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The cases of Alaska and Svalbard as an example of Russian withdrawal from the concept of Arctic Exceptionalism after 22 February, 2022

Introduction

The Russian aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 brought about many changes in areas miles away from this armed conflict. Many international actors began to question the credibility of the Russian Federation, emphasising that they had lost trust in Russia.¹ The situation in the Arctic also changed. First, seven member states (A7) of the Arctic Council (AC) excluding Russia discontinued participation in its proceedings, which led to a suspension of the forum's activity. It was resumed in June, but the A7 declared that they would refrain from implementing projects which would require Russia's cooperation (Reuters Media 2022a; Bye 2022a; Jonassen 2022b). Arctic states united around the United States (Rosen, Y. 2022), the Nordic states strengthened their defence cooperation (Edvardsen 2022a; 2022b; Jonassen 2022a), and Finland and Sweden applied to join NATO (Henley 2022).

Russia, which has been expanding its presence in the Arctic for a decade, responded by putting its strategic nuclear weapons on the Kola Peninsula on standby, and announced the deployment of 500 additional weapons to the peninsula and investments in the renovation of twenty-eight military bases

¹ Such declarations were made after the attack on Ukraine until the last quarter of 2022. According to Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin, Russia has "lost trust for generations" (France 24 2022). On the other hand, the French Permanent Representative to the UN stated that "If words no longer have any meaning, if truth and lies have equal rights, diplomacy is no longer possible" (Riviere 2022). However, there has been a noticeable lack of similar responses from some of the African, American and Asian states that refrained from unequivocally condemning Russia in the UN General Assembly (UN News 2022).

(Devyatkin 2018; Legucka 2020; Nilsen 2022). Also, military vehicles were seen near the Finnish border (Anglesey 2022). These actions were intended to act as a deterrent, as some Russian troops previously stationed on the peninsula (for example, the 200th Motor Rifle Brigade) had been sent to fight in Ukraine, thereby weakening their operational capabilities in the High North (Bye 2022b; 2022c; 2022d). At the same time, attention was drawn to the alleged illegality of actions taken by the other Arctic states. On 14 June 2022, the Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, accused them of isolating Moscow in the Arctic Council. These allegations were repeated by Russian diplomats and spread by Russian media, primarily *Kommersant* and the TASS agency, which suggested that the decisions made by the A7 were part of an international conspiracy aimed at excluding Russia from the Arctic. (TASS 2022a; 2022b; Fedotova 2022). In addition, Medvedev claimed that the AC was an international organisation; thus, the A7 were accused of undermining the existing AC rules and violating international law. Indeed, decisions made by this body must be unanimous. Therefore, it was impossible to end its proceedings without Russia's consent. However, decisions made by the AC are not legally binding, as it is not an international organisation (Graczyk and Koiurova 2015: 298–327). Moreover, the decision to isolate Russia was not taken by the AC as such, but was a separate declaration issued by the A7,² which in practice resulted in a break in the proceedings.

The case of the Arctic Council was not the only one where the Russian Federation took a strong stand against other countries in the region by resorting to manipulation. In June and July of 2022, the Russian public saw the emergence of accusations against the United States and Norway, which were then taken up by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation Viatcheslav Volodin said: “Let America always remember: there's a piece of Russian territory, Alaska” (TASS 2022c, Staalesen 2022). Deputy Chairman Pyotr Tolstoy, on the other hand, called for a referendum which would answer the question of whether the local population wished to join Russia (The Moscow Times, 2022). Meanwhile, the Deputy Speaker of the Federation Council, Konstantin Kosachev, accused Norway of violating the Svalbard Treaty of 1920. He was joined by the chairman of the Committee on Constitutional Law, Andrey Klishas, who suggested that Oslo's conduct cast doubt on its rights to the Svalbard Archipelago (TASS 2022c; Staalesen 2022).

² It should be noted that there was no mention of depriving Russia of its position as chair of the Arctic Council. Norway declared that it would take over only when the Russian mandate expired in 2023 (Woodrow Wilson Center, 2022).

