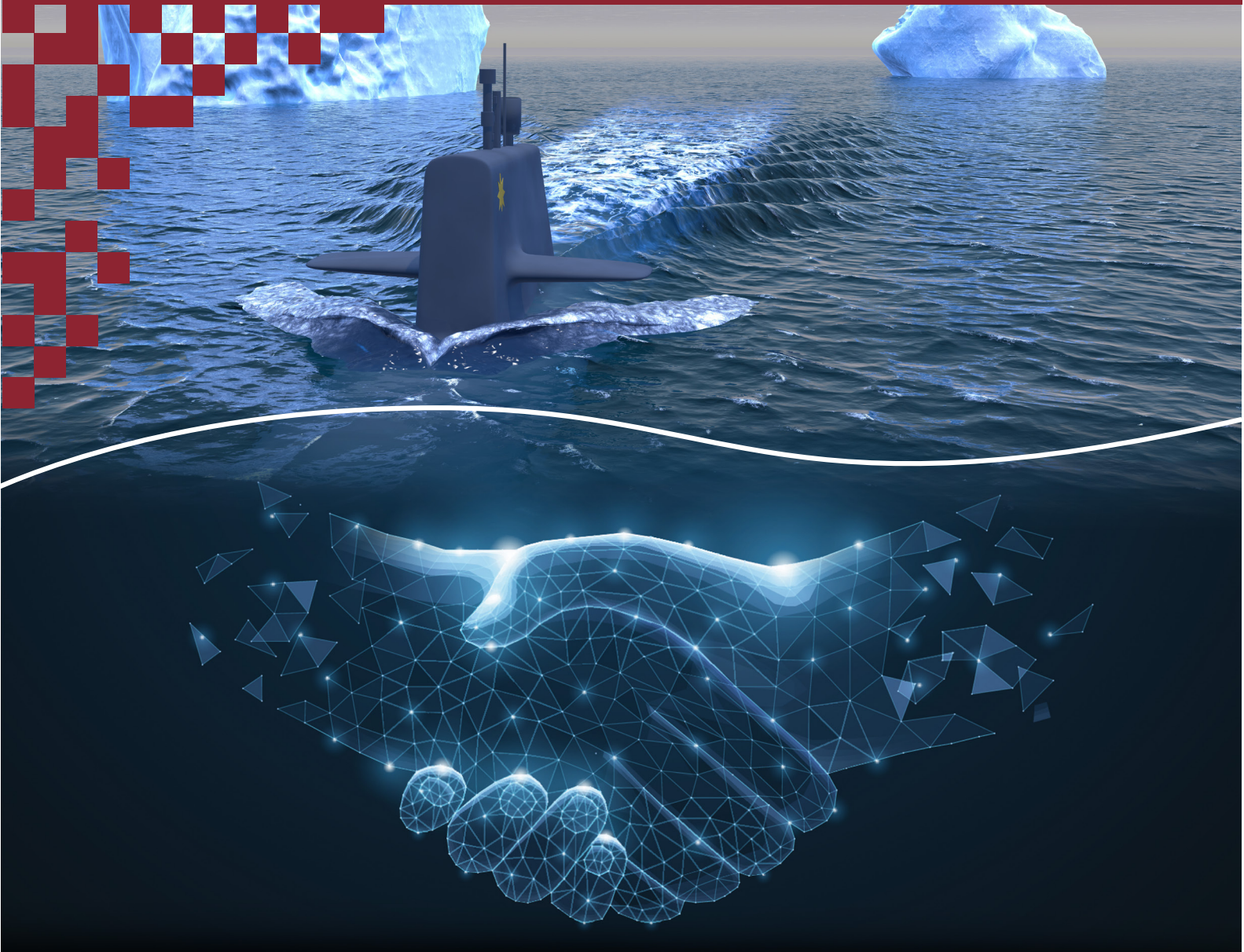


2021 Richard S. Schultz '60 Symposium Fellowship



Chilling Relations: Russia, China, and Convergence of their Interests

Larenz Simpkins '23






About Larenz Simpkins '23

Larenz Simpkins is a triple major in political science, history and studies in war and peace and is a member of the men's rugby team. He is a member of the Norwich University Corps of Cadets.

Simpkins is a voracious reader with a broad range of topical interests including history, philosophy and literature. His research examines Russia and China's conflicting interests in the Arctic and the effects of China's claim as a "semi-Arctic" state on the power dynamics in the region. After graduation, he hopes to pursue graduate studies in history.



"The generosity of both the Schultz family and The Peace and War Center at Norwich provides an excellent opportunity to create new knowledge relating to my discipline and more importantly, a challenge that when undertaken with the necessary level of alacrity, can open the doors to new opportunities and experiences that otherwise would seem unattainable".

This research endeavors to examine and identify the opportunities for conflict (and consequently cooperation) which exist between the Peoples Republic of China, and The Russian Federation. The long form interviews with subject matter experts combined with focused research, has developed the researchers understanding of the sheer depth of issues and interests that are at play within the Sino-Russian relationship, and changed the mind of this researcher regarding the prospects of U.S.-China cooperation.

