The hot and the cold: a historical explanation for Russia's and America's contrasting foreign policy approaches to the Arctic

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THE HOT AND THE COLD: A HISTORICAL EXPLANATION FOR RUSSIA’S AND AMERICA’S CONTRASTING FOREIGN POLICY APPROACHES TO THE ARCTIC

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explains how and why Russia has expanded its sphere of influence in the Arctic and why the United States has not assertively balanced this expansion. In doing so, I show that regional spheres of influence are historically and socially constructed. While material and security concerns motivate state behavior, I show that states also develop institutions, identities and interests that influence their relationships with each other and cause them to approach regions in different ways that are not readily explained by realist or liberal assumptions of how international relations should work.

I process traces five factors to explain why Russia has been more willing than the United States to expand its presence into the Arctic. These factors are geopolitics, economics, national spatial identity, environmental concerns, and native rights concerns. The process-tracing of these five different factors since the transfer of Alaska from Russia to the United States in 1867 to the end of the Cold War in 1992 demonstrates that Russian policy makers have developed a much greater materialistic and adversarial conception of the Arctic than the United States and that they have created institutions and capabilities designed to “conquer” the Arctic. In contrast, the United States has developed a much more idealistic and cooperative conception of the Arctic than Russia. In fact, many American policy makers now see the Arctic as a region that belongs more to nature, native groups, and other countries, than it does to the United States. This has made the United States much less willing than Russia to militarize the region or to develop the resources and sea lanes that are being uncovered as the ice in the Arctic recedes.

In the end, the United States’ and Russia’s behavior in the Arctic shows that regional relations are greatly influenced by historical events that have guided state-to-state relationships and created different domestic influences that cause states to construct regions differently and
behave differently within them. States are not the unitary actors many International Relations theorists assume them to be. Instead, my work shows that understanding states’ historical and institutional differences is key to understanding their distinctive behaviors in certain regions of the world.
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DISCLAIMER

This dissertation reflects the views of the author alone and does not express the official views of the government of the United States, the United States Air Force, the New York Air National Guard or the National Science Foundation.
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Introduction

In 2007, it appeared that the Arctic was primed for international competition. Arctic ice receded to a satellite-era record low as oil prices pushed to over $120 per barrel. The United States Geological Survey (Bird et. al 2008) published a prominent study that suggested the Arctic contained thirty percent of the world’s remaining undiscovered conventional hydrocarbon resources. In this context, it is not surprising that some Arctic experts predicted a “scramble for the Arctic,” a phenomenon given greater impetus by a diplomatic spat between Canada and Russia after a Russian submarine planted a Russian flag on the North Pole seabed. Other Arctic experts suggested that the institutional strength of an entrenched international Arctic regime and polar states’ shared concerns about the drastic effects of climate change would lead to greater Arctic cooperation. These contrasting viewpoints have pushed political scholars of the Arctic into two camps – liberal scholars focused on Arctic cooperation and realist scholars focused on Arctic competition.

The argument developed in this dissertation takes issue with both viewpoints because American and Russian behavior cannot be understood simply in terms of competition or cooperation. My research explains how Russia has expanded its already sizable Arctic presence while the United States, in relative terms, has neglected the region and behaves as a “reluctant” Arctic power. I argue that a constructivist approach based on comparative historical institutional (HI) analysis methodology best answers this vexing international relations question. In doing so, I highlight the comparative strength of using a constructivist, historical approach to explain a country's willingness and capability to establish a sphere of influence.

Spheres of Influence:
The international relations literature devoted specifically to understanding the formation and dissolution (construction and deconstruction) of regional spheres of influence is quite limited and is usually subsumed under literature that analyzes the rise and fall of empires (for example, Kennedy 1987 and Gilpin 1981). Despite this negligence, history has shown that at times Great Powers have claimed regional geographical spheres of influence. These spheres of influence can then become normalized entities that are tacitly acknowledged by other state actors within the international system.

The most recent significant case of states staking and stabilizing claims to regional spheres of influence was in Europe during the Cold War. Indeed, during this time in Europe, the American sphere of influence in Western Europe and the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe became so entrenched and normalized that the spheres of influence became a fact of international life (Resis 1981, p. 417), symbolically taking added significance when a wall was constructed to separate East Berlin from West Berlin in 1961.

The Cold War situation neatly fits Rutherford’s (1926, p. 300) operational definition of spheres of influence as regions that “are to be found in operation[al] arrangements, some secret and some public, stipulated either by treaty, diplomatic declaration, ‘gentlemen's agreements,’ or effected, oftimes, by military or economic penetration, varying greatly in degree and intensity, which enables Powers and their citizens to enjoy advantages in these regions without exercising necessarily, sovereign control." More simply put, a sphere of influence signifies international recognition, if not acceptance, of a state’s de facto dominance in a region without that state necessarily exercising official sovereign control over that region.

Other significant historical spheres of influence are the division of the Western Hemisphere between Portugal and Spain, made official in the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494,
America’s dominance over North and South America as stated in the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, the colonial spheres of European influence in Africa that were made official with the Congress of Berlin in 1878, and the colonial mandates in the Middle East that were coordinated with the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916. The formation of these spheres of influence suggests that there are enduring factors that prompt states to form spheres of influence. The dissolution of many of these spheres of influence also suggest that there are factors that lead to the dissolution of spheres of influence. In other words, spheres of influence are both constructed and deconstructed.

Overall, these cases cursorily suggest that spheres of influence are created and dissolved through the distribution of material capabilities in the international system and the ideational concerns that affect a specific state’s willingness to mobilize and use those material capabilities. More simply stated, material opportunity (capability) and the willingness to use that material capability are necessary conditions for a state to establish and maintain a sphere of influence. In the Arctic, Russia has developed the physical presence and demonstrated the willingness to assert dominance. In contrast, the United States has relatively little presence and has shown relatively little willingness to utilize its overall material advantage over Russia to assert regional dominance.

**IR Theories and the Arctic:**

Realism, arguably the dominant theory of international relations, does not sufficiently explain what is presently occurring in the Arctic region. As environmental conditions become more favorable and technology improves, interest in the region has increased. Realists suggest that this increased interest will lead states to compete to secure access to the region’s more accessible sea lanes and resources (Borgerson 2008; Ebinger and Zambetakis 2009). Neo-realism
(Waltz 2010) suggests that this competition is due to the anarchy of the international system, which necessitates self-help by states who must secure themselves by attempting to increase their relative material advantage over competing states. Classical realism (Morgenthau 1950) adds the influence of prestige into this equation by also suggesting that states will try to expand their hold over regions to express symbolic superiority over competing states. Offensive realism (Mearsheimer 2001) suggests that materially superior countries will be the ones taking advantage of these dynamics to spread their sphere of influence over regions and that materially weaker states must balance to keep stronger states from expanding. Walt (1987) adds the significant element of perceived threat to explain why a country will seek allies to help it balance against a state that it has learned to fear – a historical construction in itself.

The realist approach, on the surface, explains Russia’s recent assertiveness towards the Arctic. Russia has made ambitious claims to Arctic Ocean exclusive economic zones (EEZ), increased its militarization of the Arctic, increased the size and capability of its icebreaker fleet, expanded its Arctic ports, expanded hydrocarbon extraction from its terrestrial Arctic territory into the outer continental shelf next to its territory, and embarked on many ambitious and symbolic Arctic endeavors, including the aforementioned 2007 flag planting on the North Pole seabed. The realist approach also seemingly explains Canada’s own much less significant Arctic militarization, its expansive claims to Arctic EEZs, and its government’s verbal sparring with Russia over Russia’s claim to the North Pole. Perennially peaceful Norway and the non-Arctic state of China have also increased their ability to claim and extract Arctic resources as well as secure access to the region’s sea lanes, which also supports a realist approach to the region.

However, realism does not explain many other aspects of how states are behaving in the Arctic – especially how the United States has behaved in the Arctic. The United States, which
has the strongest economy in the world, a larger population than Russia, and a larger and qualitatively superior military relative to Russia (See Figures 1-3), does not have nearly the physical presence or capability that Russia has in the region and has been much less assertive in claiming Arctic territory despite the region’s apparent material wealth, strategic sea lanes, and greater accessibility. In contrast, despite its comparatively diminutive military and economy, Russia has significantly widened its relative material strength in the Arctic region over the United States in the last decade. This can be seen in the large icebreaker advantage it has developed over the United States, its efforts to re-establish Cold War-era military bases across the Arctic, and its renewed efforts to expand hydrocarbon production in the Arctic and to improve the transportation and navigation infrastructure of the Northern Sea Route.

Furthermore, neo-realists suggest that weaker states will “externally balance” against a stronger opponent by allying with other states (Waltz 2010). However, in the Arctic, it is the materially stronger United States who appears to be externally balancing against the materially weaker Russia. Whereas the United States is formally allied with littoral Arctic NATO members Canada, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland, and is increasingly cooperative with non-NATO countries Sweden and Finland, Russia is much more isolated.

This conundrum suggests that national material strength and the anarchical nature of the international system are not the sole determinants, nor even the most important determinants, of states’ regional assertiveness. Instead, a more difficult-to-measure variable – willingness – must also be included to truly understand how regional spheres of influence are formed and defended. As I will argue, willingness is composed as much by relationships, domestic interests, and identities as it is by the realist assumptions of egoistic states. As I also will argue, these
relationships, interests, and identities are constructed by historically-based social forces and ideas as well as a country’s material strength and its desire for prestige.

Figure 1: Military Expenditure Comparison Between the United States and Russia in 2017 (Source: SIPRI)

Figure 2: GDP Comparison Between the United States and Russia - 2017 (Source: The World Bank)
Liberal scholars point out the flaws in the realist approach and offer a more optimistic prognosis that international cooperation, instead of competition, can be expected in the Arctic. Liberalism stresses that states can avoid the anarchy and mutually detrimental competition through Immanuel Kant’s (1991) combination of international institutions (Keohane 1984), commercial relations (Brooks 2007), and representative democratic domestic governing institutions (Russet and O’Neal 2001). As such, liberal scholars point to three significant aspects of the Arctic - its international organizations, its regionally shared economic and environmental concerns, and the predominance of liberal democratic states in the region - to explain why it will not experience the anarchical scramble for resources and national prestige by egoist states that realism predicts.

Specifically, prominent liberal scholars (Young 1998, 2005) point to regional international organizations like the Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council as critical vehicles for regional actors to discover mutually beneficial knowledge and to set mutually beneficial rules to guide Arctic economic development and governance. They point out that even Russia, a country that is increasingly non-democratic and militarily assertive in the
Arctic, has been cooperative in these organizations and that state and non-state actors have worked through the Arctic Council to develop a temporary moratorium on fishing in the high Arctic, defined sectors of search and rescue responsibility, formed an Arctic Coast Guard forum to cooperatively police the region, and have developed a regional approach to addressing hydrocarbon spills (Exner-Pirot 2015; English 2013). Additionally, liberal scholars point to the five Arctic littoral states’ promise to abide by the United Nations Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and its subservient Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) at the 2008 Ilulissat Conference to successfully adjudicate overlapping claims to Arctic EEZs as a successful vehicle to provide an overarching political and legal structure to govern the region and realize absolute gains (Riddell-Dixon 2008; Byers 2009).

Borgeron (2008) addresses these liberal arguments about Arctic dynamics and points out the weaknesses of the liberal approach. He stresses that although the Arctic Council and the UNCLOS are significant influencers of Arctic international relations they are both weakened by American intransigence and unwillingness to expand the scope of these two institutions. With respect to the Arctic Council, the democratic United States “emasculated” the organization by prohibiting it from getting involved in security matters. With respect to the UNCLOS, the democratic United States has failed to ratify the treaty because of concerns that it would hamper America’s freedom of action in international waters while the more authoritarian Russian government ratified it. Institutional cooperation also does not explain why Russia would feel the need to militarize the region and increasingly provoke its Arctic neighbors through shows of force like the 2007 flag planting and military overflights of its Arctic neighbors’ Air Defense Identifications Zones (Conley and Rohloff 2015; Plouffe and Lasserre 2017). It also does not explain why influential segments of the Russian political elite would have a revisionist approach
to bilateral agreements with the United States, such as the Alaska Purchase and the establishment of the Baker-Shevarnadze demarcation line in the Bering Sea (Znamenski 2009; Sarhaddi-Nelson 2014). Finally, in a blow to the liberal democratic peace theory, liberalism does not explain why America's Arctic democratic neighbors would work so actively to restrain American economic and military presence in the region.

In contrast to the weaknesses of both the realist and liberal approaches, a constructivist approach is better at explaining Russia’s assertiveness in the Arctic and the United States’ lack of assertiveness. Constructivism stresses that international relations are the result of ongoing social interactions and practice. In this approach to international politics, ideas, identities, and relationships often define how a state develops its material capabilities and its national interests as well as what it considers appropriate behavior (Wendt 1999). In fact, constructivism looks to explain how both material resources and ideas have influenced each other and bound a country's willingness and capability to act in certain ways. It argues that state action cannot be explained alone by relative material strength or the structure of the international state system, but instead by historically constructed ideational concerns that are continually reproduced and altered by powerful agents and critical events. These concerns include states’ perceptions of which countries are considered as friends and which countries are considered as enemies. They also include many domestic differences (what Waltz (2010) calls second image reductionism) that cause states to act and think differently about specific regions.

Along these lines, I argue that different historically developed regional relationships and domestic differences have caused Russian and American policymakers to construct the Arctic differently and develop different interests and capabilities in the Arctic that do not align with the respective countries’ overall material strength, rationalist material concerns, or liberal
cooperation. These influences, which can be altered by contingency and agency, also constrain policy makers by giving them different historical baggage and different physical capabilities to work with as they react to the region’s changing physical and social environment.

**Capability and Willingness:**

Taking a cue from Most and Starr (1989), I argue that a state must have both the opportunity and the willingness to establish a sphere of influence. Siverson and Starr (1990, pg. 48) define the organizing concept of opportunity as “the possibilities that are available to any entity within any environment, representing the total set of environmental constraints and possibilities.” These possibilities are largely structural and based on the relative material strength of a state when compared with its neighbors and therefore fall directly under the neorealist paradigm of how states should behave. However, the realist approach fails to address how states actually behave. As such, Most and Starr rightfully argue that material capability provides a menu of choices that states can take given the opportunities they are presented (1989, pgs. 27-28, 30-31), while still underlining that material strength does not completely determine state behavior. This is where established relationships, norms, and ideas come into play.

Regarding a sphere of influence, states can decide to utilize military power, economic strength, and technology, among other things, in different ways to extend influence. Conversely, states can decide not to utilize, develop, or deploy capabilities to a region. This ties into Most and Starr’s (1989, pg. 48) concept of willingness (what Mack (1975) would call political capability), which “represents the choice processes that occur on the micro level, that is, the selection of some behavioral option from a range of alternatives.” I argue that willingness, when discussing spheres of influence, is largely based on differing perceptions of the value of a region, on the different relationships and perceptions states have of each other, and on the differing
institutional forces that constrain or enable decision-making. Therefore, the willingness variable largely falls within the constructivist and institutional paradigms of international relations that stress that ideas and perceptions about how and when to behave objectively matter. The idea of willingness has been utilized when analyzing the outcomes of war (Rosen 1972, Mack 1975, Arreguin-Toft 2001, Merom 2003) but, to my knowledge, has not been utilized when analyzing spheres of influences. I argue that political willingness to mobilize material strength is a decisive variable to understanding spheres of influence. When states have more willingness than their neighbors to mobilize their material resources in a region, they are more likely to establish a sphere of influence.

Spheres of influence can be modeled in the following way:

\[
\text{Sphere of Influence} = (\text{Opportunity} \times \text{Willingness}) - (\sum \text{Neighbors’ Opportunity} \times \text{Willingness})
\]

The following Venn diagram is an example of how this model presently works in the Arctic:
Most and Starr also highlight the difficulty of separating opportunity and willingness into independent variables (Ibid., pg. 44-45). This is because willingness and opportunity often have high multicollinearity. Willingness is needed to transform or develop material into actual capability, and, with increased capability, a state then has increased opportunity and willingness to expand its sphere of influence. In contrast, decreased state willingness to pursue an opportunity necessarily diminishes the desire to develop and transform material into capability, resulting in decreased opportunities and possibly even less willingness to pursue opportunities in the future as the relative costs of catching up with another state increases. This thought process can be graphically displayed as follows:
Figure 5: Model of Theoretical Feedback Loops that are Operating in the Arctic

Methodology:

I argue that the formation of spheres of influence are often contingent on how willing states are to mobilize their material resources in different regions and on the reactions of other states to the mobilization of those material resources. While realism provides a generally acceptable model for predicting how spheres of influence should function, actual conditions vary dramatically, and states do not always act as unitary actors or follow realist strategies. Relations between states in the Arctic region is a case in point.

