholders in this area. Zhang has identified six policy dimensions in the region: continuing to exploit and explore the Arctic; protecting the environment and rational exploitation; respecting the rights of Arctic countries and local populations; respecting the rights of non-Arctic states and the international community; building multifaceted cooperation for the benefit of all participants; and maintaining the current governance system based on international law. The declaration contained many important assumptions for Beijing continuing a firm stance towards the use of Arctic resources in cooperation with other states. It is certainly a comprehensive approach to regional issues by looking for partners, offering support and accounting for future perspectives.

In October 2016, Gao Feng, dealing with climate change in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs¹⁹, reiterated the importance of China's six principles of Arctic policy regarding highlighting peaceful cooperation of the interested parties. He stressed the importance of research carried out in the field of climate change, where the Arctic plays a major role. He also emphasised the significance of climate-related arrangements under the Paris Agreement from 2015²⁰, since its regulations could affect the climate warming process if implemented. China is demonstrating a policy of conciliation and cooperation without confrontation and, as Nengye Liu has said,

¹⁶ The International Arctic Council's site, see: <https://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us/arctic-council/observers> [accessed: 12 November 2017].

¹⁷ For more about the Arctic Circle Conference, visit: <http://arcticcircle.org/>

¹⁸ *Keynote Speech by Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming at the China Country Session of the Third Arctic Circle Assembly*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, Beijing, 17 October 2015, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1306858.shtml [accessed: 5 October 2017].

¹⁹ Video of the speech available at the site of the Arctic Council: <http://www.arcticcircle.org/assemblies/2016/videos> [accessed: 5 October 2017].

²⁰ *Paris Agreement*, UN, Paris, 12 December 2015. The document available at the site of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf [accessed: 5 October 2017].

but it will remain a predictable partner, but will not be left behind in pursuing its own interests in a resource-rich region.²¹

The Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration (CAA),²² which is subordinate to the State Oceanic Administration is managing national interests in Arctic and bears the responsibility for expeditions and matters related to this geographical region. It has been active especially in recent years and in 2004, the Yellow River research station in Ny-Alesund, Norway,²³ was established (see Figure 1) to “intensify research and scientific expeditions for better understanding of the Arctic Ocean and global climate changes”.²⁴ The station, which has some 20 persons’ crew, comprises four laboratories for meteorological research and measurement of cosmic space, glaciology, marine ecosystem, environment and weather in the Polar region.²⁵ It is intended to play a major role in the Arctic research, but also to facilitate international cooperation and data exchange with other research centres in the region and beyond.

Eight research expeditions have already been organised on the M/V ‘Xuelong’ (the Snow Dragon) icebreaker, to be followed by “a series of subsequent icebreakers to join Xuelong, thus enabling the CAA to carry out more frequent Arctic exploration and research missions”.²⁶ These are ambitious plans, showing the growing prominence of the region, since “if the eight thousand-ton ship worth CNY 1.25 billion (USD 198 million) is sent to the sea, China will have icebreakers that are larger and of better quality than those of the US and Canada”.²⁷ In the course of promoting national interests in the expedition, the countries of the region were visited and cooperation in the field of research was established. The last expedition, which lasted 83 days, ended in October 2017. It is assumed, that the expeditions will continue in the future at least once a year, increasing the intensity of research and presence in the region.²⁸ To support national interests, the China-Nordic Arctic

²¹ N. Liu, *China's Emerging Arctic Policy. China has a clear (though as yet unwritten) strategy for the Arctic*, The Diplomat 14 December 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/chinas-emerging-arctic-policy/> [accessed: 8 October 2017].

²² The site of CAA, see: <http://www.chinare.gov.cn/en/index.html>.

²³ T. Nilsen, *China–Nordic Arctic Research Center opens in Shanghai*, Kirkenes 12 December 2013, The Barents Observer, <http://barentsobserver.com/en> [accessed: 5 October 2017].

²⁴ Q. Wang, *Arctic research set to be beefed up*, The China Daily, Beijing, 6 July 2010, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-05/06/content_9814100.htm [accessed: 5 October 2017].

²⁵ *Chinese Arctic Yellow River Station*, the site of CAA, <http://www.chinare.gov.cn/en/index.html?pid=stations&st=yellow> [accessed: 6 October 2017].