Rationale

Russian claims regarding Alaska and Svalbard are important for several reasons. During the period analysed, the US was one of the main pillars of aid for Ukraine, and in the face of war sped up the rearmament of Alaska and gradually increased its presence in other parts of the Arctic (Baker 2022; Harris 2022). The US is the most important NATO³ member, and it is around it that the other countries of the region unite, which increases Russia's isolation. Norway, on the other hand, is the most important European partner of the US in the High North, on whose territory NATO's Cold Response and Trident Juncture exercises were conducted. It also pursued a policy under the slogan "High North, low tension", avoided tensions in the Arctic and continued security co-operation with Russia (Devyatkin 2018), when Russia stopped participating in meetings of the Arctic Chiefs of Defence Staff and the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable after the annexation of Crimea (Soroka, 2022: 211). Nevertheless, after the aggression against Ukraine, Norway took a clear stand against Russia (Reuters Media 2022b; Office of the Prime Minister 2022), and it is situated on NATO's front line in the event of an armed conflict – alongside Finland, which joined the alliance in April 2023.

Realising this, the Kremlin did not deny any of the mentioned claims, and in fact used them on various occasions. Maria Zakharova, spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry, when asked by a CNN journalist about the legality of Russia's seizure of its alleged historical lands,⁴ ironically asked "whether the journalist meant Alaska" (РИА Новости 2022). In the Norwegian case, the Russian Foreign Ministry summoned the country's chargé d'affaires and urged her to persuade Oslo to refrain from the alleged treaty violation (Павленко 2022). Thus, the claims that had been advanced at the parliamentary level were taken over by the government level of the Russian administration, and formed part of Moscow's anti-Western policy.

At least some of those making such assertions were closely associated with President Vladimir Putin. Volodin was said to be a member of his "inner circle". Until 2016, he was deputy head of the presidential administration; he was

³ At the annual Arctic Circle Assembly conference in October 2022, the head of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer, stated that a return to business as usual in the Arctic was doubtful (Arctic Circle Assembly 2022).

⁴ On 9 June 2022, at a press conference, Putin compared himself to Peter I and talked about regaining Russian lands (Roth 2022). The issue of Russia's historical claims keeps returning in speeches made by various Russian politicians, including some from the president's closest circle (Grala 2022).

dismissed because of his ambitions, but retained much of his influence as one of the so-called *siloviki* and “defenders of Russia against undesirable influences” (Langton 2022; Stanovaya 2020; Service 2019: chapter 17). Tolstoy was the head of Russia’s representation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, until its exclusion from the body. He has been portrayed as one of the president’s leading propagandists. Klishas is an oligarch and co-author of the 2020 constitutional amendments enabling Putin to stay in power. His close ties with the Russian leader after the invasion of Ukraine caused European countries to impose sanctions on him (Hyatt 2022; swissinfo.ch 2022; Squires 2022; Associated Press 2016). All of these people are known to have made public statements following the official line of the highest state authorities, and have demonstrated their loyalty to the president. According to Brian Taylor (Taylor 2018: 195), Volodin even regards him as a kind of saviour. In all likelihood, they realised what type of messages would meet with the Kremlin’s approval.

At the same time, it should be noted that the accusations and suggestions voiced by these figures were disseminated by foreign media, including Polish ones, which contributed to their longevity (Polska Agencja Prasowa 2022; Zarembo 2022). The message reaching a large part of the audience was that while Norway and the USA were accusing Russia of violating international law, they could also be accused of doing so themselves. Thus, the credibility of both countries was undermined. The gravity of these claims and the status of those making them lead me to take a closer look at these issues.