Due to the difficulty of understanding how spheres of influence have been constructed, I argue that process tracing provides significant leverage in explaining how present international relations in the Arctic developed and how they are likely to proceed by analyzing the region’s two most prominent actors – the “reluctant” United States and the “assertive” Russia. The main
advantage of the Historical Institutionalist (HI) approach is that it explains why real-world outcomes vary the way they do (Steinmo 2008, 123). By analyzing actors’ preferences and the specific context and rules of situations - all of which are conditioned by what the self-professed realist international relations theorist William Wohlforth describes as “personality, ideas, domestic politics, contingency, and, in a word, history (2011, 456)” - we can come to understand how a logic of appropriateness often dictates state behavior as much as a logic of consequence (March and Olsen 1989). Another advantage of HI is its ability to make sense of the “complicated multi-causality” (Tannenwald 2015) of events like those that are presently affecting the Arctic. HI focuses on recurring patterns of behavior that are then disrupted by critical junctures when actors are forced to choose between alternative paths. The decisions made during these critical junctures often lead to path dependence (Pierson 2000) that secures behavior - making it difficult to effectuate anything but incremental change to the system until the next critical juncture or powerful agent comes along.

HI has been used extensively to explain the evolution of domestic political regimes (Acemoglu and Robinson 2005) and economic systems (North 1990) as well as the formation of supranational political institutions (Pierson 1996). However, security studies’ researchers have largely neglected this methodology despite “extensive calls for bridging the divide between the study of domestic and international politics” and the institutional turn of international relations (Fioretos 2011, 368). This neglect of HI methodology comes with “significant analytical and empirical opportunity costs to the discipline,” especially for those of us seeking to understand “patterns of change and continuity in international institutions” (Ibid., 369). As a result, I argue that HI offers a useful way of bridging the divide between domestic and international politics and is the most useful approach to understanding how and why Russia is presently working to
construct a larger sphere of influence in the Arctic and why the United States has recently neglected the region.

In this dissertation, I demonstrate how this divergence has occurred by analyzing the historical development of five different factors. These five factors are geopolitics, economics, identity, environmental concerns, and native rights’ concerns. I want to highlight that these five factors are instrumental to understanding Arctic international relations and are not generalizable to other regions where different actors, influences and relationships may affect state behavior in different ways than these factors affect the Arctic.

In the following few paragraphs, I quickly discuss the factors and clarify my argument on how each one of them has contributed to America’s and Russia’s diverging willingness and capability in the Arctic. Then, I give a brief description of the dissertation chapters to show how these factors have developed differently in America and Russia over time to give both states a differing capability and willingness to expand their respective Arctic sphere of influence.

**The Five Factors:**

1) Geopolitics, the result of geography and state-to-state relationships, has greatly shaped the behavior of both the United States and Russia in the Arctic. The United States has historically been blessed with a favorable geopolitical situation (Spykeman 1943; Mearsheimer 2001). Even before the Alaska Purchase in 1867, it had almost unfettered access to the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. This has allowed it to neglect the largely ice-covered Arctic Ocean, where both its Arctic friends and its longtime rival, Russia, have had greater material and ideational concerns than the United States.

One of the reasons for America’s comparatively small Arctic presence is its long-term friendly relationships with other Arctic states. The most significant relationship is with Canada,
which has sovereign control over the second largest amount of Arctic territory. This relationship was solidified when Great Britain evacuated its military forces from Canada after the American Civil War and was strengthened when America and Canada fought on the same side during both World Wars and the Cold War. It is further buttressed by similar cultures and political and economic institutions that have developed together and influenced one another over the last century and a half. While not as “special,” the United States also came to share a formal security relationship with its democratic Arctic neighbors Norway, Denmark, and Iceland shortly after World War II, constructing a regional “security community” based on similar values and interests as well as the perceived threat coming from Germany and then the Soviet Union (Deutsch 2015; Adler, Barnett, and Smith 1998).

America has allowed itself to be regionally restrained by these friendly neighbors because of an acknowledgement of these countries’ sovereign rights to self-determination (sovereignty itself being a constructed idea, Wendt 1992), and their shared desire to avoid conflict with Russia in a region that holds relatively little ideational or material value to America. Ultimately, these historically constructed relationships mean that the United States has externally balanced against Russia with other Arctic states and not the other way around. This external balancing has allowed the United States to meet the Russian threat in the Arctic so it could focus on other geopolitical hot spots.

In contrast to the United States, Russia has struggled with territorial insecurity for centuries, which has pushed it to expand into the Arctic. Neither European nor Asian, and historically ruled through centralized authority, Russia has found difficulty feeling secure and found difficulty keeping peaceful relations with its Arctic neighbors.
Because of Russia’s inability to form lasting peaceful relations, the United States and other countries have historically acted to limit Russia’s access to the world’s oceans by actively attempting to limit Russia’s access to ice-free ports. This geopolitical situation has motivated Russia to develop specific Arctic capabilities to access the world’s oceans, to secure its far-flung borders, and to project power outward through the Arctic to achieve its leaders’ traditional reach for Great Power status (Newmann and Pouliot 2011).

The Arctic has also been a formidable wall that has kept other states from encroaching on Russian territory from the north. Due to other states’ relative lack of interest in the peripheral Arctic region, Russia has increased its Arctic presence without the comparable material balancing that it has faced in other regions. Because the Arctic has served as a buffer zone that helped secure Russia from invasion and allowed it to project power outwards, it has been constructed by Russian leaders, especially since the Stalin era, as a region that is critical to Russia’s security and power (Antrim 2010). This means that as the polar ice has thawed, and international activity in the Arctic has increased, Russia has felt both threatened and emboldened. This, in turn, has made its leaders more willing and capable than leaders in the United States to expand Russia’s sphere of influence in the Arctic.

2) Domestic economic institutions have also caused America’s and Russia’s foreign policies to diverge in the Arctic. As previously alluded to, economic strength is a key determinant to a state’s material ability to assert a sphere of influence (Gilpin1981; Wallerstein 2011). However, what is less thoroughly analyzed is how a state’s economic institutions and its economic relations with other state actors affect its willingness to assert itself regionally. By historically analyzing the construction of Russian and American economic institutions and international economic relations, I explain that Russia has been much more willing than the
United States to develop the Arctic. Russia’s unique ability to develop a sizable Arctic economy has given it both the capability and willingness to expand its sphere of influence into the region because it has much more material wealth to protect there than the United States does.

First, due to its relative openness to international trade and its friendly relations with other states, the United States has had access to goods and resources from all around the world, including the resources of its Arctic neighbors. This has decreased its desire to control and develop Arctic resources on its own. Second, the unification and consolidation of Canada shortly after the Alaskan Purchase created a barrier that restrained American economic expansion into most of the North American Arctic and isolated Alaska from the transport and market systems of the “contiguous” United States. This has increased the political and economic transaction costs of developing the Arctic “near-abroad” and exacerbated the already sizable costs incurred by the region’s harsh weather and austerity. Third, the difficulty of developing agriculture in the Arctic due to the harsh climate and geography has increased the relative cost of settling much of Alaska. Fourth, the American federal government has controlled most of Alaska’s territory since its purchase from Russia. The government has historically denied private property rights to most of this territory – first to enrich political donors and political elites and then to garner support from a strengthening environmental movement composed of influential political agents. Public ownership in a market-based system has been antithetical to economic development. Fifth, other Arctic states, including America’s aforementioned Arctic collective security partners (Canada, Norway, Iceland, and Denmark), have been reticent to allow American businesses to gain a foothold in their Arctic territory. Even though they openly trade with the United States, they have been worried that an influx of Americans into the sparse and relatively under-developed region would threaten their sovereignty over the territory.
Together, these unique economic factors have made the Arctic less economically attractive to the United States than to Russia. In turn, the lack of economic importance America has placed on the Arctic means that the United States historically has been much less compelled to mobilize American material power to develop and protect economic interests in the Arctic than Russia.

In contrast to the United States, Russia’s historically centrally controlled and autarkic economic institutions have influenced it to develop the Arctic much more than the United States. Specifically, the Russian government has proven motivated and capable enough to move people and capital, often coercively, to the Arctic to extract the region’s resources. The Russian gulag system that developed during Stalin’s reign from the 1920s to the 1950s was built on the tsarist exile system that preceded it. It has no comparison in the United States, or the world’s other Arctic states, for that matter.

These institutions allowed successive Russian rulers to extract the Arctic’s resources. These resources, in turn, substituted for resources the Russians could have received from other countries and were used to buy machinery and technology they could not develop on their own. The resources also gave Russian rulers a way to politically and economically enrich themselves. Arctic resources eventually gave Russia’s leaders leverage over Western European countries, who developed a dependency on Russia’s Arctic energy resources.

Over time, Russia used these institutions to develop an Arctic maritime transport system, Arctic urban centers with millions of people, and extensive Arctic extractive resource centers - what Russian experts Hill and Gaddy aptly call the “Siberian Curse” (2003). The Siberian Curse, and its high sunk costs, are a social phenomenon that gives the present Russian government the unique capability and willingness to expand economic development in the Arctic. The
dependence on Arctic resources that Russia developed has also given it the willingness to expand its military reach in the region to protect its control of these resources and to secure the transportation routes that allow it to transport these resources to markets.

3) Identity is the third factor that has caused America’s and Russia’s foreign policy to differ in the Arctic. Spatial identity is analyzed thoroughly in the realm of political geography and domestic state-building but has been largely neglected in international relations except in conflict areas like the Middle East. Specific locations have gained historic significance for some societies. This historic significance can then be mobilized by state leaders to legitimize otherwise materially irrational attempts to expand control over a region. Specifically, Russia and Canada have developed a special national attachment to the Arctic over time that has made them more willing than the United States to expand their control over the region.

Despite initial American exploration of much of the Arctic, including the initial discovery of the symbolic North Pole, Americans overwhelmingly have not self-identified themselves as an Arctic people or an Arctic country. I argue that this is largely the result of how America’s relationship with Canada has evolved. Canada’s unification after the Alaska Purchase made Alaska an Arctic enclave and separated the Arctic from the United States both physically and ideationally. As such, Alaska is often symbolically displayed on American maps in a box next to California and Hawaii – far away from the Arctic.

Furthermore, Canadian nationalists have drawn on the country’s northern geography as a way to separate the identity of Canadians from their otherwise very similar southern neighbors. Canada’s growing conception of itself as the “Great White North” “strong and free” has made it assertively restrain the United States in the Arctic and kept Americans from taking on an identity as a northern country themselves. Ultimately, despite America’s rich history of first discoveries
in the region – something that has been used successfully to legitimate sovereignty claims by other states in the Arctic – the United States has not seen itself as an Arctic state and has not been as keen as its circumpolar neighbors to claim sovereign control over Arctic territory or assert a sphere of influence based on historical occupation and initial discovery.

In contrast, the overwhelming bulk of Russia’s territory is contiguous with the Arctic and Russia has no ambivalent ally, like Canada, that has attempted to dilute its consciousness as an Arctic nation. In fact, Russia’s historic rivalry with other Arctic states has pushed it to perform heroic accomplishments in the Arctic that have bolstered Russia’s conception of itself as the preeminent Arctic country. Russian leaders from Tsar Alexander II onwards, but especially during Stalin’s “Red Arctic” propaganda campaigns of the 1930s, have used their control over the country’s media to develop an Arctic national consciousness (McCannon 1998) and to justify their harsh domestic policies and expensive Arctic endeavors. The propaganda campaigns around these events have mythicized the region and created a feedback loop which has mobilized subsequent Russian leaders and citizens to attempt to conquer the Arctic and take ownership of the region.

4) Environmentalism is the fourth factor that has caused Russia’s and America’s foreign policies to diverge in the Arctic. International relations neglected environmental policy until the end of the Cold War, when Western analysts expanded the purview of security studies to include the environment. However, environmentalism became a staple of domestic politics in America well before the end of the Cold War and contrasted greatly with Russia’s approach to the environment.

Significantly, Canada’s unification made the Alaskan Arctic the United States’ last large-scale, undeveloped wilderness area. In many elite American circles, this spawned the conception
of the Arctic as a unique, pristine, and vulnerable region – something given legitimacy by America’s strong “wilderness ethos” and “frontier spirit.” Consequently, many American elites influenced government agencies and inspired non-governmental organizations in America’s relatively open political system to actively restrain the American government from asserting a stronger physical presence in the Arctic than it was capable of doing. These forces have institutionally protected huge expanses of Alaska from economic development and imposed a transaction cost to develop other areas that are not institutionally protected. Furthermore, many of America’s Arctic allies have similar perceptions of the Arctic or have cynically used America’s environmental consciousness to keep it from expanding its physical presence in the region. Specifically, Canada has utilized American environmental consciousness to establish itself as the environmental protector of the Northwest Passage and to prevent the United States from developing the resource potential of the Yukon.

In contrast, Russia has developed a much more material view of the Arctic than the United States. This is partly because the country is overwhelmingly composed of Arctic wilderness and because the Arctic is contiguous to the rest of the country. Therefore, the Arctic is not as unique to Russia as it is to the United States, and wilderness has not been perceived of as “scarce” or in need of preservation. Additionally, Russia’s government and economic institutions were constructed to “conquer” the Arctic instead of preserving it. The Soviet government’s closed system kept European and American environmentalism from taking hold in the country and marginalized Soviet scientists’ efforts to institutionally preserve Arctic territory. The Russian Arctic territory that was preserved was almost purely for material reasons and was used largely as a “control group” in experiments to determine if other Arctic territory could be exploited more productively. Russia’s heavy Arctic industrialization and development
contradicts common American conceptions of a pristine and untouched Arctic sublime. The environmental damage that resulted from these enterprises was considered a necessary consequence of taming the region and strengthening Russia materially. The marginal value Russia has given to preserving the Arctic wilderness has made the Russian government much more willing to physically assert itself in the Arctic than the United States.

5) Native rights is a final factor that explains America’s and Russia’s diverging policies toward the Arctic. Like the environment, international relations’ scholars in the West have placed more value on “human security” since the end of the Cold War. However, even before the end of the Cold War, America’s domestic political institutions afforded native groups in Alaska a larger political voice and more agency than their contemporaries in the Russian Arctic. This allowed them to challenge America’s sovereignty over the Arctic in a way that Russian natives have been incapable of doing.

Over time, the United States government’s approach to native rights has evolved considerably. Alaska’s Arctic natives were not threatened to the same extent by outsiders as were natives in the contiguous United States at the time of the Alaskan Purchase because of the harsh environment and austerity of their location. So, unlike natives in the contiguous United States, they did not sign treaties that gave away their territory and, as such, remained the region’s dominant population. As social mores changed, American natives used their access to the federal government to institutionalize a modicum of sovereignty over millions of acres of northern Alaska. This, in turn, diluted the American federal government’s hold over this territory and increased the political and economic costs that “outside” business interests had to pay to develop this territory. American natives also utilized the open relationship America has had with Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, Finland, and Sweden to network with native groups in these
countries. This transnational network has since gained prominence in the Arctic Council and collectively works to influence these countries’ Arctic policies and increases the natives’ political strength to restrain America’s presence in the region.

In contrast, Russia has more forcefully asserted dominance over its Arctic native population. This internal colonization was established during the Stalin era, when Russia utilized Communist ideology to legitimize its coercive collectivization and assimilation of its Arctic natives – making them part of the collectivized Soviet proletariat. The millions of non-native Soviets sent to the Arctic overwhelmed the native population and gave the natives very little political or demographic power to restrain Russian expansion into the region.

Each of these factors has had different degrees of influence in different historical eras. While geopolitics and economics have been the strongest and most persistent factors pushing the two countries’ different approaches to the region from the mid-19th century onward, identity, environmental concern, and native rights have increasingly influenced the region since World War II. I argue in this dissertation that the cumulative influence of these factors has shaped the states’ different conceptions of the region, the states’ different physical presence in the region, and, ultimately, the states’ differing willingness and capability to assert regional dominance. Ultimately, these historical forces have made the Arctic critical to Russia’s material and ideational interests. In contrast, the cumulative effect of these influences has made the Arctic peripheral to American ideational and material concerns. The result is that the United States is a “Reluctant Arctic Power” that has allowed a relatively weaker, but much more assertive Russia, to expand its sphere of influence in the region with relatively little response.