²⁶ S. Rainwater, *Race To The North – China's Arctic Strategy and Its Implication*, op. cit., p. 69.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ L. Jia, *China's Arctic Expeditions Increase to Once a Year*, Chinese Academy of Sciences, 11 October 2017, http://english.cas.cn/newsroom/china_research/201710/t20171011_183796.shtml [accessed: 17 October 2017].

Research Centre (CNARC)²⁹ has been established in Shanghai, with an annual budget of around USD 60 million. It unites six institutes from Norway, Finland, Iceland, Denmark and Sweden, as well as three Chinese ones, strengthening the role of the country's research centres, which allows for acquiring experience and gradual building of bilateral and multilateral relations.

The interest in Arctic is general trend in Beijing international relations as it is considering to be one of superpowers in the multilateral global order. The nation is still developing within economy domain preserving GDP growth just below 7% in last few years (6.8% in 2017). It is investing in military capabilities including Navy allowing operating in the blue waters globally in all the oceans. Such the show of force was presented in March 2018 in the South China Sea with more than 40 vessels belonging to "a carrier strike group, mostly comprised of the major surface combatants like the frigates and destroyers, possibly one or two submarines".³⁰ Such the fleet will allow operating in any environment including Arctic. It is supported by investing into new technologies to expand capabilities like automatic systems, unmanned vehicles, robots,³¹ stealth technologies, artificial intelligence and many others. For example, according to the Pentagon, by 2023 China's armed forces will have even up to 42000 air, land and naval unmanned systems under contracts worth up to 10.5 billion USD.³² Another domain is militarization of space³³ by investing into orbit race³⁴ allowing using satellites to observe and monitor all the remote regions. This is why Beijing is increasing investment in space research and use of satellites for such tasks as observation and surveillance, supervision, mapping, communications, navigation (GPS), weather monitoring and forecasting.³⁵ Those tools are important not only for research but also for military operations in the Arctic Ocean.

²⁹ Information on the CNARC available at the centre's site: <http://www.arcticcentre.org/EN> [accessed: 6 October 2017].

³⁰ B. Westcott, Z. Cohen, *US challenged by China's navy in South China Sea*, CNN World 28 March 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/28/asia/south-china-sea-drills-liaoning-intl/index.html> [accessed: 12 April 2017].

³¹ P. Springer, *Military Robots and Drones: A Reference Handbook*, ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara 2013, p. 87.

³² A. Antczak-Barzan, Z. Śliwa, R. Zaniewski, *Wojna XXI wieku. Początki wojny „Trzeciej generacji”*, Vizja, Warsaw, 2016, p. 114.

³³ For more details, see: <https://pl.sputniknews.com/swiat/201510251290415-chiny-kosmos-usa/> [accessed: 10 December 2017].

³⁴ R. Ferdman, *The U.S. still spends more on space than every other country - combined*, The Washington Post, 25 October 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2014/10/25/the-u-s-still-spends-more-on-space-than-every-other-country-combined/> [accessed: 4 December 2017].

³⁵ A. Antczak-Barzan, Z. Śliwa, R. Zaniewski, *Wojna...*, p. 152.

Russia's as the crucial Arctic "player"

An important state in relation to the Arctic is Russia, which borders "vast arctic coastline, Russia not only controls the lion's share of arctic resources within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) but controls much of the Northern sea route."³⁶ which is recognized by Beijing. The new "Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation" of 26 December 2014 confirmed the strategic importance of the Arctic for the state policy. It was highlighted when presenting the main tasks of the armed forces and other state bodies. It was stressed the importance of "safeguarding the national interests of the Russian Federation in the Arctic".³⁷ This is a doctrinal confirmation of the process of building military capacity in the Arctic to safeguard economic interests with the strong political support by the state authorities. The economic aspect was expressed by defining a local war as "a war pursuing limited military-political objectives when military actions take place within the borders of the warring states and affecting mainly the interests (territorial, economic, political, etc.) of these states".³⁸ Certainly the first two categories of local wars apply to the Arctic, where territorial disputes occur (e.g. with regard to the Lomonosov Ridge).³⁹ The legal ownership such territories has a direct economic impact as of the possibility of controlling and accessing the offshore reserves of natural resources there.⁴⁰ Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that military capabilities concentration in the Arctic, which has gained momentum since the beginning of this century, will continue. There are opinions that Moscow is not focused on Eastern Europe, and that the conflict in Ukraine and exercises at NATO's borders are only to divert attention from the actual goal, which is the "High North, the region above the Arctic Circle".⁴¹ It accelerated the militarisation of the Arctic in 2014, when the Minister of Defence Shoygu stated "we set quite a significant pace in our conquest of the Arctic", with the result that "by the end of (2014 – note) we will have deployed the majority of our forces in the region,

³⁶ S. Rainwater, *Race to the North – China's Arctic...*, op. cit., p. 72.