Arctic Exceptionalism according to the English School of International Relations

After the end of the Cold War, the Arctic was perceived by the countries of the High North as an exceptional region – isolated from international disputes in other parts of the world (Hoogensen Gjørsv and Hodgson 2019; Lackenbauer and Dean 2020). According to Heather Exner-Pirot and Robert Murray (Exner-Pirot and Murray 2017: 48), an international society based on norms, multilateralism, international institutions and the balance of power was deliberately negotiated in the region. The Exner-Pirot, following representatives of the English School of International Relations, emphasises the crucial importance of norms such as sovereignty or rules-based order for the concept of international society (ibid: 50 and 52). Although after the annexation of Crimea Russia’s policy towards Ukraine was assumed to be a challenge for the region’s exceptionalism (Käpylä and Mikkola [2015]: 12–17), cooperation be-

tween Western countries and Russia was to remain undisturbed, as the latter was interested in holding the balance of power in the Arctic, which was conducive to maintaining the region's exceptionalism (Exner-Pirot 2020: 316–317; Exner-Pirot and Murray 2017: 55–56).

Such opinions seem to have been justified. Before 2022, Russia, like other countries of the region, generally conformed to the Arctic norms and principles. Russia's claims were based on legal arguments which it presented before the AC or the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (Łuszczuk 2013; Kubiak 2012). Furthermore, it made no claims to the territories of other states, nor did it use the issue of national minorities as a means of pressure. Despite increasing its military presence in the Arctic, Russia did not use its armed forces to intimidate other states, and cooperated with NATO states in the region until 2014, and with Norway until 2022. For Russia, the Arctic was first of all a “zone of peace” (Schaller 2019; Åtland 2008) and then a “territory of peace and communication” (TASS 2017), where the pursuit of national interests was possible while respecting the interests of the Arctic international society.

Research methodology

I adopt the assumption that the sanctions imposed on Russia and the suspension of cooperation within the AC led Russia to lose its “territory of peace and communication”. As a result, Russia began to use tools that it had already used in other parts of the world, especially those in the post-Soviet area, and thus abandoned the concept of the “Arctic Exceptionalism”. Such tools include making claims to alleged historical Russian territories, protecting the Russian or Orthodox minority, and protesting against alleged violations of international provisions.⁵

⁵ These arguments have already been used in Russian policy towards Georgia and Ukraine, but also Latvia, Estonia and the former Soviet republics in Central Asia (Karolak-Michalska 2017; Herpen et al. 2016: 149; Ziegler 2006). As to international agreements, among the most notorious Russian manipulations is the issue of NATO enlargement. As Marry M. Sarotte (2010) has shown, the Russians claim that the Americans promised them that NATO would not expand to include the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. However, the Americans merely raised such a possibility as a part of international negotiations. The promise was said to have been made in separate talks by German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and thus cannot be regarded as representing NATO's position on its eastward expansion. Additionally, NATO signed an agreement regulating relations with the Russian Federation (Founding Act 1997).

This article analyses the Russian claims and allegations addressed to the United States and Norway on the Alaska and Svalbard issues. They are considered in the light of the provisions and implementation of the 1867 Russian-American Treaty and the Svalbard Treaty of 1920, as these are fundamental points of reference in both disputes. I then verify whether Russian Arctic policy in these cases violated the principles that underlie the region's exceptionalism within the framework of the Arctic international society, in accordance with the theoretical assumptions of the English School of International Relations.

Alaska

Historical background

In the seventeenth century, Russia organised expeditions in order to reach America sailing along the northern coast of Eurasia. This was achieved by Vitus Bering, and the discovery of Alaska enabled Tsar Paul I to set up the Russian-American Trading Company and to establish a colony (Grinev 2015: 5–16).⁶ About twenty settlements were established there, mostly on the coast, but their population never exceeded seven hundred people. From the nineteenth century onwards, ethnic Russians began to dominate among the settlers, whereas Finns and Baltic Germans were considered to make up about a third of the colony's population. The overwhelming majority of them came from the European part of the empire, and they reached Alaska by sea, bypassing Siberia. As emphasised by Ilja Vinkovetsky (Vinkovetsky 2014: 36), this had an impact on the attitude of the Russian elite towards the colony, who saw it “as both the most remote extension of Russia's Siberian frontier and, paradoxically, as a colony that was mentally much closer to St. Petersburg than was the bulk of Siberia.”