Dissertation Organization:
The dissertation is organized chronologically into chapters built around critical junctures that set the Russia and the United States on different paths in the Arctic and serve as the basis for their present capability and willingness to expand their respective spheres of influence.

**Chapter 1** shows how the Alaska Purchase was an ambiguous affair that underlined America’s reticence to assert sovereignty over the Arctic from the very beginning but also had the enduring effect of making the United States an Arctic country. I show that the Alaska Purchase was a contingent event that occurred because of the unique combination of the agency of the United States’ Secretary of State and Russia’s Ambassador to the United States, friendly Russo-American relations, adversarial relations between the United States and Great Britain, and economic stress in Russia. Furthermore, I show that in another contingent event, the British colonists in what is now Canada unified and maintained their separation from the United States. Against realist assumptions, the United States did not overpower its new northern neighbor despite the vast material difference between the two states. Instead, I argue that the evacuation of the British from Canada reduced the perceived threat America felt from the north and made it less belligerent towards Canada. Furthermore, many prominent Americans believed that civilized people like the Canadians should have the right to self-determination and believed that Canada would eventually unify with the United States anyway, and these beliefs restrained America from moving more assertively northward. In toto, I argue that the Alaska Purchase and the consolidation of Canada at this critical juncture created a territorial buffer between the United States and its Arctic territory of Alaska that has made the United States less willing and able to assert control over the Arctic ever since.

**Chapter 2** covers the period between the 1871 Treaty of Washington and the Bolshevik Revolution, during which the United States slowly cemented peaceful relationships with Great
Britain and Canada, while Russia’s failure to politically liberalize resulted in the slow disintegration of the country’s formerly good relations with the United States. I argue that the different geopolitical circumstances of the United States and Russia, and their differing economic and political structures, started the divergence between both countries’ approach to the Arctic. By the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, Russia was institutionally and geopolitically primed to assert itself in the Arctic, while America already faced many restraining factors that kept it from asserting itself more forcefully in the Arctic.

**Chapter 3** examines the interwar period and highlights how the newly established Soviet government built upon many coercive tsarist institutions and practices to launch unprecedented plans to develop the Russian Arctic and create a national identity tied to the Arctic. It also shows that the contingent Soviet success in the Russian Civil War worsened ties between the Soviet Union and many of the world’s states, which made Russia more dependent on the Arctic than the United States. Furthermore, this chapter shows how America’s differing political and economic institutions kept it from matching the Soviet Union’s unique efforts to develop the Arctic.

**Chapter 4** highlights how the critical juncture of World War II pushed the United States to mobilize its vast material resources and establish a formidable Arctic presence for the first time. It also shows how the war facilitated the present collective security apparatus that continues to tie the United States to Canada, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland and has allowed the United States to externally balance against Russia in the Arctic ever since. This chapter also shows how World War II pushed the Soviet Union to further develop its Arctic economy, and its Arctic security infrastructure, and strengthened Russia’s national attachment to the Arctic.

**Chapter 5** examines the first two decades of the Cold War and explains how the Soviet-American rivalry and the changing nature of nuclear warfare pushed both countries to rapidly
improve their respective military capabilities to operate in the Arctic after World War II. It also shows how America’s established relationships with NATO countries in the Arctic allowed it to externally balance against the Soviets as the Cold War progressed and how technological improvements, and America’s greater sensitivity to the relative costs of garrisoning forces in the Arctic, pushed it to eliminate or redeploy many of the military assets it already had in the Arctic. Furthermore, this chapter explains how improved native rights and a strengthened environmental movement in America restrained America’s willingness to assert itself more forcibly. In contrast, it shows that Russia’s lack of environmental concern and its willingness to “internally colonize” its northern natives allowed it to expand its expansive northern development plans.

Chapter 6 examines the era from the 1973 OPEC oil crisis until the Cold War ended in 1992. Geopolitically, it shows how the United States continued to rely on its now firmly established and institutionalized Arctic allies to balance the Soviet Union and explains why the Soviet Union’s decision to expand its naval power and international reach motivated it to establish the Arctic as a defensive bastion. Economically, it explains how the contingency of the OPEC oil embargo created the necessary, albeit temporary, economic and political conditions for America to develop its own Arctic hydrocarbon industry. It also explains how the energy shortages of the 1970s and 1980s gave the Soviet Union more strength and international leverage than it ever had before. Paradoxically, it describes how the Soviet Union’s growing dependence on Arctic resources contributed to the Soviet Union’s collapse and motivated the Soviets to expand resource extraction operations in the Arctic even as resource prices buckled. Ideationally, it elucidates how influential Russian and Canadian agents continued to bolster the dual narratives of the “Russian Arctic” and “Canadian Arctic” and restrained relatively unattached America’s expansion into the region. Finally, it describes how America’s environmental and native rights
movements built on the momentum, experience, and institutional tools from previous efforts that allowed them to successfully protect millions of square miles of America’s Arctic territory from development in perpetuity.

Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation by explaining how the historical combination of the five factors I identified created a path dependence that gives Russia and the United States different degrees of willingness and opportunity to expand their respective spheres of influence in the Arctic now. It then examines which of these factors carries the most weight to explain their respective behaviors. Finally, it assesses how the behavior of these two countries contrasts with how realist or liberal assumptions of international relations suggest the two countries should behave in the Arctic.
Chapter 1: The Purchase of Alaska to the Treaty of Washington (1865 to 1871)

1. Introduction

On March 29th, 1867, the Queen of England signed the British North American Act that quickly paved the way for the Confederation of Canada as an independent and unified state on the United States’ northern boundary. On March 30th, 1867, United States Secretary of State, William Seward, and Russian Ambassador to the United States, Baron Eduard de Stoeckl, signed the treaty that gave the United States Alaska, its Arctic enclave on the North American continent. It is unlikely the British, the Canadians, the Americans, or the Russians knew these events were occurring almost simultaneously and the remarkable concurrence was likely accidental (Waitte 1962, pg. 304). Despite the coincidental timing of these two landmark events, I show that they were deeply connected to the geopolitical and domestic political influences of United States and Russia at the time.

I broke this chapter into two subchapters. The first subchapter explores the “Alaskan Purchase” and the second subchapter covers the “Unification and Confederation of Canada.” Together, these subchapters explain how contingent events that occurred almost one hundred and fifty years ago continue to affect how the United States and Russia approach the Arctic.

1.1 The Purchase of Alaska

The 1867 Alaskan Purchase marked a critical juncture that made America a de jure Arctic state and displayed influential Americans’ willingness and capability to take advantage of a fleeting opportunity to gain influence in the Arctic region at the end of the American Civil War. However, the Purchase was not designed to expand America’s hold on the Arctic per se. Instead, the idea of Manifest Destiny, an enduring dislike for the British, an affinity for Russia,
domestic economic concerns, and the agency of United States Secretary of State, William Seward, influenced the American decision to buy Alaska.

This purchase required a willing partner in Russia. Russia’s decision to sell Alaska to the United States was a result of Russia’s decreasing capability and willingness to hold Alaska at the time. Important Russian leaders believed Alaska was an economic liability and was increasingly vulnerable to the growing regional economic influence and reach of British and American business interests. Rather than lose the territory outright, or continue to subsidize the territory indefinitely, the Russian government decided to sell Alaska to the United States for over seven million dollars.¹

The highly contentious and prolonged American Congressional decision to make government funds available for the Purchase of Alaska illustrated America’s overall ambiguous interest in acquiring the territory. In the rest of this dissertation, I argue that this ambiguous feeling towards the Arctic has largely endured since the Alaskan Purchase and contributes to America’s “reluctant Arctic power” posture today. Russia, on the other hand, has shown a much greater willingness and capability to influence the Arctic since selling Alaska to the United States. Significantly, the sale of Alaska is now heavily criticized by influential Russian nationalists who claim the sale was a plot by “cosmopolitan liberal forces to undermine the strategic interests of the Russian Empire in the northern Pacific” (Znameski 2009).

It is apparent that Russia and the United States now view the Arctic and the sale of Alaska differently and that the Arctic has been constructed in contrasting fashions in the two states. Therefore, this critical juncture is an important point of analysis. The sale of Alaska

¹ According to the website http://www.in2013dollars.com/1867-dollars-in-2015?amount=7200000 $7.2M was worth an inflation-adjusted $110M in 2013. In order to provide some context, this $7.2M was just under 2% of the total federal budget of $376.8M in the United States in 1867, according to the website http://www.usgovernmentspending.com/fed_spending_1867USmn.
marked America’s sovereign entry into the Arctic and is an event that is significant to both the United States’ and Russia’s present willingness and capability to establish a sphere of influence in the Arctic.

1.1.1. Geopolitics

In 1867, the world’s major powers resided in Europe. The United States emerged from its Civil War as a rising material power that threatened to upset this European-dominated system. Not unlike present geopolitics, the Arctic was a frontier region that was peripheral to the larger interests of these Great Powers and their balance of power calculations. However, geopolitics is also shaped by historical learning, distinct bilateral relationships, and domestic conceptions of how regions should be constructed. Emanuel Adler suggests that international relations are shaped by the material world and that the material world is also shaped by human action and interaction where diplomats and the states they represent come to learn about each other from previous experiences (1997, pg. 322). As such, agents act per institutionalized rules gleaned from previous behavior as much as their own rational interests (Ibid., pg. 325). The Alaskan Purchase follows this framework quite closely. This section starts off by discussing the geopolitical situations of the United States and Russia at the time of the Alaskan Purchase and then discusses how the U.S.-Russian bilateral relationship influenced the peaceful transfer of Alaska from Russia to the United States.

1.1.1.1 Russian Geopolitics

One of the enduring aspects of Russia’s geopolitical position is its lack of access to ice-free ports and its position on the Eurasian continent between historically adversarial European powers to the west and the Asian powers to the east. In the middle of the 19th century, Russia shared the European continent with the Great Powers of Great Britain, France, the Ottoman
Empire, and Prussia. These other powers blocked Russian expansion into Europe and pushed Russia to expand eastward where isolationist China and Japan lacked the ability and willingness to resist Russia (Gibson 1979, pg. 180).

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Russian eastward expansion was also contested by the British who instigated a Great Game (Hopkirk 2002) with Russia for control of Central Asia. Britain allied with France during the Crimean War of 1853-55 to contain Russia and restrict its access to the Black and Mediterranean Seas. This devastating loss made Russian leaders keenly aware that the tenuous hold they had on the critical ice-free, coastal territory they recently acquired in the Amur from China was vulnerable. Russia’s friendly relationship with the United States and the two countries’ shared animosity and fear of Great Britain created the conditions where Russia began to see the United States as a potential territorial buffer between itself and Great Britain in the North Pacific.

This perception increased when it became clear how vulnerable Russia’s control of Alaska was during the Crimean War (Gibson 1979, pg. 185; Haycox 2002, 137-138). The Russian American Company (RAC) controlled Alaska at the time. It was a state-chartered company that was far away from Russia’s main naval fleet on the Baltic Sea and therefore was difficult for the Russians to protect. This vulnerability was illustrated during the Crimean War when Russia was unable to relieve the naval siege of Sevastopol, a settlement much closer to Russian military garrisons than its far-flung Alaska colony in North America. Russia was unable to re-supply the RAC during the Crimean War and instead relied on American commercial entities to do so. Fearing that Britain would take advantage of this tenuous situation and seize Alaska, Russia developed a fictitious plan to sell Alaska to the United States during the Crimean War (Thomas 1970, pg. 110).
Russia’s threat to sell Alaska to Britain’s North American rival, the United States, contributed to Britain’s agreement to facilitate a neutrality clause between the British-chartered Hudson Bay Company (HBC) in British North America and the RAC (McPherson 1934) – effectively keeping the conflict between the two countries from extending into North America. The side effect of this fictitious sale was that it increased the likelihood that Russia would eventually sell Alaska to the United States, because it made this transaction a possible course of action for both Russian and American leaders afterwards.

After the Crimean War, Great Britain continued to challenge the materially weaker Russia in the North Pacific. This motivated the Russian Ambassador to the United States, Baron Stoeckl, to re-open a dialogue with the United States about purchasing Alaska. He believed that selling Alaska to the United States would mean that "British Oregon would be crowded on the northern side and on the southern side by the Americans and escape with difficulty from the aggression of the latter" (qtd. Gerus 1973, pg. 168). In effect, he believed that balancing with the United States and creating an American territorial buffer between Russia and Great Britain in Alaska would relieve Russia of an untenable position on the North American side of the North Pacific and allow Russia to focus on defending the more critical Amur region on the Eurasian side of the North Pacific from the British.

1.1.1.2 American Geopolitics

In contrast to Russia’s difficult geographic situation, America’s unique geography has been fortuitous (Spykeman 1942; Mearsheimer 2001). Notably, at the end of the American Civil War, America was physically separated from Europe and Asia by oceans that provided protection. The oceans also served as conduits that allowed the United States to expand its economic and military influence outwards into the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. By the end of the
American Civil War, the British and French realized they were unable to maintain their tenuous positions in North America or even successfully put down independence movements within their own American colonies, as they dealt with European rivalries that presented a more proximate threat to their centers of power. Their pull-back from the Americas created a power vacuum that increased America’s freedom of movement in North America and allowed it to move into Alaska.

The Civil War served as the most proximate lesson for American statesmen and contributed to their contingent and contested decision to purchase Alaska from Russia. Specifically, the inability of the Union navy to stop the C.S.S. *Shenandoah*, which raided Northern whaling ships in the North Pacific at the end of the Civil War, highlighted the potential protective perks of acquiring Alaska and using it as a coaling station to protect the increasingly important American sea lines of communication in the Northern Pacific (Welch 1958). The ability of the Confederates to avoid Union blockades, and the Union’s vulnerability to potential blockades by the British, also heightened American leaders’ awareness of the importance of acquiring protected ports in the North Pacific. This insecurity explains why American Secretary of State, William Seward, also used the Purchase of Alaska to get Russia to pressure Denmark to sell valuable Caribbean territories to the United States (Stahr 2012, pg. 484). Seward believed that acquiring these Caribbean colonies would increase America’s ability to protect its maritime commerce in the south as much as acquiring Alaska would protect American commerce in the North Pacific. He believed (incorrectly, it turns out) that he could leverage the sale with Russia to increase American security in both regions.

The Civil War also taught American statesmen that France and Great Britain still had the ability and willingness to threaten America. Influential elements in both of these European
countries credibly threatened to tip the balance of power against the Union during the war with the British colonies north of the United States, presenting an especially dangerous second front to the Union (Callahan 1908, pgs. 6-10, Thomas 1970, pgs. 116-119). Powerful American politicians like Seward and Senate Foreign Relations Chairman, Charles Sumner, agreed with Stoeckl that acquiring Alaska would allow the United States to form a pincer around British territory on the North American Pacific Coast that would then pressure the British to withdraw their presence from North America entirely. This sentiment was supported by the American press (Welch 1958) and from American consuls in the British North American colonies that suggested there was a large contingent of annexationist colonists in what is now western Canada, ready and willing to join the United States if given a sufficient push (The second subchapter explains this dynamic in much greater detail).

Influential American expansionists like Seward, R.J. Walker, and Charles Sumner also had plans to acquire Iceland and Greenland from Denmark at this time when new territory was still being “discovered” in the Arctic and boundary lines between states were negotiable. The purchase of Iceland and Greenland, on the other side of the Arctic Ocean from Alaska, was explored as a way to further cut off the British colonies from the North Atlantic and designed to further pressure the British to leave North America (Dyer 1940, pgs. 265-266).

However, the United States did not have as strong a relationship with Denmark as it did with Russia, which made the sale more difficult to seal. Furthermore, a growing anti-expansionist sentiment within the United States Congress ridiculed the proposed purchase of these Arctic islands during Congressional hearings when the appropriation bill for the purchase of Alaska was debated (Ibid., 265). The fact that Great Britain was uninterested in acquiring Greenland and Iceland from relatively impotent Denmark also probably contributed to America’s
lukewarm attempts to acquire the islands. In the end, the failure of the United States to actively pursue these available Arctic territories at this time signified America’s overall lack of willingness to expand into the Arctic and highlights the importance of its relationship with Russia as a critical factor that made the Purchase of Alaska possible.

1.1.1.3 The Crucial Russo-American Relationship

Liberal theorizing would assume that democratic America would have had better relations with democratic Great Britain than non-democratic (but liberalizing) Russia at the time of the Alaskan Purchase. Instead, historic enmity still emanating from the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and Great Britain’s ambiguous support for the Confederacy during the American Civil War made the United States look at Great Britain as an adversary.