³⁷ *Военная доктрина Российской Федерации* (Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation), Moscow, 26 December 2014, section 32s, <http://news.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf> and *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation approved by the President of the Russian Federation on December 25, 2014*, the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland 29 June 2015, <https://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029> [accessed: 17 August 2017].

³⁸ Ibidem, section 8f.

³⁹ Claims for the Lomonosov Ridge are reported by Denmark, Canada and Russia.

⁴⁰ For more Russia's interests and perspectives, see: S.J. Main, *If spring comes tomorrow... Russia and the Arctic*, Russian Series 2011, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, Shrivenham 2011, p. 51-58, <http://www.da.mod.uk/publications/library/russian-series/20111017-SJM-Arctic-paper.pdf/view> [accessed: 15 August 2017].

⁴¹ D. Sloggett, *Arctic Ambitions*, Air Force monthly, January 2015 issue, p. 47.

from Murmansk to Chukotka”.⁴² Despite the budgetary constraints resulting from the weakened economy, the Arctic will remain one of the priorities of the programme for the expansion and modernisation of the armed forces, as it is simply needed by the state now and even more so in the future. The General Gerasimov, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and the First Deputy Minister of Defence, assessed that “in 2015, the main effort of the Ministry of Defence will be to enhance the combat capacity of the armed forces, ...with a strong focus on the Crimean, Kaliningrad and Arctic concentrations”.⁴³ This is linked to the requirement of military control over the 6,200 kilometre-long Russian Arctic coast. An example was the “Zapad 2017” exercise as it was related to the Arctic as Norwegian experts evaluated that the exercise included testing the readiness of the Arctic brigades and the Northern Fleet to conduct amphibian operations and abilities to operate in harsh Arctic conditions. According to the authors, it included the simulation of an air and sea landing on the Norwegian Svalbard archipelago.⁴⁴

The comprehensive strengthening of the Russian Federation’s military capabilities in the region, coupled with the creation of a joint command integrating various types of armed forces, is an important element in deterring potential opponents from taking aggressive steps in enhancing of their national interests by trying to influence the status of the disputed areas. At the same time, given the recent conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine, Moscow is determined to use all the available instruments of force⁴⁵ to safeguard the interests of the state. This is even more true as Russia’s military potential is steadily increasing as a result of the modernisation of its armed forces. Already in 2012, Krzysztof Kubiak assessed “that despite the numerous difficulties that the navy (including the Northern Fleet) and other armed forces have experienced, the Russian Federation now has the greatest military potential behind the Arctic Circle of all the states participating in the Arctic game. Although the military force argument does not seem to be decisive in the issues raised, it must not

⁴² A. Petrov, *Russian Bases to Span Entire Arctic Border by End of 2014*, RIA Novosti, 21 October 2014, <http://rt.com/news/197936-russia-arctic-military-shoigu/> [accessed: 26 October 2017].

⁴³ For the priorities, see: J. Bender, *Russia Is Constructing An Arctic Stronghold 30 Miles From The Finnish Border*, Business Insider, 14 January 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/russian-arctic-base-miles-from-finnish-border-2015-1#ixzz3OtUu9PXr> and J. Bender, *Russia Is Reinforcing 3 Crucial Geopolitical Frontlines*, Business Insider, 13 January 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/russia-reinforcing-geopolitical-frontlines-2015-1> [accessed: 15 August 2017].

⁴⁴ K. Stormark, *Russian forces exercised attack on Svalbard*, AldriMer. no 18, October 2017, <https://www.aldrimer.no/russian-forces-exercised-attack-on-svalbard/> [accessed: 15 August 2017].