I would like to acknowledge first the generosity of the Schultz family, for without them this research would have never been possible. I would also like to thank Dr. Miri Kim, the advisor for this project, for her patience, candor, and clear advice. Additional thanks to Dr. Morris and Ms. Nicole Greenwood of the Peace and War Center, their tireless commitment to the research projects and more importantly; the Research Fellows behind the scenes is indispensable. Finally, I would like to thank all the interviewees for their thorough and enthusiastic responses. All of these individuals behind the scenes are what made this project possible.

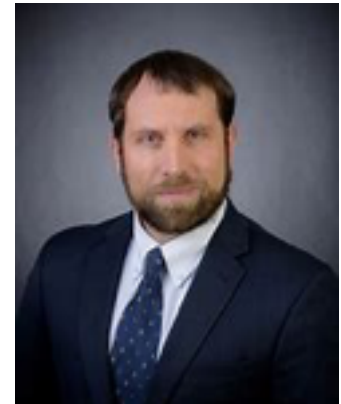
—Larenz Simpkins '23

Introduction

The great northern expanse of melting tundra, permafrost, and iceberg-laden territory known as the arctic, is an area of the earth which covers 5.5 million square miles. That is approximately 1 million square miles larger than Europe, the United States, and China. Possessing a complexity commensurate with its size, its unforgiving climate and unique amalgamation of regional players has historically been a region of both conflict and cooperation for different nations at different times. Resources, territory, and strategic positioning have impelled great powers to act in this part of the world. In the 21st Century, this region has become a junction of the interests of regional actors, and those of extra-regional ones. Prominent among these non-regional actors is China, whose ascendancy has been steady and global since the 1990's as a part of its "peaceful rise". The positioning of China as an interested party in the affairs of the arctic, and its investments have increased the Chinese profile in the Arctic, a region which Russia has historically had a dominant presence in. What is the extent of conflict in the interests of China and Russia in the Arctic? What are the options moving forward for the United States in a region which has only recently been reprioritized?



Dr. Mary Thompson-Jones:
Naval War College



Dr. Lyle Goldstein:
Naval War College



Dr. Barry Zellen:
CASP Director, Coast Guard Academy



CSIS Media Relations Team:
Arctic Working Group

Findings:

How the Past Impacts Present

The Russian presence in the arctic dates to exploration in the 11th Century and its Siberian expeditions in the 16th century, and has always centered around resource acquisition, development of trade routes, and military activity. In 1926, the Soviet Union's entry to the arctic came in the form of a common cause for interaction amongst arctic nations: the resolution of land claims. In the days of the Cold War, the arctic was Russia's principal region for military buildup and infrastructure. Now in the 21st Century, the Russian Federation is shifting away from the large-scale force structure of the Cold War, instead pursuing a more targeted deployment regime regarding military assets. China's increased activity in the arctic creates a dilemma of mutual anxiety: on Russia's part because as the largest Arctic nation they view themselves as the masters of the Arctic, but that dominance is harried by the prospect of overstepping bounds with China for purely economic reasons, and China is in a constant state of balancing its increased activity in the region with concern for the perception and consequent strength of their ties with Russia through whom much of their access to the region is channeled.

An Eyebrow-raising Moniker

In its 2018 *Arctic White Paper*, The People's Republic of China made several claims that drew both the suspicion, and the ire of the Arctic member states. The PRC claimed that both its proximity and the nature of the Arctic as a "global space", conferred certain rights upon China as a "near-Arctic state". This attestation of compelling interest in the ongoings of the Arctic was –to put it mildly– a provocation, a convenient and visible means of testing the waters and confounding the Arctic states. While China's presence in the Arctic has a distinctly non-military profile, Russia is also increasing its military activity in the region and engaging in increasingly provocative behaviors. China has as Dr. Barry Zellen explains, "carved out a unique space, where they made the declaration as an Arctic-interested state and carved out a space with no dependencies" the PRC is doing business with all that desire it in the Arctic, and poor behavior on the part of the Russians could very well induce them to leave Russia behind. Dr. Lyle Goldstein provides an anecdote identifying this quandary from the Chinese perspective "there was a debate –a rare back and forth– in Chinese newspapers, they were discussing whether or not they should leave Russia behind". China is reserving that right and may very well find cause to leave Russia behind if the opportunity cost is too high.

"Blissful Simplicity"