In contrast, Russia and the United States had historically good relations. This relationship dated to the American Revolution when the Russians turned down British requests to support British military operations against America and instead made a Declaration of Armed Neutrality that helped America weaken the British blockade on American ports (Saul 1991, pgs. 6-7, 12-13). More proximate in time to the Alaska Purchase, America was the lone Great Power to give diplomatic and material support to the Russians during the Crimean War – citing that Britain and France were unfairly ganging up on Russia (Jampoler 2011).

This recent history influenced Russia to lean towards the side of the Union during the American Civil War when France and Britain started leaning towards the Confederacy. Significantly, Russia refused to recognize the Confederates as legitimate belligerents in the conflict (Thomas 1970, pg. 125). It also influenced many Americans to perceive Russian naval visits to San Francisco, New York, and Virginia in 1863 – a time when many northerners feared the Confederate Army was winning the war – as an act of altruistic friendship (Kroll 2007, Saul
1991, pgs. 339-354), even though the Russian fleet’s American port visits were also a tactical gambit by the Russians in the greater geopolitical game that was being played in Europe (Jampoler 2011).

America’s and Russia’s shared concern about other European powers was a contributing factor to their warm relationship and highlights how both material and ideational concerns construct international relations. During the Crimean War, United States Secretary of State, William Marcy, mused to James Buchanan, the United States Minister to Russia, that "should Russia be defeated...and crippled...and the entente cordiale between Great Britain and France continue, their abstinence from intermeddling in our affairs can hardly be expected – this view of the subject is Russianizing some of our people" (qtd. in Thomas 1970, pg. 116). The Russians saw things in a similar fashion during the American Civil War, with Foreign Minister, Alexander Gorchakov, hoping for a Union victory “not only because of the cordial sympathy which unites the two countries, but moreover because the maintenance of its power interests in the highest degree [maintains] the general political equilibrium” (qtd. in Thomas 1970, pg. 126).

In this light, both Russia and the United States believed that transferring Alaska could deepen their friendship between the two states and increase their collective security against Great Britain. Russia was confident that the United States would not use its hold on Alaska to threaten Russia. On the other hand, if Alaska fell into British hands, (a distinct possibility at the time of the sale), it was believed that Britain would use the territory to threaten both the United States and Russia.

Additionally, leaders in Russia and the United States pointed to the similar progressive movements in each country as a reason for their warm relations. Like Lincoln’s Emancipation of American slaves in 1863, Tsar Alexander II emancipated Russian serfs in 1861 (Saul 1991, pg. 38).
313). Both countries’ rulers faced intense domestic backlash from their liberalization efforts. Lincoln was assassinated in 1865, and Tsar Alexander II avoided an assassination attempt in 1866. The similarity between the two events prompted the United States’ legislature to issue a joint resolution after the assassination attempt on Alexander II that underlined America’s perception of Russia as a kindred state. The United States sent Gustavus Fox, Assistant Undersecretary of the Navy, as an envoy to Russia to hand-deliver the resolution. His visit was joyously received by thousands of Russians (Saul 1991, pgs. 371, 394). The Tsar’s letter to President Johnson underlines the mutual appreciation between the two states at the time that created the necessary trust that contributed to Russia’s decision to transfer Alaska to the United States.

He writes: “I have received by the hand of Mr. Fox the resolution of the Congress of the United States of America…. This mark of sympathy has touched me deeply…. It is a new attestation of the sentiments which unite the American Nation to Russia…. It is with a lively satisfaction that I see these bonds continually strengthening. I have communicated my sentiments to Mr. Fox. I pray you to express them to Congress and to the American people…. Tell them how much I – and with me all Russia – appreciate the testimonials of friendship which they have given me, and how heartily I shall congratulate myself on seeing the American nation growing in power and prosperity by the union and continued practice of the civic virtues which distinguished it” (qtd. in Potemkin 2016).
A similar American appreciation for Russia progressivism was captured by the widely read Harper’s Weekly (1863, pg. 658) in America which pushed for an alliance between Russia and the United States:

“Russia, like the United States, is a nation of the future. Its capabilities are only just being developed. Its national destiny is barely shaped. Its’ very institutions are in their cradle and have yet to be modeled to fit advancing civilization and the spread of intelligence. Like the United States, Russia is in the agonies of a terrible transition; the Russian serfs, like the American negroes, are receiving their liberty; and the Russian boiars, like the Southern slave-owners, are mutinous at the loss of their property. When this great problem shall have been solved, and the Russian people shall consist of 100,000,000 intelligent, educated human beings, it is possible that Russian institutions will have been welded by the force of civilization into a similarity with ours.”

The “kindred psychological make-up” (Saul 1991, pg. 400) of the two countries went beyond emancipation of formerly enslaved people. Both American and Russian officials shared an anti-Catholic and anti-interventionist bias. Many elite Americans believed Catholicism retarded progress towards more ideal republican institutions due to its hierarchical nature. Russian nobles disliked Catholicism because it was the main religion of the Russia’s insurgent Polish population in Russia that was receiving moral support from the French (Saul 1991 pgs. 398-399). This common distrust of Catholicism, and the French, was a unifying theme for
Americans and Russians and further played into America’s perception of Russia as a liberalizing country that was ripe for the republican institutions American politicians believed they were promoting through their own example. Furthermore, American and Russian political elites appreciated the fact that neither country intervened in the civil disputes in the other country – respecting state sovereignty in a way that they perceived the “Old World” countries of Britain and France did not (Thomas 1970, pg. 136).

These similarities and friendliness contributed to the perception of legitimacy of each country’s expansion across their respective continents. Influential Russian statesman Muravyov-Amursky wrote to Tsar Alexander I as early as 1853 that, "The ultimate rule of the United States over the whole of America is so natural that we must ourselves sooner or later recede, but we must recede peacefully in return for which we might receive other advantages from the Americans. Due to the present amazing development of the railroad, the United States will soon spread over all North America. We must face the fact that we will have to cede our North American possessions to them” (qtd. Gerus 1973, pg. 162). Later Russian leaders, Arch-Duke Constantine (Tsar Alexander II’s brother) and Admiral Popov, also believed that the United States had a natural and legitimate claim to control North America, just as Russia was trying to control Eurasia (Golder 1920, pg. 413-416). A Russian official at the time declared that the Monroe Doctrine "enters more and more into the veins of the [American] people and... the latest generation imbibes it with mother's milk and inhales it with the air" (qtd. in Zimmerman 2002, pg. 32).

As historian Frank Golder concludes, despite strong resistance in the American legislature, not wanting to disgrace Russia or cause enmity between the two friendly nations contributed to America’s decision to eventually pay the relatively large sum for Alaska (Golder
1920, pg. 421). Many American politicians went along with the sale, even though they believed the price was exorbitant and the territory was a barren wasteland. Similarly, prominent Russians, like Foreign Minister Alexander Gorchakov, went along with the sale, although he feared that giving up the Alaskan territory would limit Russian influence in the North Pacific and improve the strength of the United States unnecessarily (Van Deusen 1967, pg. 537).

The fact that America did not acquire the Danish possessions of Greenland and Iceland that were for sale at the same time further suggests that gratitude and bilateral amity were critical aspects of the Purchase of Alaska (Johnson 1916, pg. 387). The Danish relationship with the United States was not as enduring as the Russo-American relationship, and American political elites did not believe they had a moral obligation to the Danes like they did to the Russians.

Overall, both Russia and the United States saw each other as indispensable partners in the geopolitical chess game that was being played against the British. Statesmen in each country believed an increased American presence in Alaska was favorable to both states and would favorably improve their important bilateral relationship.

1.2.1 Russian Economics

It is important to note that the Russian and American economies have historically diverged in their structure and that this divergence has important implications as to why both countries have developed the Arctic in such different fashions. The Russian government has traditionally utilized centralized economic decision-making, or as Lenin later claimed, held the “commanding heights” over the Russian economy (Yergin and Stanislaq 1998, Kindle Location 122). The mercantilist Russian American Company (RAC) fits neatly within this framework. It was a government-chartered company that was created to enrich Russia’s political elites and to colonize Alaska. Not too different from the nationalized Russian extractive resource companies
that operate in the Arctic today, it was a tool of the Russian government and beholden to the Russian leaders’ political and economic objectives.

By 1866, the RAC was only able to avoid bankruptcy because of heavy subsidies from the Russian government (Golder 1920; Gibson 1979, pg. 184). Baron von Stoeckl, the Russian ambassador to the United States, noted that the fur trade which sustained the RAC was diminishing because Alaska was over-hunted and the fur markets in Europe were over-supplied (Golder 1920, pg. 415). It was hard to justify subsidizing the RAC when the country was already under a large economic strain and there were more lucrative opportunities nearby.

Specifically, Russia recently reacquired territory in the Amur valley from China. This region was closer to the potentially lucrative markets of China and Japan than Alaska. Russian leaders like East Siberian Governor Nikolay Muravyov-Amurksy feared that if Russia did not solidify its economic strength in Amur, it would lose out there to the British (Gerus 1973, pg. 161). In this light, the RAC was perceived as a liability that would serve Russian economic and geopolitical interests better if it was liquidated and its workers and supplies were moved to the Amur (Haycox 2002, pg. 155).

A further economic factor that contributed to Russia’s decision to sell Alaska was the rapid spread of American business interests into the North Pacific. In contrast to the Russian economic system, the United States allowed the free market to dominate its economic affairs, and private entrepreneurs were often the precursors of government involvement in foreign lands. Russian statesmen recognized this. Baron de Stoeckl was especially fearful that the Russian government was unable to defend RAC business interests in Alaska against American whaling boats, fur traders, and gold prospectors that had emerged in Alaska, and neighboring British Columbia, in the previous decades (Golder 1920, pgs. 413-414; Gibson 1979, pg. 185, Haycox
2002, pgs. 150, 136). Furthermore, Stoeckl was alarmed at Brigham Young’s open discussions of moving his Mormon congregation from Utah to Alaska (Gerus 1973, pg. 167). Unlike the British, the Russians did not maintain a significant constabulary force in the North Pacific that could stop an influx of outsiders (Gough 1972). Therefore, selling the territory to the United States was an attractive alternative to losing it outright to American or British business interests.

1.2.2 American Economics

As was alluded to in the previous section, American whalers, fur trappers, and miners wanted to secure their access to Alaska, and its coastal waters, from both the British and the Russians. They pushed their representatives in the American government to acquire Alaska. However, businessmen that wanted to expand American trade into East Asia were even more influential.

Like the Russians and the British, Americans were interested in exploiting potentially lucrative East Asian markets. Americans viewed Russians as logical economic partners in this respect because they shared America’s aversion to the British (Haycox 2002, pg. 151). Alaska was viewed as a logical stepping stone between North America and East Asia by these entrepreneurs because of the short expanse of water between Asia and North America across the Bering Strait and Alaska’s potential as a coaling station for merchant ships. Businessmen like Perry McDonough Collins, appointed as the American Agent to the Amur River (Collins 2011), pushed the United States to acquire Alaska even before the Civil War. Collins concocted an ambitious plan to establish a communications network between North America, Europe, and Asia by laying a telegraph wire across the Bering Strait in the 1850s. He, and other American entrepreneurs, worked with expansionist politicians like William Seward of New York (Saul
Charles Sumner and Nathan Banks of Massachusetts, and William Gwin of California (Kushner 1973; McPherson 1934) to acquire Alaska before the Civil War.

William Seward’s alliance with Senator Gwin illustrates the economic pull that united American representatives from both coasts in a shared desire to acquire Alaska. While the two men differed on party politics and slavery, “they closely collaborated to secure governmental support for the China trade, and Pacific Coast whaling and trading projects” and a transcontinental railway (Kushner 1973, pg. 305) that would benefit their constituents. After the Civil War, the political situation contingently favored their situation and made the acquisition of Alaska more likely (Kushner 1973, pg. 306). Significantly, Southern states, who would have benefitted more from the acquisition of the Virgin Islands than Alaska, were not yet readmitted to the American legislature and were therefore unable to vote against the Purchase of Alaska or for the alternative acquisition of the Virgin Islands. Thus, the Union’s victory over the South made acquiring Alaska possible.

1.3 Identity

At the time of the Alaska Purchase, neither Russians nor Americans were ideationally attached to the Arctic. Significantly, Russia’s lack of Arctic identity made it easier for it to sell Alaska to the United States than it would be decades later. Alaska was not yet imbued with the historic significance that now motivates prominent Russians’ revisionist claims to Alaska or to preeminence in the Arctic.

While America did not have an ideational attachment to the Arctic, many prominent American politicians, including Seward and Sumner, were motivated by the belief that America had a “Manifest Destiny” to control North America. This identity as the rightful owners of North America was institutionalized in the 1823 Monroe Doctrine that unequivocally stated that the
United States saw itself as the protector of the Americas from the Great Powers of Europe. This identity partly explains why the United States did not work as hard to acquire Iceland, Greenland, or the Virgin Islands as it did Alaska. These other islands were not contiguous with North America like Alaska is and therefore were considered more “foreign” than Alaska. Seward claimed as early as 1846 that “our population is destined to roll its resistless waves to the icy barriers of the north, and to encounter oriental civilization on the shores of the Pacific” (qtd. in Stahr 2012 pg. 453).

1.4 Environment

At the time of the Alaskan Purchase, environmental concern was not a significant influence in either the United States or Russia. This paradoxically pushed both countries to push outward into new territories. For instance, overhunting in Siberia motivated Russian furriers to expand into Alaska (Armstrong 1965). It was not until Alaska was overhunted that the Russian government looked to disband the RAC and move its personnel to the Amur to secure Russia’s control over this new territory.

American fur trappers and whalers operated similarly to their Russian counterparts. Overhunting created a decreasing supply of whales and fur-bearing animals that pushed these interests into Alaska and its coastal waters (Haycox 2002). However, industrialization and urbanization, especially in the northeast, made many Americans receptive to the romanticism of naturalist authors like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau that came on the scene in the middle of the nineteenth century. The naturalist ethos inspired by their writings, in turn, motivated America’s first attempts to preserve “untouched” wilderness, especially in the relatively sparse territories it acquired (Nash 2001, pgs. xiii-xiv). It also spurred a conservationist
movement that lobbied the government to slow resource exploitation and make it more efficient, thereby restraining expansion into the Arctic.

1.5 Native Rights

Although native rights did not play a very influential role in the sale of Alaska, progressive politicians in both the United States and Russia believed that natives would fare better under American governance than under the governance of the RAC. Senator Charles Sumner made this clear in a speech to the American Senate where he promoted the purchase of Alaska, stating that the “most important endowment Congress could ever give to Alaska was to fully incorporate it under the republican form of government” (qtd. in Cole 2010, pg. 40) so that Alaska’s people could live more freely. Admiral Popov and other liberalizing Russian elites agreed with Sumner. They were also critical of the harsh treatment the RAC imposed on natives in Alaska. They did not believe they had the capacity to rein in the RAC due to the extreme distance between Alaska and St. Petersburg and hoped that the United States could better govern the territory (Golder 1920, pg. 416).

1.6 Elite Agency

The preceding discussion highlights the myriad influences that affected the Alaska Purchase, but understates the agency of United States Secretary of State William Seward and Russian Ambassador to the United States Baron Eduard de Stoeckl to push the transaction through. Stoeckl and Seward were in key positions at this critical juncture. Their propitious actions gave the United States a tenuous toe hold in the Arctic at this early time when the region’s boundaries were solidifying. While they both worked within the foreign policy constructs of their respective countries, without their assertiveness, the Alaskan Purchase would
not have occurred and regional relations in the Arctic would be much different than they are today.

Eduard de Stoeckl initiated the idea of selling Alaska to the United States during the Crimean conflict. As was previously mentioned, this was likely a tactic to keep the British from seizing the vulnerable territory. However, it also planted a seed in elite circles in both Russia and the United States that the sale of Alaska could be negotiated. Afterwards, the suave Stoeckl, and his American wife, perpetuated this idea in the social circles of Washington (Wilson 2016). Stoeckl also used his privileged position within the inner ranks of Russia’s political circles, especially his relationship with Tsar Alexander II’s brother, Grand Duke Constantin, the head of the Russian Navy, to persuade the Russian government to sell Alaska to the United States. Without Stoeckl, and his close relationship with leaders in both Washington and St. Petersburg, it is unlikely the sale of Alaska would have been conceptualized or realized.