⁴⁵ In NATO the national instruments of power are referred to as political, economic, and civil – MPEC. For more information about this subject, see: *Allied Command Operations Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive COPD Interim V2.0*, SHAPE, Brussels, 4 October 2013, p. 1-9.

be downplayed”.⁴⁶ The creation of the joint strategic command in the Arctic in 2014 and its responsibility for the Arctic region is an expression of the growing importance of the area mainly in the context of raw material resources needed for Russian economy. It is also a region where population migration is taking place, which may cause demographic expansion of other countries. It includes Siberia, so increased military presence is an important deterrent for any attempt to try to retake control especially by growing Chinese presence and its minority in Russian Far East. Russian armed forces already have considerable capabilities in planning and conducting operations combined with the use of sizeable military potential of the Arctic units. Numerous naval bases and shipyards along the Russian Arctic coasts will provide the basis for permanent presence throughout the region, will support command and management in times of peace and crisis, and will sustain logistics support. In addition, in the event of a crisis, the forces and resources at the disposal of the Eastern, Central and Western Military Districts may support the activities of land, sea and air units subordinated to the Arctic command.

Consequently, China's cooperation with Russia is essential for a number of reasons. It is important to note that the important Chinese “Ice Silk Road” initiative along the Northern Route must pass through waters perceived by Moscow to be economic zone waters, not being the subject to international navigation. Any violation of such the perception requires legal action to change the situation. However, the current good relations between the states do not allow attempts to undermine Moscow's position in this area, at least in the near future. The “China-Russia Joint Declaration on Further Strengthening Comprehensive, Strategic and Cooperative Partnership” signed at the G-20 Summit in July 2017 in the presence of President Xi and President Putin fosters good relations. The Declaration supports the cooperation already undertaken within the framework of the “Russian-Chinese Polar Engineering and Research Centre” resulting from the close relations between the Russian “Far Eastern Federal University” and the Chinese “Harbin Polytechnic University”.⁴⁷ Russia is however careful in building relations as it is also developing relations with other Asian nations like India and Japan to diversify partnerships in the Arctic “in order to lessen the risks of locking itself completely to China and ending up as a resource appendage supporting China's great power position and status”.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ K. Kubiak, *Potencjał wojskowy Floty Północnej*, Armia 24, 10 July 2012, <http://www.armia24.pl/na-morzu/98-marynarka-wojenna/1862-potencjal-wojskowy-floty-polnocnej> [accessed: 2 October 2017]; also see *Military Balance 2016*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, by Routledge, London, February 2016, Chapter 5: Russia-Eurasia.

⁴⁷ C. Sørensen, E. Klimenko, *Emerging Chinese-Russian cooperation in the Arctic Possibilities and constraints*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Policy Paper No. 46, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 42.

Interests of the states in the Arctic Region

Canada and United States are important Arctic states in the context of their ambitions and relative power when compared with other actors. The former Canadian Prime Minister Harper clearly underlined the role of the region, because “when it comes to defending our sovereignty in the Arctic, we either use it or we will lose it”, since “Arctic is essential to our identity as a northern state. It is a part of our history. It also represents a huge potential for our future”.⁴⁹ The statement was important in terms of international relations, but also for internal national policy reasons.⁵⁰ Canada has started to expand its maritime base in Nanisivik and a training centre in the Resolute Bay. However, seeing Russia as the most important opponent and monitoring its actions, it was estimated that “we have not seen, of course, the kind of aggressive behaviour in the Arctic that has been observed in Eastern Europe”.⁵¹ However, there are concerns about the future. Canada also has claims against the United States, including i.e. the Northwest Passage, recognising it as the Canadian Internal Waters and not international waters.⁵²

In May 2013, the United States adopted the *National Strategy for the Arctic Region* in order to safeguard national interests, develop the Arctic responsibly and strengthen international cooperation.⁵³ In November 2013, the Department of Defence adopted the *Strategy for the Arctic Region*, drawing attention to the need to work with allies and partners, to protect the region’s environment and to support civilian authorities in the face of increased human activity in the Arctic.⁵⁴ These documents had an impact on the new naval strategy called *US Navy Arctic Roadmap for 2014 to 2030*.⁵⁵ As a result, as the former Secretary of Defence Hagel stressed, “the US intends to be *heavily involved*

⁴⁹ A. Lytvynenko, *Arctic Sovereignty, Policy Review*, prepared for Ad Hoc Committee of Deputy Ministers on the Arctic, 5 April 2011, <http://www4.carleton.ca/cifp/app/serve.php/1355.pdf> [accessed: 14 August 2017].