The colony traded primarily in furs, but the profitability of this venture was questioned in view of the cost of transport to the metropolis. In order to survive, the Company preferred to sell its goods to China, which was closer to it, rather than the distant European part of Russia (Wheeler 1971: 420–421). Nevertheless, for the Admiralty and Tsar Alexander I, Alaska was an element of their global imperial policy, and they intended to protect it as part of the tsarist domain (Nichols 1967: 15). Nicholas I, on the other hand, considered it

⁶ For more details on Russian expeditions and colonisation of America before 1799, see Grinëv (2018).

too expensive and with uncertain returns investment, and provocative to the Americans (Vinkovetsky 2014: 49). Despite this, the tsarist government, who no longer treated Alaska as a means of expansion, subsidised the colony. The tsar's indifference to Alaska was quite obvious, and the colony was forced to fend for itself in the face of increasing American whaling activity (Grinev 2015: 24).

The Company administering the colony had many opponents at the tsar's court. From the mid-1840s it recorded worse and worse turnover, and the government, looking for savings after the Crimean War, began to consider the option of selling Alaska, which was deemed "complete uselessness of these colonies for Russia" (Petrov 2015: 61–90; Vinkovetsky 2014: 181–182; Miller 1943: 524). As the territory was adjacent to British possessions and there were fears regarding London's expansion in the direction of Asia, an offer was made to the United States. The first attempts to sell the territory were made as early as 1857, but the transaction was not completed until 30 March 1867.

Russian claims and the treaty provisions

Russian claims to Alaska revolve around three issues. The first is the claim that the state is in fact the property of the Russian Federation. It is based on the assumption that the 1867 agreement did not speak of the sale of the territory, but of its lease. This narrative reflects a long-standing tradition, as it was taught in Soviet schools that this territory was leased rather than sold (Vinkovetsky 2014: 14). The second claim challenges the conclusion of the sale, as the United States, according to this narrative, did not pay the amount agreed in the treaty (Smith-Peter 2015: 2).⁷ Finally, the last issue refers to the idea that there is a group of people, most probably of Russian descent, living in Alaska, defying their current status and willing to support the annexation of that state to the Russian Federation.

All three narratives are directly or indirectly related to the 1867 Treaty or its implementation. It is enough to read Article I of the document to learn that "His Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias agrees to cede to the United States, by this convention, immediately upon the exchange of ratifications" (*Treaty with*

⁷ The sale of Alaska is quite deftly handled by Russian nationalists in their imperial rhetoric. They often refer to a "Judeo-Masonic conspiracy" allegedly underlying the transaction. It also includes a theme referring to a "Polish traitor", a separatist who wanted to both separate Polish lands from Russia and make Alaska independent and act in alliance against the tsarist regime (Znamenski 2009: 359–366).

Russia 1867: Art. I). The term “cede” is of key importance here as it clearly implies a transfer of the entire territory. In the case of a lease, a more appropriate term would be used, for example, “administrative cession” or, more precisely, “territorial leasing” (Bugajski 2013: 55–56).

The document was drawn up in two languages, English and, following the Russian diplomatic tradition of the time, French.⁸ By comparing the two texts, it is possible to determine with a high degree of probability what the intentions of its authors were. The English section of the treaty refers to “ceded territory” while the French one refers to “territoire cédé” (*Treaty with Russia 1867*: Art. III), i.e. the sale of territory understood not only as the transfer of land, but also of all undeveloped squares, public buildings, forts and military units and archives at the moment of ratification of the document by both parties. It is emphasised in the documents that the cession is “complete and absolute” (“complète et absolue”) (*Treaty with Russia 1867*: Art. II–V). It is noteworthy that this issue was also discussed in diplomatic correspondence at the time, in which the planned transaction was referred to as a “cession” not only by the US Secretary of State William Seward, but also by the Russian ambassador Eduard Stoeckl (Stoeckl 1867).⁹ The latter was congratulated on the conclusion of the cession by minister Aleksandr Gorchakov and Emperor Alexander II (Golder 1920: 421). Thus, the Russian government was fully aware that it was selling the territory, not leasing it.