William Seward’s agency was also a necessary condition for the sale. Seward’s biographer, Walter Stahr, suggests Seward was second to only Lincoln in the power structures of American government (2012, pg. 5). Seward, like Stoeckl, was a firm believer in America’s Manifest Destiny to expand across the North American continent. Seward used substantial energy and political influence over multiple years to conclude the sale of Alaska with the Russians. In 1860, he made one of the first of multiple speeches asserting that Russian America would “yet become the outposts of my own country” (qtd. Stahr 2012, pg. 482). Later, he discussed buying Russian America with Admiral Constantin and de Stoeckl (Stahr 2012, pgs. 482-483).

Their secret negotiations established a selling price of just over seven million dollars for Alaska. After this price was decided upon, Seward hastily wrote up a contract in the middle of
the night and delivered it to President Johnson’s executive cabinet. This tactic was totally unorthodox. Seward himself claimed, "Probably this treaty stands alone in the history of diplomacy, as an important treaty, conceived, initiated, prosecuted and completed without being preceded or attended by protocols and dispatches" (qtd. in Herber 1954, pg. 139). The fait accompli was then delivered to Seward’s adversary on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, who, despite his poor relationship with Seward, decided to push the Treaty to the Senate (Herber 1954, pg. 140).

Sumner successfully pushed the Treaty through the Senate but was less successful getting Congress to appropriate funds for the purchase. Many Congressmen disliked Seward and believed Alaska was a barren wasteland (Stahr 2012, pgs. 496, 514-516). Here again, Seward doggedly and craftily used his influence to close the deal. First, he had the United States military take formal possession of Alaska. As Stahr suggests, “Seward knew that it would be difficult for the House to refuse to pay for territory over which American flags were waving and within which Americans were settling” (2012, pg. 495). Seward also used his substantial relationships with newspapers, and the State Department’s printing press, to make the Alaska Purchase more attractive to the American public (Stahr 2012, pgs. 483, 488-490). To cement the deal, Seward set up Stoeckl with lobbyists who most likely used illegal bribery to get legislators to vote to appropriate funding for Alaska (Luthin 1934). He also pushed a lukewarm President Johnson, whom he recently helped avoid conviction after being impeached, to get other fence-sitting legislators to vote to pay for Alaska (Stahr, 2012 pgs. 507-519). As Stahl points out, Seward was “not above using dubious means to achieve great goals” (Stahr 2012, pg. 519). However, if not for Seward’s unrelenting doggedness and the dubious tactics he employed, America may never
have acquired Alaska. Seward considered the Purchase of Alaska his greatest accomplishment even as detractors called it his largest folly (Starh 2012, pg. 4).

1.7 Path Dependence

The purchase of Alaska occurred at a time when American Manifest Destiny ideology was strong, when there was a strong feeling that Russia should be compensated for its previous goodwill towards the United States, and when southern states were institutionally incapable of blocking what were predominantly northern and western economic interests. On the Russian side, the sale occurred when Russia was economically weak, Alaska was especially vulnerable, and relations with the United States were good. Even still, the transfer of Alaska from Russia to the United States was an event that was contingent on the agency of influential political actors and on a confluence of factors that temporarily made it possible.

This contingent acquisition made the United States an Arctic state and necessarily forced it to focus on the Arctic, if only reluctantly, afterwards. It also allowed it to check Russia’s expansion into the Arctic and the North Pacific. In the period between WWI and WWII, historian Reinhold Luthin (1937, pg. 182) postulated about how events would have unfolded if the United States had not acquired Alaska. He concluded that “the complications resulting from [Russia’s] proximity to the Pacific coast territory of the United States would undoubtedly have placed Russian-American relations in an utterly different diplomatic setting than hitherto, particularly from the fall of the Romanovs to the present day." Contemporary American historian Stephen Haycox notes, "Few Americans know of the Russian American chapter in their history… however, not only the history of the Northwest but of North America would have been quite different if Russia had not sold Alaska" (2002, pg. 154). These statements highlight
America’s historic lack of interest in the Arctic, but also illuminates how the Purchase of Alaska continues to influence regional relations.

Ironically, William Seward’s actions during the Purchase of Alaska decreased expansionists’ ability to acquire other available Arctic territories like Iceland and Greenland in the decades that followed. American legislators quickly moved to close loopholes Seward used to push through the Purchase of Alaska. Congressman Cadwallader Washburn, a leader of the anti-expansionist movement, passed a bill in late 1867 that ensured Congressional money could no longer be used by the State Department before the Senate approved the necessary treaty (Callahan 1908, pg. 29). This bill greatly hindered the type of fait accompli agreement that Seward used to put pressure on the United States’ legislative branch to pay for Alaska. As we will see in the next chapter, the Purchase of Alaska also influenced colonists in British North America to resist further American encroachment into what is now Canada.

As for Russia, Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy state that, “perhaps surprisingly for a state that now sprawled across such a vast territory, Russia eventually considered Alaska a bridgehead too far (2003, pg. 60).” Many conservative Russian elites who were not privy to the secretive negotiations did not believe it was a bridge too far. For example, Baron Osten-Sacken cited an 1862 Russian government report to support his view that Alaska could be made profitable if the RAC was replaced by other Russians. He also correctly believed the United States would eventually be as threatening to Russia as the British were and therefore doubted the wisdom of selling Alaska to the United States (Gerus 1978, pgs. 172-173). His criticism was echoed by the conservative Russian press that also denounced the sale (Saul 1991, pg. 393).

Selling Alaska to the United States has complicated Russia’s ability to expand its sphere of influence in the Arctic. The mere presence of the United States in the region has affected
Russia’s leaders’ calculations and made them more restrained than otherwise would have been the case. Alternatively, the transfer of “Russian Alaska” to America has occasionally been a source of revisionist danger in Russia (Znamenski 2009; Sarhaddi-Nelson 2014) that has fueled attempts to expand Russia’s control of the Arctic.

2.1 The Unification and Confederation of Canada and the 1871 Treaty of Washington

While the Alaska Purchase negotiations ensued between Russia and the United States, a separate round of negotiations between colonial politicians and colonial administrators in British North America just as decisively altered America’s future ability and willingness to expand into the Arctic. These negotiations were spurred on by the United States’ acquisition of Alaska. They established modern Canada, a country that subsequently gained sovereignty over the rest of the North American Arctic and physically, economically, and ideationally isolated Alaska and the Arctic from the contiguous American states.

2.2 Geopolitics

According to theorizing by offensive realists like Mearsheimer (2001), Great Britain should have intervened in the American Civil War in support of the Confederate Army to keep America from gaining control over North America (Little 2007). To this end, British shipyards built Confederate ships that harassed Union merchants and ran Union blockades, and British North America hosted both Confederate sympathizers and Union draft dodgers. However, these were ultimately small and ineffectual influences on the overall war effort, and by 1864 it was clear that the Union would win the war and emerge as the preeminent military power on the North American continent.

According to neo-realist assumptions (Waltz 2010), the failure of the British to intervene in North America when they had the chance to turn the tide should have resulted in America’s
expansion over all of North America. After the war, the United States was not as threatened or as extended as the British. Unlike Britain, all of America’s military forces were massed within its borders and it did not have any overseas colonies to worry about. Only the French, who were fighting a losing battle against Mexican insurgents, posed any kind of threat to America at the time. America’s military consisted of over one million experienced soldiers and seven hundred naval ships as well as the development of some of the most advanced military equipment and production systems in the world (Myers 2015, pg. 13). The *London Spectator* claimed in 1866 that “nobody doubts anymore that the United States is a power of the first class, a nation which it is very dangerous to offend and almost impossible to attack” (qtd. in Myers 2015, pg. 13).

In contrast, Great Britain’s remaining colonies in North America were “defenceless and at the moment ultimately indefencible” laying “at the mercy of an angry nation [America] which had suddenly shown itself to be one of the most powerful military states of the nineteenth century” (Creighton 1965, pg. 282). The British North American colonies had only twenty-four thousand militia members and an equally small number of English troops to defend their vast frontier with America at the time. Canadian historian Donald Creighton asserts that two thirds of what is now Canada was a "howling wilderness" and the inhabited portions were "split up into half a dozen miserable fragments of provinces" (1965, pgs. 6-7). British Army Lt Col. William Jervois (1865, pg. A5), highlighted the British’s perilous position when he declared that British military forces in North America were unlikely to even be able to retreat if America attacked. As such, he ascertained, "The question appears to be; - whether the British force now in Canada should be withdrawn, in order to avoid the risk of its defeat, or whether the necessary measures should be taken to enable the force to be of use for the defense of the province" (Ibid., pgs. A4-A5).
The report was attacked in the British House of Lords for exposing “the utterly defenceless state of Canada” (Creighton 1965, pg. 245). The decision in favor of Jervois’s proposition to remove British military support for Canada was borne out in the meager fifty-thousand-pound sterling the British government allocated to fortify Quebec in 1865 (Creighton, 1965, pg. 245). It also foreshadowed Britain’s eventual military evacuation from North America in 1867.

Britain was constrained in what it could do in North America due to Prussia’s growing strength in Europe and Russia’s expansion into Asia. The British overwhelmingly came to believe that any investment they made in North America would weaken their ability to maintain the strength of their navy and their ability to hold onto other colonial possessions. Therefore, they pushed the Canadians to take on more of their own responsibility for territorial defense as the Civil War concluded and came to view their tenuous possessions in North America as a distressing point of contention with the nascent United States (Creighton 1965, pgs. 83-89).

Many British leaders also believed the United States was less threatening than other potential adversaries and valued self-determination. This contributed to their decision to give their North American colonies independence with the historic North American Act that was enacted almost simultaneously with the Purchase of Alaska in 1867 (Myers 2015). Anti-colonial British politicians, such as Robert Lowe and future Prime Minister William Gladstone, declared that they would not fight to keep the British North American colonies from joining with the United States, if the British colonists so desired (Shi 1978). The widely read London Times declared it would not object to Canada’s annexation by the United States if the annexation was free and spontaneous (Van Deusen 1967, pg. 536).
As such, the highly vulnerable North American colonists were stuck between their seemingly disinterested colonial protector, Great Britain, and the suddenly militarized behemoth to their south. In line with realist theorizing, they attempted to externally balance the United States by pushing Great Britain to increase its contribution to their defense. When it became apparent that Britain was reluctant to do this, and it appeared that it was likely the United States would acquire Alaska, the colonists moved to unify instead. However, historian Glynn Barratt concludes that Canadian unification was not much of a physical deterrent to American invasion. In fact, he suggests America’s material superiority was so large, it made Canadians numb to render Canada secure even against potential Russian aggression in the North Pacific in the decades that followed (Barratt 1983, pg. ix).

Canada was so defenseless at the time that the American government would not even have needed to use its own professional military to invade Canada. A group of Irish-American immigrants called the Fenians were hostile to the British colonialists because of Britain’s occupation of Ireland and could have been used instead. After the Civil War, they were “led by former officers of the American army, patronized by American politicians, and supported by funds raised openly at public meetings, drilled and paraded, fully armed, before applauding crowds in northern American towns during the spring months” (Creighton 1964, pg. 382).

This situation shares many similarities with Thucydides’ account of the Melian Dialogue (Wasserman 1947) during the Peloponnesian War. Seemingly, the United States was overwhelmingly powerful, and the Canadians should have been made to suffer as they must. Similar to the Athenians who were angry at the Melians, there were Americans like Senator Zachariah Taylor who supported the Fenians and exerted Michigan Civil War veterans to occupy Canada in revenge for Canada’s belligerence to the Union during the Civil War (Van Deusen,
1967, pg. 535). Additionally, like the Melians, the Canadians refused to back down to the United States, even as their external protector backed away from the situation. Despite the expansionist zeal of Taylor’s ilk, and Canada’s defenselessness, the United States’ government did not invade Canada and did not even take advantage of the Fenian movement that operated on both sides of the shared border with Canada.

While tolerating the Fenians for domestic political purposes, President Johnson also moved to stymie their military operations. He proclaimed the United States as a neutral party to the Fenian affair in 1866, calling the Fenians "evil disposed persons." He also had many of their leaders arrested (Sacramento Daily News, 1866). This reflected his strong belief that America should respect the colonists’ sovereignty and should not allow Americans to intervene in their internal matters.

Both the United States and Canada eventually created laws to maintain their neutrality in the internal matters of the other country and aggressively pursued and arrested their own citizens, like the Fenians, who attempted to sow discord in the other country. The United States went as far as allowing Britain to transit locks in American Sault Ste. Marie to put down the 1870 Canadian Red River Rebellion because it included American agitators (Myers 2015, pg. 251). Myers argues that joint efforts between the Americans, Canadians, and British to snuff out the Fenian insurgency strengthened the norms the countries shared on non-intervention and sovereignty. Additionally, he suggests this cooperation helped bring about the momentous 1871 Treaty of Washington that solidified the shared borders between the United States and Canada (Myers 2015, pg. 143).

Another important restraint that kept the United States from forcibly annexing the British North American colonies was the widely held belief that “civilized” people like the colonists
should be allowed to determine their own government. This belief became more important when the British gave the colonists independence with the North America Act of 1867. While there were many Anglophobes in the United States, even some of the most ardent expansionists (Callahan 1908, pg. 28) were content that Great Britain had removed what they deemed was the repressive yoke of colonization and allowed the Canadians to decide their own destiny.

For instance, Secretary of State Seward discredited assertions the United States would annex British North America militarily, exclaiming the United States would “insist upon the freedom of the seas for our commerce, and the safety of our borders against extensive violence. Beyond that there are no questions which may not be safely and surely left to the powers of diplomacy” (qtd. in Van Deusen 1967, pg. 360). Similarly, Charles Sumner believed that the consent of the British North American colonists should be gained before annexation (Callahan 1908, pg. 32). As such, American diplomats did not threaten to invade the colonies if they did not annex with the United States. Furthermore, although expansionists like Seward and Sumner used the Purchase of Alaska to put geopolitical pressure on the British, they also did not threaten to use Alaska to attack what is now British Columbia.

Additionally, expansionists like Sumner and Seward wrongly believed that the culturally similar British colonists would eventually annex with the United States anyways, which diluted their aggression towards the colonists. The expansionists believed America had political and economic institutions that were readily superior to the ones the British had established in Canada (Stuart 1988, Chapter 11)² and that the colonists would readily want to be included in them. Hamilton Fish, who took over as Secretary of State from William Seward, went so far as to

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² The parallels between the assertions here and assertions by prominent American politicians during Quebec’s 1990 failed referendum on secession suggest an enduring pattern of belief by American elites in the ultimate compatibility of American and Canadian institutions and societies and the eventual political unification of parts of Canada with the United States.
assert that nine-tenths of the British colonists would vote in favor of annexation with the United States if given the chance in 1870 (Stacey 1963, pg. 231).

It turns out that many of the American expansionists were delusional. In fact, many elite Canadians had a deep-seated anti-American loyalist ethos that went back as far as the American Revolution and was heightened by the War of 1812 (Lipset 1990). Many of these colonial elites still thought of themselves as British imperial servants, even after their newfound independence from Great Britain after 1867. America’s unruly conduct while it expanded westward, and the horrors of the American Civil War, heightened their distaste for American governmental institutions and cultural individualism.

It also made them conclude that the American system was prone to revolve between the tyranny of democracy and the tyranny of the president. Consequently, they firmly believed in the institutional superiority of the British-inspired Canadian parliamentary governmental system (Creighton 1965, pgs. 142-143). Canadian politicians as disparate in outlook as the Conservative John Macdonald, the Liberal George Brown, and even the Quebecois politicians decided they would rather maintain their Anglo-dominated Canadian government institutions they were bequeathed by the British than attach themselves to the United States.

Two more intertwined, ideational factors that kept the United States from forcibly annexing Canada in the years between the Civil War and the 1871 Treaty of Washington were the fulfillment of the Monroe Doctrine and the idea that “New World” North American international relations should be different from the strangling and counterproductive rivalries that plagued the “Old World” of Europe.

In regard to the Monroe Doctrine, Canada’s increasing independence from England and England’s overwhelming eagerness to reduce its military presence in North America greatly
contributed to America’s perception that Britain was finally adhering to the Monroe Doctrine. By the 1871 Treaty of Washington, the British military had just two unimpressive naval outposts on either coast of the North American continent. One historian contends that Britain’s defenses were so slim that they could not defend Canada from the Russians, much less the much more powerful Americans (Barratt 1983).

By reducing the military threat it posed to the United States in North America, Great Britain paradoxically influenced the United States to rapidly reduce its own forces on the forty-ninth parallel. America’s rapid demilitarization led Lord Derby, British Secretary of Foreign Affairs, to remark in 1870 that “the Americans have revived the Alabama claims, in a tone sufficiently unpleasant: but they have disbanded their army and reduced their navy to the lowest point, indicating that however they may talk, they do not mean mischief” (Myers 2015, pg. 101).