⁵⁰ For information about claims put forward by Canada, see: K. Drummond, *Cold wars: why Canada wants to claim the North Pole*, The Verge, 09 December 2013, <http://www.theverge.com/2013/12/9/5191740/canada-russia-fight-over-north-pole-arctic> [accessed: 14 August 2017].

⁵¹ Stephen Harper concerned by Russia’s growing military presence in Arctic, the Canadian Press, 22 August 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/stephen-harper-concerned-by-russia-s-growing-military-presence-in-arctic-1.2744499> [accessed: 15 August 2017].

⁵² *The Arctic: Canada’s legal claims*, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Publication PRB 08-05E, The Parliament of Canada, 24 October 2008, <http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/lop/researchpublications/prb0805-e.pdf> [accessed: 15 August 2017].

⁵³ National Strategy for the Arctic Region, Washington, May 2013, p. 2, available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_arctic_strategy.pdf [accessed: 15 August 2017].

⁵⁴ Arctic Strategy, Department of Defence, Washington, November 2013, p. 7, 10, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2013_Arctic_Strategy.pdf [accessed: 15 August 2017].

⁵⁵ See: *U.S. Navy Arctic Roadmap for 2014 to 2030*, Department of the Navy, Washington, February 2014, http://www.navy.mil/docs/USN_arctic_roadmap.pdf [accessed: 16 August 2017].

in the Arctic” and the Navy will strive to gain the capability of conducting combined Arctic operations by 2025.⁵⁶ These decisions are entering the implementation phase, although current commitments in the Pacific, Europe, Middle East and budget cuts limit their scope. However, this is important from China's point of view, as there is a diversification of the US involvement in several regions, thus affecting the amount of power and resources in the Pacific region.

Another country seeking to increase ownership in the Arctic is Denmark, which is conducting research to prove rights to the Lomonosov Ridge (Figure 2), but its military and economic potential makes it too weak to compete with other “players”. Improving Chinese relations with Norway⁵⁷ and restoring diplomatic relations in December 2016 were also conducive to attracting a partner with a strong geographical position and an extensive record of accomplishment in modern technologies useful in the Arctic. Oslo is an important partner and it is a prove that “Chinese approach is fairly straightforward: if the Arctic becomes more open for business and shipping, then China wants to have its partnerships and its capacity in the region in place”.⁵⁸

As mentioned previously, Iceland can greatly benefit from cooperation with Beijing, gaining a new, very substantial market for the production of fish and the export of technology know-how in the field of fish breeding, but also the use of geothermal sources. For this small country, but also for China, this is a win-win situation, especially when one of the projects, the deep-sea the Finnaþfjörður Harbour Project in a fjord in northern Iceland as a logistics centre, will be finalized. It depends on receiving financial support, which will be available from Beijing – if the “Chinese plan to increase navigation through the North Pole Circle”⁵⁹ finds the desired end state. In addition to cooperation with Iceland, bilateral contacts have been established with Greenland, which is Denmark's autonomous dependent territory. Going further, Greenland is of real importance as a supplier of iron ore and due to its geostrategic location. *Mysteel* and *China General Nice Group* took over the Isua iron ore mines in Greenland after the bankruptcy of *London Mining Incorporated*, where up to 15 million tonnes of iron ore had been mined annually.⁶⁰ It was decided despite concerns about the profitability of the investment and possible technological setbacks.⁶¹ Investments in oil production are also planned at the Barents and Pechora Seas, and fishing opportunities are being explored.

⁵⁶ J.M. Cole, *Militarization of the Arctic Heats Up, Russia Takes the Lead, the Diplomat*, 06 December 2013, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/12/militarization-of-the-arctic-heats-up-russia-takes-the-lead/> [accessed: 16 August 2017].

⁵⁷ C. Sørensen, E. Klimenko, *Emerging Chinese–Russian cooperation...*, op. cit., p. 7.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 8.

⁵⁹ A. Parfieniuk, *Chiński interes na Arktyce...*, op. cit.