An integral part of this transaction was the payment for the ceded territory. The treaty set the amount at \$7,200,000 in gold (*Treaty with Russia 1867*: Art. VI). In 1868, questions were raised whether the American government had met its obligations. This was related to two issues. First, more than a year passed between when the treaty was signed and when Congress approved the payment of the agreed amount.¹⁰ Second, although the full amount was paid, it was rumoured that only \$5,000,000 had crossed the ocean to Russia (Dunning 1912: 391–392). This would portray the United States in a bad light as a country that did not want to meet its obligations.

⁸ The official journal of the Russian Foreign Ministry, the *Journal de Saint-Petersbourg*, was also published in this language.

⁹ Stoeckl was convinced that Asia was the future of Russian expansion due to its proximity to the rich harbours in China and Japan (Hunter 1943: 530).

¹⁰ This was related to the claims of the Perkins family and their supporters, who maintained that in 1855 the late Benjamin Perkins was deceived by the Russian spy Rakelevich and his accomplice Ambassador Stoeckel. Some of the congressmen who opposed the ratification of the treaty with Russia concerning the purchase of Alaska supported these claims. Later some of them changed their minds. See Golder (1920: 422–424).

A thorough investigation conducted by the Public Expenditure Commission revealed that the American side had paid the Russian ambassador the full amount agreed to in the treaty. However, he had transferred only 7,035,000 dollars, which created a shortfall of \$165,000 (Dunning 1912: 392; Jensen 1975: 127). The commission was unable to determine what had happened to the missing money. Later, historians found a memorandum signed by President Andrew Johnson, indicating that the ambassador had paid certain American journalists and politicians to support the idea of purchasing Alaska and then to push a bill through Congress on the payment to Russia (Dunning 1912: 385–386). Regardless of whether ambassador Stoeckl bribed or just financially supported those advocating the purchase of Alaska, all the evidence we have leaves no doubt that the American government, despite some delays, ultimately paid the 7,200,000 dollars agreed to in the treaty.¹¹

As has already been mentioned, the number of colonists in Russian America did not exceed 700 people at its peak, most of the time fluctuating around 600.¹² However, it should be remembered that some members of the native population adopted the Russian language and converted to Orthodoxy (Veniaminov, Nichols and Croskey 1972: 41–54; Vinkovetsky 2014: 127–130, 163–180), which increased the influence of Russian culture. Once the treaty was ratified, Alaskan residents had the right to stay in the region and to practise their religion freely. Russian nationalists have argued in recent years that the Americans have failed to comply with this part of the treaty by making it difficult to learn the language and closing Russian schools (Devonshire-Ellis 2021). However, the vast majority of settlers, the cultural elite of the colony, chose to return to Russia (Lain 1976: 146–149). After that, the number of people speaking Russian at their homes in Alaska steadily decreased, which also resulted in school closures. Tolstoy's calls for a referendum are linked to an event that took place in 2014, when a pro-Kremlin organisation presented, supposedly as a joke, a petition demanding Alaska's return to Russia. At that time,

¹¹ Ronald Jensen (1975: 131) referred here, among other things, to the findings of H Miller, according to whom ambassador Stoeckl told his superiors in St Petersburg that he had allocated a large sum of the approximately \$200,000 to settle the Perkins case. F. A. Golder (1920: 424) made it clear that this money bought the congressmen's favour. The findings of other researchers seem to support this statement. It should be noted, however, that the Alaska case did not violate the American legislative process of the nineteenth century in any significant way, because bribes are thought to have been an integral part of it (Jensen 1975: 131–132).