In regard to the belief that the “New World” relations of North America should be different than the “Old World” relations of Europe, both the American and Canadian populaces did not approve of large standing armies in their countries (Barratt 1983, pg. 144). Even ardent expansionists like Seward, and anti-American Canadians like John Macdonald, believed the leaders of North America should behave less aggressively than their counterparts in Europe.

The British included the “New World Politics” into its calculations when it decided to abandon North America and allow its remaining colonists there to govern themselves in 1867. Specifically, the British Prime Minister, William Gladstone, took into account the United States’ previous maintenance of strict neutrality during the Crimean War, America’s inaction during the Polish Uprising of 1863 in Russia, and America’s neutrality during the 1870 Franco-Prussian

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3 The name of the indemnity litigation between the United States and Great Britain, the “Alabama Claims,” was taken from the name of one of the most successful Confederate raiding ships that was built in British shipyards during the Civil War.
War to ascertain that the United States would not attack Canada while Britain was focused on its challenges in Europe and Asia (Myers 2015, pg. 107).

United States Secretary of State Hamilton Fish also intimated that America did not get involved in the Franco-Prussian War because "in substance...the traditions and interests of the United States prevented their interference in European politics, and from joining with European Powers in the settlement of European questions" (qtd. in Myers 2015, pg. 111). He also stressed that “we do not interfere in the question of purely European politics, and therefore abstain from those connected with the Treaty of Paris, limiting and restricting Russia in the enjoyment of the Black Sea…we shall adhere to the traditional policy of this government of non-interference in the internal politics of Europe” (ibid., pg. 111).

As historian Phillip Myers stresses, the non-intervention of Britain and the United States in each other’s affairs during the mid-nineteenth century brought the two countries into closer rapprochement (ibid., pg. 112). The inclusion of Canada in the discussions that led up to the ratification of the 1871 Washington Treaty signaled that Canada was now included as a more equal partner in the trilateral relationship as Britain slowly stepped aside (ibid., pg. 233, 238). This normalized relations between the United States and Canada and decreased the threat that the United States would occupy Canada. It also set the tone for how the relationship between the materially unequal neighbors would play out in the long run.

The improved relationship between Great Britain and the United States worried the Russians. They were unable to get America to support them during the Black Sea affair that shortly followed the Purchase of Alaska because of America’s reticence to get involved in European affairs. Worse yet, the Russian minister to Washington, Constantine Catacazy, spread lies that he did have American support during the affair. Furthermore, Russia’s reversion to
monarchical absolutism shortly after the Purchase of Alaska contributed to America’s and Russia’s deteriorating relationship. Ultimately, this caused America’s representative to Russia to remark that he saw more similarities between the English and the United States than he did between the United States and Russia (Myers 2015 pgs. 113-114).

Britain’s decision to allow its North American colonists self-rule and its willingness to arbitrate with the United States to end the years of tension between the two states in North America contributed to this feeling. In line with liberal theorizing, Lord Palmerston, the British Prime Minister, believed the comparative democratic institutions of the United States and Great Britain were a key to their rapprochement. He claimed he "would not disturb democratic governments like the United States" and claimed that Britain did not get more involved in the American Civil War than it did because of the "liberal tradition in British foreign policy of supporting liberal states like the United States" (Myers 2015 pgs. 7-10). He was happy the Union government had prevailed during the American Civil War because it provided for "liberal advancement - increased freedom, increased liberty, moral and environmental improvement" (ibid., pg. 10). The British Radical, Richard Cobden, also did not believe the English would ever go to war with post-Civil War America because of its “fair and promising social system" (ibid., pg. 14).

The legitimacy the British and American statesmen gave each other after the Civil War evolved with the increasingly institutionalized practice of using arbitration and diplomacy to resolve disputes between them (ibid., pg. 14). Myers claims that, by the 1871 Treaty of Washington, "the two democracies had plenty of practice at the negotiating table" (ibid., pg. 3) which allowed them to make a “realistic appraisal of each other's strengths and recognition of constraining national factors both external and internal" (ibid., pg. 3).
It was ultimately this mutual recognition, and the economic interdependence that will be discussed in the next section, that cemented the 1871 Treaty of Washington and resulted in America’s official recognition of the new state of Canada. Fish noted that the Treaty of Washington was regarded as a "New Departure" in international diplomacy and signified the difference between “New World Politics” in North America and “Old World Politics” in Europe (ibid., pg. 201). This would keep the United States from invading Canada after this critical juncture, even though it certainly had the capability to do so. In turn, it allowed Canada to establish itself in between the contiguous United States and Alaska and launch its own campaign to gain control over the rest of the North American Arctic.

2.3 Economics

This section explains why the dire economic situation America faced after the Civil War made it reticent to maintain a large military force it could have used to occupy Canada. It also explains how the economic relationships the United States developed with Great Britain and Britain’s North American colonists after the war made military occupation of Canada less likely than realists would suggest. Finally, it suggests that many Americans did not believe southern Canada, much less Arctic Canada, was economically worth fighting to control – a sentiment that still keeps America from more forcefully pushing itself into the north than it has.

Although America developed a formidable military during the Civil War, it also accumulated significant burdens. The federal debt increased from sixty-five million dollars before the war to almost three billion dollars after the war (Folsom 2011). The budget situation was also dismal. Before the war, the federal budget was sixty-three million dollars, but after the war, the federal budget exceeded three hundred million dollars (Folsom 2011). The country also embarked on extensive reconstruction efforts in the southern states that had been ravaged by the
war and was saddled with the pensions of thousands of wounded veterans. The dire economic situation of the country contributed to its decision to downsize its military so that it could free up scarce financial resources and manpower. Consequently, seven months after the Civil War concluded, nearly eighty percent of the Union’s volunteer soldiers were discharged (Holbertson 1993, pg. 2). This decreased America’s sizable manpower advantage over the English and their North American colonists and made Canadian occupation less feasible than at war’s end.

Additionally, the United States was able to secure multiple lucrative economic advantages over Great Britain and Canada without threatening violence, which decreased any economic urge it may have had to physically punish England or subjugate Canada. It was awarded over fifteen million dollars for damages Confederate ships the British built during the Civil War made to Union property during arbitration (Folsom 2011). Additionally, it secured favorable fishing rights to Canadian coastal waters and negotiated tariffs with Britain that made American goods as economical as Canadian goods in British markets (Smith 1971). Furthermore, Britain’s abolition of the Corn Laws in 1846 made the Canadian colonists extremely reliant on the American market (Callahan 1908, pg. 9).

The economic integration that occurred in the border communities where most colonists lived also eased the lingering tension between the United States and the British colonists (Allin 1912; Callahan 1908). This was especially the case in the western colony of British Columbia, which was far from the British government’s seat of power in eastern Canada and had an extremely high percentage of Americans citizens in its population because of the 1850s Frazer River gold rush (Callahan 1908, pg. 19).

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4 America also demilitarized after World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War, which suggests a pattern of behavior.
Additionally, both American and English entrepreneurs were loath to disrupt ties between the two nations. British investment in American infrastructure helped both economies prosper as America expanded after the Civil War (Myers 2015, pgs. 12-13). The United States government also relied on British capital to pay off debts it accumulated during the Civil War (ibid., pg. 130). The British Governor-General of Canada, Lord Sydenham, underlined the commercial peace that was quietly emerging between the United States and Great Britain, claiming, "commercial interests on both sides were strong enough to prevent a petty war" (qtd. in Myers 2015 pg. 12).

The advantageous economic situation of a peaceful North America helped the United States to greatly reduce the national debt and expand the national transportation infrastructure westward in the years after the Civil War (Folsom 2011). American expansionists like William Seward and Charles Sumner took heart from American economic consuls in Canadian communities, who reported that many former British colonists were eager to annex with the United States. The Canadian Riel Rebellion of 1870 enhanced these sentiments. Many American expansionists came to believe that the gravitational pull of the American economy was so strong that Canada would eventually decide to annex with the United States. It can be inferred that this meant that these expansionists also believed forceful annexation of the colonies was unnecessarily costly.

For its part, Britain was also happy to maintain good economic ties with both its former colonies and America while being allowed to bow out of North America without the type of embarrassment it faced in 1776 and 1812. Previous conflicts with American colonists taught the British that colonies in North America could be expensive to administer and difficult to control (Myers 2015, pg. 12).
A final economic reason that kept America from occupying Canada at the end of the Civil War, and an economic reason that keeps America from being more assertive in the Arctic to this day, was the widespread American belief that much of Canada was a barren and icy wasteland that was overwhelmingly unfit for inhabitance, let alone economic endeavors (Callahan 1908, pg. 23). This sentiment was especially strong between the end of the Civil War and the Treaty of Washington when the United States was in debt, and many American politicians doubted the United States could afford to annex and incorporate the Dominion of Canada (Myers 2015, pgs. 92, 130), especially after it had already dubiously purchased Alaska.

Overall, American expansionists’ belief that Canada’s economic dependence on the United States would eventually cause it to annex with the United States, the strong economic relations United States had with Great Britain and its former British colonists, and many Americans’ belief that Canadian territory was not all that lucrative restrained the United States from physically seizing Canada after the Civil War and taking control over the entire North American Arctic when it was propitious. Why, after all, would it be necessary to expensively seize territory that may not hold all that much economic value when it may “drop like a ripe fruit” right into American hands?

2.4 Identity

Canada had a much stronger national attachment with northern territory at the time of the 1871 Treaty of Washington than the United States did, and this contributed to its subsequent desired to gain sovereignty over Arctic territory before the United States could. One reason for this attachment to the Arctic was that these former colonists remained politically and ideationally attached to the British Empire, which, in the previous centuries, had embarked on many audacious and highly publicized voyages to transit the Northwest Passage. These heroic feats,
especially the ill-fated Franklin Expedition of 1845-1847, was (and remains) especially significant to Canada’s subsequent mythical attachment to the North.

Identifying themselves with the “North” also had a more functional characteristic. It allowed Britain’s former colonists to differentiate themselves from the otherwise historically, culturally, linguistically, and religiously similar Americans and unite to protect against invasion from the South (Lipset 1990). English-speaking Canadians hoped to create “a Great Britannic Empire of the North” and French-Canadians declared “notre ouest, c’est le Nord”6, when they attempted to keep Americans from moving northward (Grant 1988, pg. 4). Inspirational founder of the nationalist Canadian First movement, Robert Haliburton, seized on this sentiment to extol Canada’s northern climate and northern race as virtues that created the moderate and “genteel” temperament that he predicted would lead Canada to someday match America’s material greatness (Grant 1988, pg. 4).

In contrast, America had no real national attachment to the North. Its’ overwhelming position south of the forty-ninth parallel, even after acquiring Alaska, meant that it was, de facto, a “southern state” after Canada unified and assumed its own identity as North America’s “northern state.” Consequently, America was much less interested in claiming sovereignty over northern territory for symbolic reasons than was Canada.

2.5 Environment

The Arctic environment was not a large concern for the United States or Canada during this era and did not affect either country’s willingness to expand its sphere of influence in the Arctic. Canadian fur trappers and whalers, and their British Commonwealth compatriots, operated largely in the same fashion as American and Russian trappers and whalers – competing

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6 This translates into “our West is the North.”
for the depleting fauna of the High North. However, Canadians, because of their geographical and cultural closeness to the United States, were also influenced by the environmental ethos that was developing in the United States and would later use their shared environmental ethos to restrain American physical expansion into the Arctic.

2.6 Native Rights

Concern for native rights had little to do with Canada’s attempts to restrain America’s northward expansion during this era.

2.7 Path Dependence

The uncertain, but final unification of Canada, and America’s official recognition of this new state, signified in the Washington Treaty of 1871, made Alaska and the American Arctic a veritable island by ensuring that Alaska would not be territorially contiguous with the United States. By 1871, Canada purchased Prince Rupert Land, the massive territory between Manitoba and British Columbia from the British government-controlled Hudson Bay Company. This gave Canada sovereignty over what became the provinces of Midwestern Canada and the Northwest and Yukon territories. This purchase induced the British Columbians to also unify with the Dominion of Canada in lieu of annexation with the United States – diminishing Seward’s belief that Alaska could be used to push British Columbians towards annexation with the United States.

Although real control over the mostly uninhabited Canadian frontier was more difficult to establish (Thompson and Randall 2002, pg. 44), Canada solidified its hold over its vast territory in the decades that followed. This meant that Americans attempting to get to Alaska would either need to go by water or by land with the permission of the Canadian government. This resulted in Alaska’s isolation and the American government’s relative neglect of the newly acquired territory (Nichols 1923). The rapid expansion of the relatively weak Canadians to
isolate Alaska and gain sovereignty over the vast majority of the North American Arctic during these critical years is poignantly illustrated in maps from the Canadian Library and Archives that illustrate how Canada rapidly gained sovereignty over all of the territory in North American above the forty-ninth parallel, except for Alaska, between 1849 and 1871.

Since the majority of the Arctic was under Canadian control after the Treaty of Washington, America’s ability to influence the Arctic was limited in the years that followed. As we will see in subsequent chapters, Canada became especially sensitive to American influence in its thinly populated northern regions due to its fear of losing control and sovereignty. This sensitivity contributed to a growing Canadian “northern identity” in the years that followed— an identity that made many Canadians feel they were not only institutionally different than their American neighbors, but also geographically different. Only during critical junctures like WW II and the Cold War, when Canada faced existential overseas threats, was it willing to overlook this sensitivity and allow America to temporarily increase its presence on its Arctic territory.

Overall, the Purchase of Alaska and Canada’s unification have resulted in four enduring effects. The first is that the United States is an Arctic state, despite the enclave status of its Arctic territory and America’s relative neglect of the region. Second, a unified Canada has historically worked to limit American activity and influence in the Arctic. Third, Russia has been alternatively motivated to expand its sphere of influence in the Arctic to re-acquire Alaska and restrained from expanding its sphere of influence in the Arctic because of American control of Alaska. Fourth, Alaska’s physical isolation from the contiguous United States contributes to many affluent Americans’ conception of Alaska as a “Last Frontier” and a “Last Wilderness”
that needs to be maintained in its primitive state. All four of these effects have decreased
America’s willingness to economically and politically take a leadership role in the Arctic since.
Chapter 2 – Treaty of Washington to the Bolshevik Revolution (1871-1919)

1. Introduction:

After the Purchase of Alaska, Russia and the United States lost interest in northern latitudes. Instead, both countries’ attention moved towards opportunities they had to expand in southern latitudes. This disinterest continued until the turn of the century when renewed economic and geopolitical concerns pushed both countries to refocus on the North. Even still, the beginnings of an environmental consciousness and a desire to allow Alaska natives a degree of sovereignty restrained the United States from developing the Arctic and improving its capability to operate there. This created a small divergence between the two countries’ willingness and capability to dominate the Arctic that would expand when the Bolsheviks won a contingent victory in the Russian Civil War that followed World War I.

2. Geopolitics

This section explains how America’s geopolitical situation improved after the Civil War after the European powers evacuated from North America. This favorable geopolitical position gave the United States easy access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and the creation of the Panama Canal as well as a trans-continental railroad allowed its merchants and military to move quickly across the country and between the two oceans. These developments decreased the relative worth America placed both on Alaska and the Northwest Passage.

In contrast, this section explains how Russia faced a strained geopolitical situation that made it more interested in expanding into the Arctic than the United States. It had many adversaries in Europe and Asia that actively tried to block it from gaining ice-free ports. It also had difficulty connecting its sprawling Siberian territory with its political and economic centers.
in western Russia. These geopolitical challenges were highlighted in its disastrous 1905 war with Japan and World War I - both of which motivated the Bolsheviks to develop the Soviet Union’s Arctic capability when they came to power.

2.1 American Geopolitics

The Purchase of Alaska, the British North American Acts, and the retreat of France left the United States without a significant competitor in North America after 1871. Russia pulled out of the continent altogether, and Great Britain reduced its military presence on the continent to just two naval ports in Esquimalt, British Columbia and Halifax, Nova Scotia (Barrat 1983). Both ports were minimally supplied and did not present a legitimate threat to American territory or to America’s ability to expand its physical influence over the region.