⁶⁰ A. Guschin, *Understanding China's Arctic Policies*, op. cit.

⁶¹ J. Du, *General Nice Group to take over Greenland mine*, China Daily, 13 January 2015, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2015-01/13/content_19301900.htm [accessed: 22 May 2017].



Fig. 2. Contested regions in the Arctic Ocean

Source: *Russian Claimed Territory in Arctic Ocean*, The map by the courtesy of the Library of the University of Texas Libraries, Austin, additional information provided by the author: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/islands_oceans_poles/arctic_russian_claims_2008.jpg [accessed: 18 May 2017]

China drew attention to Finland, with which it signed a ‘Joint Declaration on Partnership’⁶² in April 2017, highlighting, in para 13, the risks to the Arctic environment and the intensification of economic and technological cooperation in several areas. This is important for China, as it allows the country to gain a partner offering experience and access to the necessary technologies. Cooperation with the Nordic countries is encouraged by the fact that Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden and Iceland have joined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in China, which encourages cooperation, especially in obtaining funds and cheap loans. This is related to “One Belt, One Road” concept, which is one of the President Xi’s flagship projects.

⁶² Full text available at: *Joint Declaration between the Republic of Finland and the People’s Republic of China on Establishing and Promoting the future-oriented new-type cooperative partnership*, the site of the President of Finland, Helsinki, 5 April 2017, <http://www.tpk.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=360378&culture=en-US> [accessed: 2 October 2017].

Conclusions

The strong involvement of Russia and rather moderate as for now from USA will mean that China will significantly increase its engagement in the Arctic in the longer term. At present, relations between Moscow and Beijing are good and Russia will not be able to take decisive action against the Arctic region's involvement and use of its resources. This is among others, as Russian companies need capital to carry out further work, which will be intensified once sanctions will be stopped and the natural resources market will be stabilised. This will promote common economic growth, research objectives and shipping. However, relations between Russia and China are quite complex, and even though the countries cooperate at present, if Moscow may feel threatened by Beijing's ambitions, these relations may deteriorate, which will also translate into the lack of mutual support in the High North. The cooperation could be limited as in the case of lifting the West sanctions Moscow could shift to the West limiting Chinese impact on the country policies. However, China has capital and infrastructure, and sanctions against Russia require a partner willing to invest in research and development of new, necessary technologies. This is certainly a win-win option. The interest in the Arctic has been confirmed by the presence of five Chinese Navy vessels in international waters around the Aleutian Islands. This may indicate a greater interest in the region, but also attempts to make an initial estimation of the shipping conditions in this area. If Arctic policy is further developed, it is likely that there will be more activity in every respect. According to Song Lilei, Tongji University, "Beijing needs to clearly define its objectives in the Arctic and Antarctica, such document drawn by China can help to address the concerns of the Nordic countries"⁶³ allowing for better cooperation. The state will certainly be an important shareholder in overall transport, using the Arctic routes to find ways to diversify supplies. To this end, there will be investments in the icebreaker fleet or in commercial cooperation with Russia, which already has a large fleet of such vessels. Another requirement is the construction of cargo ships adapted to sailing in difficult waters of the region and the preparation of crews for navigation. This is important because any disaster can have serious consequences for the environment and encourage accusations of China's failure to take care of them, which would not be in line with the declarations made, as the six policy dimensions, which has repeatedly been communicated.

Already today, the pace and determination with which the Middle Kingdom continues to develop its strategies and tools to play an increasingly important role in the above dimensions and areas deserve a lot of attention. For this purpose,

⁶³ T. Ng, *Blueprint called for on China's ambitions in Arctic and Antarctic*, The South China Morning Post, 20 September 2014, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1402721/blueprint-called-chinas-ambitions-arctic-and-antarctic> [accessed: 2 October 2017].

political and economic factors are effectively used, as well as military cooperation and scientific and research centres, allowing to take advantage of opportunities and negate risks in new conditions. They are supported by “strategic patience” and careful observation of other countries in their activities. Economic cooperation and research are carried out for the benefit of the state, but they are also an element of presence that seems to raise as few concerns as possible about Beijing’s involvement. The cooperation is in line with international law and is underpinned within international organisations such as the Arctic Council. However, the Arctic states are concerned about their over-reliance on Beijing, especially its economic dependence, in view of the country’s great capacity to finance projects and, therefore, its possible influence on foreign policy. Chinese companies are already present in many countries with the political support of their own authorities and it is matter of time when they will their expand investments further. Among such the companies, there are China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC).