¹² Stoeckl pointed out that these were generally the Company's employees and it was impossible to attract other settlers. The number of Creoles, on the other hand, was not higher than 1,200 (Miller 1943: 528).

it was allegedly signed by 37,000 people, but the credibility of these signatures is difficult to verify (Sarhaddi Nelson 2014; Tetrault-Farber 2014). The social base for a potential referendum seems to be insignificant. According to the United States Census Bureau, about 0.7% of American citizens in Alaska spoke Russian (*The Demographic Statistical Atlas of the United States* 2018b). About 3% of its residents indicated Russia as their place of birth (*The Demographic Statistical Atlas of the United States* 2018c) and 1.4% declared Russian ancestry (*The Demographic Statistical Atlas of the United States* 2018a). The number of people of Orthodox faith does not exceed 5% (Pew Research Center 2014). The aforementioned number of people who signed the petition approaches the number of Orthodox people in Alaska, but a large proportion of them are Native Americans who for a long time have had no cultural ties to Russia. Besides, the Alaskan Orthodox diocese is part of the autocephalous Orthodox Church of America recognised by the Russian Orthodox Church.

The claims regarding Alaska encountered in the Russian public space are therefore based on questionable premises. Despite this, Vladimir Chizhov, the Russian ambassador to the EU, when asked in 2014 about Russia's expansionist ambitions, said: "Should I tell Sen. McCain to watch over Alaska? ... It used to be Russian." He immediately added that this was only a joke (Sarhaddi Nelson 2014). Such insinuations were not taken up by the Russian Foreign Ministry at the time; they may have been an individual initiative of the aforementioned Russian diplomat. Furthermore, Putin publicly stated that the 1867 treaty was not threatened (Rupar 2014). In 2022, a similar narrative using known nationalist slogans could be heard from both leading Russian parliamentarians and a Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, which made it an element of official state policy.

Svalbard

Historical background

The history of the Svalbard Archipelago is different from that of Alaska. It was discovered in 1596 by the Dutch sailor Willem Barents. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the English and Dutch, but also the French and Spanish, used to hunt seals, walruses and whales there. Rivalry among the countries, especially between England and the Netherlands, became particularly aggressive, which led to a reduction in their profits. Finally, they managed to reach an agreement that ended the hunting. It remained in force until the nineteenth

century, when the Russians, who hunted the local walrus until the middle of that century, intensified their activity (Numminen [2011]: 7–8).

Despite this, until the twentieth century Svalbard remained a no-man's land (*terra nullius*), a status characteristic of most islands and archipelagos in the Arctic Ocean. The discovery of coal deposits increased the interest of individual countries in Svalbard. The United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway were the first to make claims, with the intention of establishing a colony there. Russian opposition made them abandon these plans. The problem resurfaced when Norway became independent, but again its plans were thwarted by Russia and Germany, which took an interest in the region. In their attempt to find a solution, Norway, Sweden and Russia proposed that the status of the archipelago as a no-man's land be maintained, but under the administration of Oslo, Stockholm and St Petersburg. The outbreak of the First World War and opposition from Germany and the USA buried that idea (Grydehøj 2020: 269–270; Numminen [2011]: 8).

Only when the global conflict ended could the Svalbard case be settled. At that time, the USA was no longer interested in the archipelago, Germany was isolated on the international stage, and Russia was mired in civil war. In such circumstances, the Entente states decided to reward Norway, which – while formally neutral during the war – had put its merchant fleet at the disposal of the British and lost nearly half of its vessels and about 2,000 sailors (Knutzen 1999: 57). On 9 February 1920, Norway, the USA, France, Denmark, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, India and the Union of South Africa signed the Svalbard Treaty granting Oslo full rights to the archipelago.¹³ The Soviet Union ratified it in 1935 (Closson 2018: 3) in exchange for recognition and the establishment of diplomatic relations with Norway.

¹³ Dariusz Rozmus claims that “under the Svalbard Treaty, the Archipelago does not belong to Norway, but is merely its overseas territory” (Rozmus 2017: 270). Article 1 of the treaty states that the contracting parties recognise “the full and complete sovereignty of Norway over the Archipelago of Spitsbergen; cf. Treaty concerning the Archipelago of Spitsbergen (1920) and Government Statement (1931). D. H. Anderson (2009: 373–374) on the other hand, points out that the treaty in fact regulated the new status of Svalbard in international relations and granted Norway sovereignty over the archipelago pursuant to its own proclamation and the recognition of this sovereignty by the other signatories to the treaty. Furthermore, according to Jensen (2020: 86) the acknowledgement of Norwegian sovereignty in Article 1 was intended to emphasise that it was no different from its customary sovereignty over its other territories. Having been granted sovereignty over Svalbard in 1925, Norway passed the Svalbard Act, recognising the Archipelago as part of the Kingdom of Norway (*Lov om Svalbard* 1925).