In line with liberal theorizing, Anglo-American ties also improved when British liberals won Parliamentary elections in the 1860s and 1870s. The resulting ideational and institutional convergence between the two countries tempered their historic mutual enmity and was key to their rapidly improving relationship in the decades after the Treaty of Washington – including their alliance in World War I, which was legitimized by the growing power of the “secular religion” of democracy (Kinser 2011, pg. 10) that tied them together. Additionally, Great Britain’s own strained geopolitical situation contributed to its improved relationship with the United States. It was threatened on the European continent and faced uprisings in its colonies, which motivated it to reduce the threat that America posed to it. In turn, America’s improved rapport with Great Britain meant that its association with the new state of Canada began on good terms.

These improved relationships decisively shaped America’s interest in the Arctic. The lack of threat from the north meant that the United States paradoxically lacked a reason to push
northward. Instead, it used its growing material power to expand into what it perceived were more strategic locations in the South Pacific and Caribbean. The lack of northern threat also meant, against offensive realist theorizing, that relatively weak Canada could claim North American Arctic territory without engendering a threatening reaction from the much more powerful United States.

America’s lackluster attempts to acquire the Yukon Territory, Northwest Territory, British Columbia, and Rupert’s Land (now the prairie provinces of Canada) after the 1871 Treaty of Washington underpin the lack of geo-strategic significance America placed on the north. Indeed, the United States pulled its own meager military forces from Alaska in 1877 since they were no longer needed to balance against a British threat that no longer existed (Hinckley 1973, pg. 8). Instead, the minimal forces placed in Alaska after it was acquired by the United States were used to protect settlements in Idaho against the Nez Perce native uprising. This made a tax collector the sole representative of the American government in Alaska from 1877 to 1879 (Nichols 1924, pg. 59). America only slightly increased its official presence in Alaska after 1879, following a native uprising which threatened Alaska’s largest settlement of Sitka. It sent a small naval contingent to govern the territory after American settlers were embarrassingly forced to call on the British navy when American forces were not readily available to protect them from the natives (ibid., pg. 60).

Despite the Sitka incident, Britain continued to pull back from North America in the 1870s. Ironically, Britain’s pullback meant that the Canadians came to rely on the United States, and the American Monroe Doctrine, to deter possible Russian aggression against their

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7 This occurrence gives credence to Walt’s (1987) Balance of Threat theory of international relations. However, I argue that this theory can also be conceived as a constructivist approach to international relations. The fact that British, American, and Canadian statesmen believed that a reduced British military presence would reduce the threat that America would forcefully annex Canada was the result of previous interactions between the leaders of these countries which signaled that America would not invade Canada if Britain withdrew from Canada.
unprotected western territory. Essentially, the Purchase of Alaska came to provide both the Russians and the Canadians with a territorial buffer that protected them from each other.

As historian Glynn Barrat (1983, pg. 146) claims, "Canadian awareness of United States military superiority was so deep and lasting that it made Canadians numb to render Canada secure even against the slighter threat that Tsarist Russia represented." This was the first time that Canada implicitly used America as a security blanket – a role that it would grow into during this period as Britain pulled back from North America and America’s material strength increased.

The Canadians did not have any other geopolitical pursuits to distract them, so they were more willing to secure sovereignty over the sparsely populated northern territory of North America than the United States during the second half of the 19th century. Their politicians learned from America’s earlier acquisition of the Oregon Territory to proactively claim, govern, and occupy territory, or effectively lose it to American settler occupation (Bancroft 1886). Britain was also spurred into action when America drafted legislation to buy the British state-affiliated Hudson Bay Company for ten million dollars in 1866 and six million dollars in 1868, although these bills died in committee (Blegen 1918). The British government forced the Hudson Bay Company to sell the land to Canada for a relatively paltry sum of 300,000 pounds in 1869 to keep it away from the United States. It judged, correctly, that the United States would not protest the transactions (Galbraith 1949). Canada also cajoled British Columbia to join its confederation in 1871 by promising to build a transcontinental line of communication to connect it with the urbanized eastern portion of Canada.

Canada first Prime Minister, John Macdonald, justified the expense and effort of Canada’s sovereignty efforts stating, “I would be quite willing, personally, to leave the whole
[Hudson Bay Company] country a wilderness for the next half century, but I fear if Englishmen do not go there, the Yankee will” (qtd. Grant 2010, pg. 136). The Canadian government used the newly formed constabulary, the Northwest Mounted Police (NWMP)\(^8\), to stake sovereignty over their new acquisitions. Against American expectations, the Canadians completed a transcontinental railroad in the 1880s that allowed them to effectively govern far-flung western territories with the small, but agile, NWMP. These moves solidified Canadian sovereignty over territory north of the forty-ninth parallel of North America and physically isolated Alaska from the contiguous United States.

Canada further expanded its sovereignty over the Arctic by quietly agreeing to British requests throughout the 1870s to claim islands in the Northwest Passage based on earlier discoveries by British explorers. Britain was afraid that officially declaring the islands for itself would unnecessarily provoke confrontation with the United States, who would consider it a contravention of the Monroe Doctrine (Grant 2010, pg. 156). Like the earlier transfer of Hudson Bay Company land to Canada, the American government did not officially protest Canada’s assumption of sovereignty over what is now called the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. This was the case even though American and Norwegian explorers and whalers discovered, and temporarily occupied, many of the North American Arctic islands of which the Canadian took possession (Smith 1961).

America showed even less interest in obtaining Arctic territory when it became clear, near the turn of the century, that there was no remaining undiscovered large landmass to be claimed near the North Pole (Fogelson 1985a). Earlier, it was thought that there might be an open polar sea around the North Pole with warm currents that might lead the way to this “open

\(^8\) The NWMP is now called the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).
sea” from both the Bering Strait and Greenland. It was also thought that Greenland might extend across the Arctic Ocean to eastern Siberia (Tammiksaar, Sukhova and Stone 1999; Maury 1869). However, the U.S.S. Jeannette expedition, which ended tragically, weakened these unsupported theories. It did discover substantial islands in the Siberian Sea that Russia subsequently claimed for itself, however (Sides 2014).

The desire for national and individual prestige pushed other Americans to go farther north into the early years of the twentieth century, even though the chance of discovering new large landmasses decreased (Grant 2010, pg. 173). Notable American explorers such as Francis Hall, George Washington de Long, Frederick Schwatka, Adolphus Greeley, Frederick Cook, Donald MacMillan, and Robert Peary worked in public-private partnerships between wealthy philanthropists and the American military to go to higher latitudes. These endeavors culminated in 1908 and 1909, when Americans Robert Peary and Frederick Cook claimed the North Pole for the United States.\(^9\)

President Taft’s reaction to the symbolic attainment of the North Pole profoundly illustrated the lack of geopolitical value American leaders put on the Arctic. When Peary telegraphed Taft, stating, “I have the honor to place the North Pole at your disposal,” Taft replied, “Thanks for your interesting and generous offer, I do not know exactly what to do with it” (qtd. in Fogelson 1985b). In contrast to other Arctic countries, like Russia, Canada, and Norway, the United States did not use the discoveries of its explorers to establish sovereignty in the Arctic and were content with the short-term fame the explorers brought to the country instead.

\(^9\) The debate over whether either man actually reached the North Pole continues.
Paradoxically, the perceived threat American (and Scandinavian) explorers posed to Canadian Arctic sovereignty spurred Canada to claim much of the territory these foreigners discovered. After Peary’s North Pole exploits, a Canadian senator, Pierre Poirier, suggested for the first time that the Arctic should be broken into sectors and that Canada should obtain sovereignty to all the territory in the Arctic Ocean north of its continental boundaries up to the North Pole (Horensma 1991, pg. 3). The Canadian government subsequently mobilized its relatively meager resources to undertake its own expeditions of the North American Arctic with its main aim – unlike American expeditions – being to secure sovereignty of Arctic territory and waters for Canada. America’s continued acquiescence to Canada’s claims further entrenched the construct that Canada could claim a special Arctic sphere of influence, with very little threat of retaliation or resistance from its much stronger southern neighbor.

America’s relative lack of concern for Canada’s expanding sovereignty over North American territory can be partly explained by the decreased threat that resulted from the British military withdrawal from Canada and its improving trilateral relationship with both Canada and Great Britain. But it can also be explained by the quixotic relationship between Canada and Britain. The United States perceived the Canadians as a non-threatening and illegitimate upstart (Fogleson 1985). This perception meant that the United States believed that it could later challenge the legality of Canada’s claims if it felt that the territory Canada had acquired was worth anything.

Compared to the other territory now available to the United States, it was not. The retreat of European powers from North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean allowed the United States to expand its own presence into these regions. These regions were much easier to access and economically more important than polar territory. The desire to
prioritize the south over the north was highlighted when the American Navy detoured a man-of-war that was pigeon-holed to support the 1879 U.S.S. *Jeannette* Arctic expedition to instead secure America’s access to valuable nitrates in Chile (Sides 2014, pg. 129).

The presence of authoritarian, unstable governments south and west of the United States also made the United States more willing to expand its sphere of influence into these regions, rather than into Canada. For instance, President McKinley (1898) claimed he liberated strategic territory in the Pacific and Caribbean from tyrannical Spain during the Spanish-American War. Subsequently, the United States specified it would continue to control these territories until it could develop functioning republican governing institutions in them (Jordan 1898). Interestingly, this was something Seward also claimed America would accomplish in Alaska when he purchased it from Russia. Canada, in contrast, was already moving towards a republican form of government and it could not be argued it needed to be liberated.

Improvements in transportation and access to more strategic waterways also decreased America’s willingness to control and develop the Northwest Passage. The Northwest Passage was called the British “Arctic Grail” (1988), because of Great Britain’s tragic 18th and 19th century attempts to establish it to connect Europe with Asia by ship. However, transcontinental railroads in both the United States and Canada made this tragically difficult-to-navigate waterway superfluous when they were constructed in the middle of the 19th century. Railroads opened the western states and provinces and gave Americans (and Canadians) much more access to the Pacific Ocean than they previously had.

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10 Although outside the scope of this study, it should also be noted that the Suez Canal, completed in 1869 and controlled by the French and British alternately during the 19th century, also decreased the relative value Europeans placed on the Northwest Passage by providing an alternate way of connecting Europe with Asia. See Houghton (1869-70) and Wilson (1939) for historical analyses of the importance of the Suez Canal to Europeans.
America’s construction of the Panama Canal in 1914 further decreased the relative geo-strategic attractiveness of the Northwest Passage. Taking advantage of French and British weakness, its increasing material power, and a Mahanian (1890) strategy of controlling strategic sea lanes that was made possible by Theodore Roosevelt’s assemblage of a world-class navy at the turn of the century (Karsten 1971), America purchased the partially completed Panama Canal from a French company for ten million dollars in 1904 (McCullough 1977).\

The geopolitical significance of the Panama Canal to the United States is hard to underestimate. Although both the Northwest Passage and Panama Canal connect the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific, controlling the Panama Canal has many strategic advantages: 1) it is less treacherous than the Northwest Passage since it is ice-free and has multiple hours of daylight year-round; 2) the sea lanes that go through the Panama Canal are not littered with islands and are much deeper than the multiple sea lanes through the Northwest Passage, so larger ships can travel through it than can traverse many parts of the Northwest Passage (Waldie 2014); 3) perhaps most importantly, the sea lanes that go through the Panama Canal are in much more habitable climates and therefore much closer to major markets and population centers than the Northwest Passage.

The clear strategic advantages of the Panama Canal, and southern territory over northern territory in general, also explain America’s decision to forego possible territorial acquisition in the north to acquire even more territory in the Caribbean. In 1916, the United States rescinded its sovereignty claims over Greenland that were based on the semi-permanent expedition base camps Robert Peary set up during his polar expeditions. In exchange, Denmark sold the United

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States the West Indies – what are now known as the American Virgin Islands – because these islands were threatened by Germany.

Giving up its claim to Greenland meant that the United States gave up twice the Arctic landmass it had acquired when it bought Alaska. It also kept the United States from controlling the approaches to the Northwest Passage and the North Atlantic. However, President Woodrow Wilson’s administration believed that this tradeoff was needed. With the Wehrmacht’s early advance during World War I, President Wilson believed it was likely Germany would annex Denmark (United States Department of State, n.d.). By doing so, Germany could claim the Virgin Islands and threaten America’s Caribbean interests, the southern states, and the Panama Canal (Grant 2010, pgs. 247-248; Fogelson 1989, pg. 52). Greenland, although also within the confines of the Monroe Doctrine region, did not appear as vulnerable to German aggression and was not as critical to America’s national interests as the Virgin Islands at the time.

Significantly, Alaska’s potential strategic position as an American link to the Far East also diminished after the Spanish-American War. At the Spanish-American War’s conclusion, the United States acquired Guam and the Philippines and annexed the Hawaiian Islands. These Pacific islands were more accessible and temperate than Alaska – invalidating another one of Seward’s key rationales for the Purchase of Alaska. Even though relations with Russia soured as its government reverted towards authoritarianism and America remained neutral during the Russo-Japanese war, the bilateral relationship between the two countries was still good enough that Alaska was not threatened by Russia. After the Russian navy was crushed during the 1905 Russo-Japanese War, it did not have the material strength to threaten Alaska anyway (Saul 1996).
It was not until Klondike gold prospectors migrated down the Yukon River towards Nome, Alaska in 1899 that the American government fully realized the potential mineral wealth of Alaska and the Arctic – something that will be explained in more detail later in the chapter. Consequently, the United States utilized its material strength and superior geopolitical position vis-à-vis Canada and Great Britain to secure the territory that is now the Alaskan panhandle, at the Alaskan Boundary Tribunal of 1903. The Tribunal’s decision cut off the Canadian Yukon from the North Pacific, giving America leverage over Canada. However, in the larger scheme, this event, and the Bering Sea Seal Dispute explained later in this chapter, were episodes that only transitorily drew American leaders’ attention to the north, and Alaska remained peripheral to America’s larger geopolitical interests and concerns. The peaceful resolution of these episodes through arbitration also diminished America’s willingness to militarize the region or to threaten Canada.

In contrast, the “unforgivable” results of the Alaskan Boundary Tribunal inspired Canadian nationalism and influenced an enduring desire by Canadian politicians to solidify Canada’s hold over its northern territory against their more powerful neighbors. Canada’s moves were driven by a “fear of the real or imagined potential of the United States to absorb Canada (Brown and Cook qtd. in Grant 2010, pg. 194).” This fear motivated Canada to solidify its hold over the North American Arctic by making greater efforts to occupy it. This effectively restrained America’s ability to expand its sphere of influence into the North American Arctic.

Overall, the United States was in a much stronger geopolitical position than Russia as World War I approached. This favorable geopolitical position, and America’s increasingly passive stance towards democratic and culturally similar Great Britain and Canada, meant that America’s focus was turned away from the Arctic and towards regions deemed more important.
to national security and prosperity. This era institutionalized America as a world power, but also relegated America’s official control over Arctic territory to its one Arctic enclave - Alaska. Significantly, Canada’s and Russia’s claims to sovereignty over newly discovered Arctic territory during this era when borders were more malleable was much greater than that of the United States.

2.2 Russian Geopolitics

Russia’s geo-strategic position was more complex and dangerous than the American position after the Alaskan Purchase. In fact, as was discussed in the previous chapter, Russia’s precarious geopolitical position was a main reason Russia sold Alaska to the United States in the first place. Russia was largely isolated within Europe and felt threatened by its strengthening western competitors, Germany and Austro-Hungary, and its strengthening eastern competitor, Japan. Furthermore, Germany and Austro-Hungary threatened to fill the vacuum caused by the impending collapse of the Ottoman Empire on its southern flank. Germany’s plan to build a railway from Berlin to Baghdad signaled its intent in this respect and threatened Russia’s southern flank.

Furthermore, liberals in Great Britain, France, and Washington D.C. came to revile the Russian Romanov dynasty because of its increasingly harsh domestic rule. This limited the potential cooperation on which Russia could count from these democracies to balance its competitors (Service 1997, pg. 1). The decline in Russo-American relations became apparent when the American companies provided military aid to Japan during the Russo-Japanese War and the government remained neutral (Saul 1996). France, looking for some help balancing Germany, eased Russia’s isolation somewhat when it signed a security agreement with Russia in 1893. Britain, also threatened by Germany, joined the security agreement in 1907 to form the
Triple Entente that lasted until World War I. Great Britain’s and France’s security cooperation with Russia was based much more on their shared concern with Germany and traditional European balance of power politics (itself a historical and social construction) than filial attachment to Russia, though. Even its nominal European allies, France and England, remained fearful of Russia’s potential material power. It already was considered a great land power because it possessed Europe’s largest population and an abundance of natural resources. It could also become a great seafaring nation if it had more access to the oceans.