It is clear that the militarisation of the Arctic is a fast-paced and irreversible process, which can encourage pressure to be employed in territorial disputes by threatening by use of force. The situation in the Arctic is changing, and at present, it is not just a hypothetical area where the interests of concerned states could clash, but also a real area for military capacity building to promote political and economic interests. This evokes another look at the region from the perspective of possible conflict of interests. The changes are taking place very dynamically in the shadow of geopolitical events such as the conflict in Ukraine, the fight against the Islamic State and the withdrawal of NATO’s combat component from Afghanistan. The Arctic has already become one of the important areas of strategic importance for Russia, Canada and the US and has become a field of growing activity for China. The Nordic countries, mainly Norway and Denmark, are linked historically and geographically with this area and benefit from the resources available there, which affects their economic situation. At the same time, they are too weak, including military domain, to protect their own interests, and therefore they are looking for unity of effort between the Scandinavian states and their partners within international organisations (the European Union, NATO, the Arctic Council) in order to secure their participation in future benefits. Most of the countries interested in the Arctic are members of NATO or the EU, and this is a significant fact, particularly with regard to Article V of the Washington Treaty and the threat of creating a conflict with a wider scope. In this context, the balance caused by a growing Washington presence will serve containing threats and limiting risks. This is because without “a leading role of the US and support for diplomatic solutions with respect to contentious claims and potential conflicts, the (Arctic) region could explode into a mad

race for its raw materials”.⁶⁴ Beijing's growing ambitions for global leadership and the pursuit of the Chinese Dream concept to be achieved by 2049 will also have consequences for the Arctic.

The High North will remain one of China's important areas of activity in support of political and economic interests. The issue will certainly be to secure long-term interests and the need to extend potential in other areas to meet this challenge. This will not take a form of arms race in short-term, as it is not a priority area and the use of soft power will continue to be priority. The limited military presence of nations, excluding Russia, will be the case for at least the next two decades. Especially as US focus on the Pacific and Asia and investments on other continents will not allow resources to be allocated for the development of the significant Arctic military potential. For China, it will a window of opportunity to acquire experience and technologies enabling to compete with other countries, especially Russia, with its prominent presence there in every respect. However, the oil and gas market will cause continuation of the expansion of the Arctic presence, even at the expense of other regions, with the support of state authorities to ensure that the benefits of having an established role are realised in long-term perspective. While political and economic interests in the region are Chinese number one priority, the measures taken allow continuity of presence, observation of the activity of countries and organisations to increase involvement. Greater interest and involvement of the Middle Kingdom is a matter of time considering both the need to shape the image of a global player in a multipolar world and to search raw materials for the economy. It will happen with strong support from political leadership.

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⁶⁴ L.W. Brigham, *Think Again: The Arctic*, op. cit.

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ARKTYKA – OBSZAR ZAINTERESOWAŃ ŚRODKOWEGO KRÓLESTWA

Abstrakt. Region arktyczny jest jednym z obszarów zainteresowania Chin, na razie związanym z ich polityką i gospodarką. Zauważając pojawiające się opcje, szczególnie w tej ostatniej dziedzinie, kraj ten poszukuje możliwości zapewnienia swoich interesów narodowych w perspektywie długoterminowej. Związane jest to z wykorzystaniem różnorodnych narzędzi do zaangażowania podmiotów regionalnych w sposób dwustronny i organizacyjny, bez angażowania wojskowego narzędzia władzy. Równolegle Chiny rozwijają technologie niezbędne do działania w Arktyce, pozwalając na konkurowanie z innymi graczami. Zajmują się również badaniami i inwestycjami w regionie. Zasoby naturalne, morskie linie komunikacyjne, możliwości połowowe są uznanymi czynnikami określającymi potencjał krajowych korzyści, a jest to możliwe tylko dzięki ugruntowanej obecności w wielu wymiarach.

Słowa kluczowe: Arktyka, Chiny, zasoby naturalne, morskie linie komunikacyjne, zmiany klimatyczne, stosunki międzynarodowe.