Treaty provisions and Russian claims

After the ratification of the Svalbard Treaty, in 1925 Norway passed a law incorporating the archipelago into the kingdom. This marked the beginning of a process during which Oslo continued to emphasise its sovereignty over the territory. This policy included efforts to establish, in 1977, an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) around Svalbard pursuant to the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). However, the USSR and its satellites, as well as some NATO countries objected to this idea (Pedersen 2009: 323–325). The opposition resulted not only from countries' conflicting interests, but also from the fact that, at the time of the drafting of the treaty, there were no established forms of international regime in maritime law, such as the aforementioned EEZ granting specific privileges to a coastal state. Hence, there were many, sometimes mutually exclusive interpretations of Norway's rights. While Norway's sovereignty over the archipelago or the territorial sea was not questioned, the attitude of individual countries towards the EEZ varied. So as to avoid further complications, at least temporarily, in 1977 Norway established a Fisheries Protection Zone around the archipelago, to which the Soviets objected. The dispute continued after the collapse of the USSR. Since 1998, the Norwegian Coast Guard has repeatedly tried to detain Russian fishing boats on charges of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the zone (Østhagen 2018: 101). It was the conclusion of the Treaty between the Kingdom of Norway and the Russian Federation concerning Maritime Delimitation and Cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean in 2010 that partially resolved the accumulated problems (Grydehøj 2020: 274; Østhagen, Jørgensen and Moe 2020: 150–168; Tiller and Nyman 2015: 141–148). However, in 2017, when NATO's Trident Juncture exercises were being held in Norway, the Russian Defence Ministry announced that Norwegian policy towards Svalbard might bring a potential risk of war (Nilsen 2017).

Faced with the Norwegian position in the Russian–Ukrainian war, Moscow threatened to terminate the 2010 treaty (Эрозбек 2023). Its main objections, however, focused on the issue of Svalbard's accessibility. Due to the sanctions, Russian trucks could not cross the border with Norway. This also applied to the vehicles heading for the port of Tromsø with supplies for four hundred Russian miners working in Barentsburg on Svalbard. Kosachev and Klishas argued that this meant stopping transit to the archipelago and, in effect, violated Article 3 of the 1920 Treaty and thus called into question Norwegian sovereignty over the territory (TASS 2022c; Staalesen 2022).

The above argument can be reduced to the claim that the violation of the treaty consisted in preventing Russia from transporting supplies to, and consequently accessing, Svalbard, as suggested by Russian lawmakers. Article 3, which is used to support the objections, does indeed refer to this issue. It states that citizens of the signatory states have “equal liberty of access and stay for any reason or object in the ports of the archipelago.” Similar rights were granted to the vessels of these states “[n]otwithstanding any rules relating to coasting trade which may be in force in Norway.” They also have the right to access Norwegian ports for the receiving and unloading of passengers and goods. Furthermore, no burdens concerning the transit and export of goods that would not apply to Norway may be imposed on any signatory to the treaty (*Government statement 1931: Art. 3; Treaty concerning the Archipelago of Spitsbergen 1920: Art. 3*).

The aforementioned article clearly defines the rights of the signatories. The opinions cited by Russian politicians are based on the assumption that the closure of the borders makes it impossible to use the port in Tromsø. However, the Norwegian government did not prohibit Russia from using it. Russian vessels were still permitted to call at Norwegian ports and Svalbard pursuant to the treaty. This was confirmed by the head of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, Anniken Huitfeldt, who stated that there were no objections to delivering supplies to the miners in Barentsburg. The Russians could have shipped them to Tromsø using alternative routes. At the same time, it was emphasised that the sanctions policy did not apply to the archipelago (Staalesen 2022).