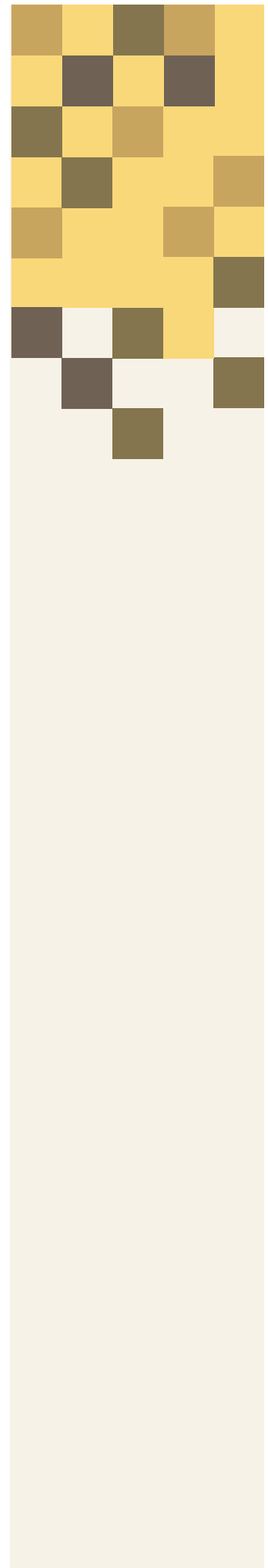
The vastness of the Arctic as a region often creates the misconception that its politics are overly-complex and intricate, this is not the case as Dr. Barry Zellen of the Center for Arctic Study and Policy at the Coast Guard Academy explains, "When you think about the vast scale of the geography, when you have a minimum number of regional actors, it's not complex. There is a blissful simplicity to the region". This regions vastness is balanced by the finite number of powerful actors within the region, and any change in this long-existing dynamic of states is jarring to the balance of power. When viewed through this prism, the opportunity for conflicting interests between China and Russia becomes starkly clear: the economic partnerships between the China and Russia in the Arctic should be juxtaposed to the possible disruptive influence that increased Chinese presence could have in the Arctic.

Follow the Money

Economics drives the Sino-Russian Partnership in the Arctic. Dr. Lyle Goldstein of the Naval War college provided a lucid description of how one should conceptualize the stated intentions of a state vs. their real intentions, “actions speak louder than words, and a billion dollars speaks louder than a billion words.” The Economic partnership between China and Russia is not one fostered in pure charity and neighborly goodwill; it is –for China– an economic calculus. This is not the case for Russia, most of the best economic prospects they possess are tied up in the Arctic, or Chinese investment in the Arctic. China has financed the Russian endeavor to, --as Heather Conley of the Center for Strategic and International Studies writes-- develop the Northern Sea Route (NSR), the Russian attempt at creating a viable alternative trade route to connect the Russian energy industry with Asian Global trade partners. But this vision of a bustling Russian trade regime and the prospect of continued investment from China is tamed by a simple fact of economics: Russia has taken on most of the risk, while China will have its debts paid, one way or another.

A Silent Crisis: Russia’s Diminishing Population

Russian Arctic infrastructure is outdated, and often poorly constructed and they are facing a population crisis in the region creating a massive decrease in workers. Dr. Mary Thompson-Jones of the Naval War College provided insight into this crisis while describing the causes of the Norilsk Oil spill that devastated the region, --one of the largest infrastructure/environmental disasters in regional history— stating, “the region is very sparsely populated, the industry is ancient and crumbling, the aging factor of the population is something that Russia has not been successful in reversing” China has been instrumental in providing workers, investment, and new technologies to Russia. As Russian militarism in the region serves only to make interactions with other Arctic states less palatable, China is working to increase both its footprint, and its relations with Arctic nations. Irrespective of the Russian Federations need for China to continue financing its projects, the PRC and the Russian Federation are driving in different directions in terms of their regional disposition.



Conclusions/Policy Recommendations:

China and Russia are on different sides of the global power dynamic: China, the upstart and a nation that is driving economic activity in the region. Russia, who is on a decline, and whose economic success exists primarily by the good graces of the People's Republic of China. China is expected to continue this increase of their presence in the region, and has the diplomatic ties, capital, and desire to do so without aggressive action. Russia has neither the capital, nor the patience to increase their influence in the region through economics or diplomacy. They are speaking loudly whilst carrying a tree trunk. This difference in approach regionally is inevitably going to create distance between the two nations, which presents an opportunity for the United States. We should take a more active approach to affairs the region, as Dr. Goldstein says, "we should engage with both sides, we should get involved, be at the table, you know, and get our companies in there" The United States has the smallest footprint on-location of the Arctic nations, an increase in multilateral engagement, and taking the lead on issues of research and development, trade, etc. can only redound to our benefit.

Beyond a simple overall increase in Arctic Activity, another policy recommendation is to increase cooperation with China in the Arctic, while our general disposition towards China is as an adversary, and comparisons are often drawn to the bipolar, dichotomy of the Cold War Status quo, I believe this is a false premise. Our interests for stability, steady economic activity, and R&D more closely align with China's, and if our overall activity in conjunction as opposed to in conflict with the PRC is increased, we can degrade the Russian capacity, desire, and opportunity for further provocation, and diminish the centrality of their position in the region.

Policy	Recommendations
Recommendation #1	Work to develop a larger footprint in the Arctic: leveraging research stations, financing economic projects, and increased economic activity, increased development of icebreakers, while developing useful technology of the changing climate/melting of icecaps.
Recommendation #2	Engagement/cooperation with the PRC in the Arctic, so as to isolate the military activity of Russia, who presents the principal threat in the region.
Recommendation #3	Change the perception that we have of the PRC. This is not the Cold War, different times and a different country require a new approach. Cooperate where we can, repel them where we must.