The Norwegian government took advantage of the fact that Article 3 of the treaty did not refer to land transport in mainland Norway, but only to sea transport. Russian allegations were based on the assumption that a lack of passage through Norwegian territory practically meant no transit at all, which did not reflect reality. Oslo’s firm stance prompted Russia to summon the Norwegian chargé d’affaires (Павленко 2022), thereby granting the claims made by Russian parliamentarians the status of an official government position. In response, the Norwegian government decided on a compromise solution. It sent its own lorries to the border with Russia (Andreassen, Rypeng and Skeie 2022). This, in turn, made possible the transportation of supplies to the port by land. Since the lorries belonged to Norway, there could be no suggestion that Oslo considered claims related to Article 3 to be justified.

Although the Russian government has voiced its objections to Norway’s Svalbard policy in the past, these could be interpreted as not that different from the concerns of other countries opposed to the EEZ around the archipelago. Similarly, the warnings issued by the Russian Ministry of Defence, though exaggerated, referred to Norway’s policy, which may have been considered con-

troversial. However, the summoning of the Norwegian chargé d'affaires to force Norway to change its policy on sanctions amounted to the Kremlin's identification with the manipulations of those parliamentarians who accused Norway of violating Article 3 of the Svalbard Treaty.

Conclusions

Upon analysing the Alaska and Svalbard cases, the following conclusions can be drawn: 1) Russian claims were based on assumptions that were not supported by either the provisions of the treaties or their implementation; 2) such a practice showed signs of manipulation used to undermine the sovereignty of the USA over Alaska and Norway over Svalbard; 3) questioning the sovereignty of Arctic states and using manipulation for this purpose stands in contrast to the concept of Arctic Exceptionalism based, among other things, on the acceptance of norms, principles and respect for international law; 4) the fact that the Russian Foreign Ministry accepted a narrative based on manipulation and questioned the sovereignty of Arctic states points towards Russia's withdrawal from the concept of the High North's exceptionalism, at least in the sense in which it has been viewed so far, as confirmed by subsequent changes to its regional strategy, from which cooperation in the AC was removed and in which greater emphasis was placed on national interest and the independence of its Arctic industrial projects (Humpert 2023).

Seeing the unification of the other countries of the region around the USA, Russia recognized it was losing its "territory of peace and communication" and implemented the tools it used elsewhere (for example, manipulating international arrangements or exploiting minority issues). The High North is becoming a stage for Russia's disinformation policy (Damski 2022), complementing its more extensive activity in this field (see Legucka and Szczudlik 2023).

Russia's retreat from the concept of Arctic Exceptionalism in its current form seems to correspond to similar observations made by other countries in the region, who agree that it will be a source of tensions and incidents in the future (Rosen, K., 2022). This is considered a fundamental withdrawal, even by Russia, from the concept of isolating the High North from disputes, and a shift towards the American idea of perceiving the region as an element of one of the components of the security of individual Arctic states.¹⁴

¹⁴ George Soroka (2022: 212) notes that Russia had a separate strategy for the Arctic, while the US Arctic strategy was part of its broader defence strategy.

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Keywords: Arctic, Russia, United States, Norway, Alaska purchase, Svalbard Treaty, disinformation, international law, English School of IR

Abstract

This article examines emerging claims in the Russian public sphere over US Alaska and challenging Norwegian sovereignty over Svalbard. Both cases are analysed in relation to the theoretical approach of the English school of international relations, assuming the functioning of an international society built on treaty provisions and the norms and principles of conduct, and values common to the members of that society. For this reason, the main part of the article focuses on the analysis of the treaty provisions and their implementation. On this basis, it was concluded that the rhetoric towards Alaska and Svalbard picked up by the Russian government indicates Russia's departure from the norms and principles constituting the Arctic regime (the so-called exceptionalism) and the implementation in the High North of foreign policy tools which, although typical for the Kremlin in other parts of the world, have not yet been applied in the Arctic.