However, Russia’s isolation was still exacerbated by its lack of ice-free ports and the vast distances between its relatively heavily populated western territory and the less-populated eastern territory it looked to develop. These weaknesses were centuries old and well known to other Great Powers who continued to restrict Russia’s access to the world’s oceans (Roucek 1953, pg. 83). International efforts to deny Russia access to the oceans even manifested themselves intermittently in the mostly inaccessible and peripheral Arctic. Effectively, Russia was landlocked, except in the Arctic Barents Sea, where the warm water of the Gulfstream Current kept Russia’s northwest coastline clear of ice year-round (Saunders 2016). Even here, other European states historically worked to limit Russia’s access to coastal harbors (Nielsen 2001, pg. 175).

Russian leaders from Peter the Great onward tried to break this maritime containment. Peter moved to do this in 1703, by establishing the future capital city of St. Petersburg, which gave Russia access to the Baltic Sea and provided an alternative to the small Arctic port of Arkhangelsk as a way for Russia to conduct maritime trade with Europe (Hill 2007, pgs. 361-362). Russia’s subsequent motivation to protect St. Petersburg motivated them to occupy Finland as a semi-autonomous state after defeating Sweden in 1809.
The rulers that followed Peter also tried to gain access to the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans. These non-Arctic waters were more attractive than the Arctic due to their proximity to markets and their lack of ice. However, Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War of 1855 decisively contained Russia on the Eurasian continent (Nielsen 2001, pg. 176). As was previously mentioned in Chapter 1, Russia established itself in the Amur, which gave it tenuous access to the North Pacific. Additionally, in 1877-78 Russia beat the Ottomans and gained short-term access to the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas (Saul 1996, pg. 119). But Russia’s Balkan gains, and its newfound access to the Mediterranean, made other European Great Powers anxious. The subsequent Congress of Berlin saw these materially more powerful, wary, and adversarial European powers redistribute Russian Balkan war gains amongst themselves. The depleted Russian navy was again bottled up in the Black and Baltic Seas, and Russia’s access to the Mediterranean Sea and the Suez Canal was greatly restricted in the decades that followed.

By the end of the 19th century, Russia was forced to put a large strategic value on its ports in the Barents Sea because of its lack of maritime access elsewhere and because Germany had recently shown its ability to block the Russian navy in the Baltic Sea (Horensma 1991, pg. 6). Consequently, Russian officials denied Sweden’s request to annex Spitsbergen in 1871, so Russia could protect the Barents’ sea lanes (Horensma 1991, pg. 9). Then, in 1898, Russia sent the warship, Svetlana, to Bear Island to deny Germany the ability to claim the island (Horensma 1991, pg. 8). Russia also contracted with an English shipbuilder to construct the world’s first oceangoing icebreaker in 1899 to provide a larger official presence in the region. This icebreaker, the Yermak, visited Spitsbergen and Franz Josef Lands in 1899 to secure what were now considered critical sea lanes in the Barents Sea.
Russia also assertively moved to claim a sphere of influence over the Kara Sea. Norwegian fishermen had a geographic advantage over Russian Pomor fishermen because of the ice-free Gulf Coast waters that surrounded Norway’s home ports. This allowed the Norwegians to establish themselves in the Kara Sea earlier in the fishing season than the Siberian fishermen and, thus, dominate the region. Russian officials were afraid the Norwegians would assume effective occupation over the sea and the islands of Novaya Zemlya through these fishermen. Therefore, the Russians established a military presence on the Murmansk coast where the warship *Naezdnik* was instructed to restrict Norwegian hunting and fishing off the coast of Novaya Zemlya. Russia also formed the administrative center of Alexandrovsk (now Polyarny) on the Kola Fjord in 1899 (Nielsen 2001 pg. 168), coercively moved indigenous Nentsy citizens to colonize Novaya Zemlya, constructed a rescue station at Malye Karmakuly in Novaya Zemlya, and pressured the Norwegian government to disband settlements on northern Novaya Zemlya (Horensma 1991, pgs. 9-12) to solidify Russia’s hold on the region.

Despite these actions, Russia attempted to stay on good terms with Norway to keep Norway as a territorial buffer between themselves and Great Britain and Germany, who were expanding into the region. Russia went as far as supporting Norway’s independence from Sweden in 1905, which “removed the possibility that a third power might occupy one of the Norwegian ports on the Arctic Ocean” where they could threaten Russia (Nielsen 2001, pg. 179). Notably, international reaction to Russian Arctic assertiveness was muted because Russia’s Great Power adversaries had much more access to the world’s oceans and the Arctic was therefore much more peripheral to their concerns than it was to Russia.

Russia also mitigated its lack of access to the oceans and its connectivity with Siberia by constructing the Trans-Siberian Railroad in the 1890s. Similar to America’s and Canada’s
rationale for constructing their own transcontinental railroads in North America, the Eurasian Trans-Siberian Railroad was designed to supply the Russian army in the Far East with supplies from western Russia, link the Far East with the main centers of nascent Russian industry in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and represented “a major attempt to drive back the frontier” (Ames 1943, pg. 64). It was completed at great cost prior to the war with Japan in 1904, but its poor construction, and numerous accidents, meant that it could only move thirteen loads of soldiers to the front a day by the time the war started (Reichman 1988, pg. 26). This deficiency, and the difficulty of moving supplies overland during the initial construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, motivated Russian government officials to develop an operable sea lane off its Arctic coastline for the first time. But this proposition foundered because the Russian Arctic lacked communication infrastructure, ice conditions were unpredictable, and the Russian navy lacked the vessels necessary to utilize the ice-infested and treacherous sea lanes. Consequently, only three hundred thousand of the nearly twenty-two million rubles dedicated to the railroad went to develop the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and very little was accomplished to make it a usable waterway before World War I (Josephson 2014, pg. 27).

The disastrous results of the 1905 Russo-Japanese War was a contingent event that forced Russia to further acknowledge the logistical necessity of establishing sea lanes in the Arctic, however. The Japanese quickly penned down the Russian Pacific Fleet in Port Arthur, a warm-water port in the Yellow Sea that Russia had obtained from weakened China in 1897. The Trans-Siberian Railroad quickly became overloaded. Without access to the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal, the Russians were forced to send their Baltic Fleet to rescue their entrapped Pacific Fleet. Lacking the capability to operate in the ice of the NSR, the Baltic fleet was forced to travel eighteen thousand miles around Europe and Africa to get to the Pacific. England actively limited
the number of countries willing to supply the Russian Northern Fleet’s long voyage to war against Japan or to use the Suez Canal (Hill 2007, pg. 367). When the Russian fleet finally arrived in the Tsushima Straits, bedraggled and limping, the Japanese fleet annihilated it (Fairhall 2010, pg. 51) – a crushing blow to Russian geopolitical power. The loss of the Baltic and Pacific Fleets further diminished Russia’s already tenuous ability to operate in the Mediterranean and the Far East (Lobell 2001, pg. 180). The loss of Port Arthur again restricted Russia’s access to the Pacific Ocean, relegating its debilitated Pacific naval fleet to Vladivostok, a port that was closed to ice for four months out of the year.

This debacle, and the continued lack of warm water ports, further motivated the Russian government to develop sea lanes across its northern coastline to shorten the logistical lines between Europe and the Far East and to supplement the deficient Trans-Siberian Railroad. In 1906, the Russian government constructed two icebreakers to study the feasibility of this endeavor (Horensma 2003, pg. 15). The two ships, the Taymyr and Vaygach, were used to secure Russian territorial claims to its northern Pacific coastline and to make initial claims to multiple islands contiguous with the Russian Arctic coastline, even though other countries had first discovered many of these islands (ibid., 16). The defeat also motivated the Russian government to seriously contemplate constructing a canal between the White Sea and the Baltic Sea, so that it could quickly transfer naval forces between the two bodies of water (Hill 2007, pg. 367) – a dubious idea that later came to fruition under Stalin.

Despite the Russian icebreakers’ initial success, the difficulty and cost of developing the NSR, much less a modern navy, and the lack of a competent naval administration amidst domestic turmoil (most notably the failed 1905 Russian Revolution), continued to hamper Russia’s ability to improve its military capability (Demchak 2013) in the Arctic and elsewhere.
The traditional Russian proclivity for inefficient state control of the defense industry, and the perceived need to quickly make up for underdevelopment that was highlighted by the Russo-Japanese war, contributed to Russia’s inability to modernize its navy effectively or efficiently (Gattrell 1990) or to develop an Arctic infrastructure before World War I.

Even though Russia had difficulty increasing its physical presence in the Arctic, it moved to solidify its jurisdictional control over the region. In 1916, it filed a “note diplomatique” that formally claimed islands off Russia’s northern coast, even though American and European explorers first discovered many of these islands (Sides 2014). It is important to note that these claims were comparable to Canada’s claims to islands off its northern coast, increasing the legitimacy of both countries’ claims. Similar to its reaction to Canada, the United States did not see any real benefit to claiming the islands for itself and did not protest Russia’s claims.

The events of WW I and the Russian Revolution spurred the Bolsheviks to establish its sphere of influence over the Barents, White, and Kara Seas once and for all. Germany effectively isolated Russia from its allies in Western Europe during the war by sealing off the Baltic Sea with submarines and restricting lines of communication to Russia through Eastern Europe (Hill 2007, pg. 369). The Ottoman Empire also blockaded Russia’s fleet in the Black Sea (Saunders 2016, pg. 814). This left the ice-free waters of the northwest Arctic as the remaining way for Russia’s allies to get supplies to western Russia.

Russia’s allies also realized the value of the Arctic at this time. They tried to sustain Russia to keep Germany fighting a two-front war. As such, Great Britain loaned money to Russia, which it then used to contract British ship builders to construct icebreakers (Saunders 2016). The huge expense incurred with the purchase of the icebreakers was essential to the Russian war effort because the icebreakers kept the critical supply lines to Russian ports on the
Kola Peninsula and White Sea ice-free year-round (Saunders 2016, pg. 817). By 1917, Russia assembled a fleet of twenty-four icebreakers (two more were destroyed) through their contracts with the British. Russia also bought icebreakers from Canada (Hill 2007, pg. 370-71). By 1917, the icebreakers made it possible for Archangelsk to receive twenty times more imports than it had four years earlier and Archangelsk was responsible for twice “the combined capacity of all three of Russia’s alternative import routes (Vladivostok, Finland-Sweden-Norway, Murman)” (Saunders 2016, pgs. 821-22).

Russia also used prisoners of war to complete the St. Petersburg to Murmansk railroad line in 1917, which connected Russia’s most important western cities with the ports of Murmansk, Archangelsk, and Alexandrov (Hill 2007, pg. 369). Russia’s allies (including the United States, by this time) used (Ames 1947, pg. 64) the ports and railroad to deliver supplies to Russian forces on the Eastern Front through the Arctic. Notably, the Allies shipped over eighteen hundred aircraft and four thousand aircraft engines to Murmansk during the war – a number that far outpaced what the Russians were able to produce themselves at the time (Boyd 1977, pg. 6). Russia also used the ports to transport thousands of Russian soldiers to France and the Balkans to aid the Allies’ efforts on the Western Front (Hill 2007, pg. 372). Icebreakers were augmented by Russia’s Northern Fleet, which was expanded to protect Arctic sea lanes from German minesweepers and submarines (Hill 2007, pg. 373).

The Allies’ efforts ultimately proved inadequate to protect the war-weary Russian government from its own domestic insurgents, who for decades had chafed at the Romanov’s rule and were emboldened by Russia’s devastating losses in WW I. The largest immediate geopolitical result of the Russian government’s collapse in 1917 was the loss of the formerly semi-autonomous duchy of Finland, as well as the Baltic states of Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia,
and Poland to independence. These events further threatened Russian access to the Baltic and Kara Seas and removed a critical territorial buffer that formerly protected the Russian capital of St. Petersburg (quickly renamed Leningrad by the Bolsheviks) (Joenniemi 1998, pg. 186, 190).

The Bolshevik government that succeeded the Romanovs quickly made peace with Germany to get out of the war so it could focus on fighting against domestic adversaries. The Bolshevik surrender made it the immediate adversary of the Allies, who had troops and supplies on Russian soil. The Allies feared that northwestern Russia would quickly fall under German control, an event that would result in a one-front war and decisively allow Germany to move the forces it had fighting Russia to the Western Front. The Allies also feared that the supplies they provided Russia in Murmansk would now end up in German hands. To keep that from happening (Strakhovsky 1941, pgs. 102-103), the British seized many Russian Northern Fleet vessels and commandeered many of the icebreakers they had previously constructed for the Russians (Hill 2007 pg. 374; Saunders 2016, pg. 826).

The British also created an Allied expeditionary unit to control the supplies they had previously given to the Russian government. America was hesitant to intervene, but ended up sending over forty-six hundred troops, called the “Polar Bears,” to Archangelsk, which became the largest part of the expeditionary force (Weeks and Baylen 1974; Lee 2011). “The Allied commanders concluded that the ice-free ports of Murmansk and Archangel held great strategic importance because of their location near the railroad system, which connected these cities to St. Petersburg” (Lee 2011, pg. 3). American forces were also sent to Siberia to secure Allied supplies along the Trans-Siberian Railway and to aid Czech and Russian forces thought to be sympathetic to the Allies.
This was the first and last time American soldiers operated on Russian soil (Smith 2002). They were pushed there due to their alliance with Great Britain during World War I, but harsh environmental conditions, extended logistic lines, and uncertain objectives led to poor morale that ultimately undermined the operation. Many soldiers were uncertain why they continued to fight historically friendly Russians under such environmental hardship, especially after Germany surrendered in 1918 (Strakhovsky 1941, pg. 107). Additionally, many of the American soldiers bristled under British command – a legacy that went back to America’s Revolutionary War (Lee 2011, pg. 11).

Some Polar Bears threatened to mutiny, and their families successfully petitioned the government to send them home in 1919 (Fussell 2010). This retreat from the Arctic symbolically displayed the relative lack of geopolitical worth the Arctic continued to have for the United States. If the American Polar Bears had been reinforced, it would have been possible for them to quickly expand southward and occupy St. Petersburg (Lee 2011, pg. 14). Ultimately, however, the Russian northwest was much more geopolitically important to the Russian Bolsheviks than it was for the Americans or their allies.

Overall, financial, technological, and administrative difficulties, as well as domestic turmoil, kept Russia from fully capitalizing on its motivation to expand into the Arctic as much as it wanted to during this timeframe. However, the ports, railroads, and icebreakers that Russia accumulated did give it a head start towards giving it the capability to establish the Arctic as a Russian sphere of influence. Furthermore, the ability of Russia’s enemies to cordon the Russian navy in the Black, Baltic, and White Seas and occupy northwestern Russian coastal population centers like Archangelsk and Murmansk during World War I motivated subsequent Russian
leaders to fortify their defenses in the waters of the Barents and Kara Seas (Hill 2007, pgs. 377-382) and direct more attention to the Arctic.

3. Economics

3.1 American Economics

   In the decades that followed the Alaskan Purchase, economic incentives did not motivate either the United States or Russia to develop the Arctic in any meaningful manner. For the United States, this was largely the result of its market-based economic institutions. These institutions made establishing a transportation infrastructure and attracting labor relatively expensive. Canada’s consolidation increased these costs by physically isolating Alaska from the contiguous states. Furthermore, many Americans came to believe that Alaska was “Seward’s Folly” and devoid of economic value.

   As time progressed, American political institutions added further transaction costs to American businesses that looked to develop Alaska. Competing interests for and against “big business” and a growing interest in protecting America’s dwindling wilderness (explained in depth later in this chapter) gridlocked American policy makers’ decisions on how to develop Alaska and the Arctic. Unlike other American territories in the contiguous states, the federal government officially owned all of Alaska’s territory, which meant that this political gridlock had a greater effect on Alaska’s economic development than if Alaska had developed under the previously decentralized model that prevailed in the United States (Nichols 1924).

   Among these various influences, the harsh climate, rugged geography, inability to farm, and physical isolation were (and continue to be) the most significant reasons that American entrepreneurs neglected the Arctic. These conditions made the use of Homestead Acts, like the ones that previously motivated Americans to settle other western states, unworkable.
The decreasing market for whale oil shortly after the Alaskan Purchase is a case that is symbolic of the boom-and-bust American interest in Arctic resources. Seward was, in part, promoting northeastern American whaling interests when he pushed through the Alaskan Purchase. However, the rapidly expanding American petroleum industry, started in Pennsylvania in the 1860s, largely replaced whale oil as a lubricant for lighting and as the predominant fuel for the budding northeast industrialization in the subsequent decades. Overfishing of whales and dangerous sea ice made whale oil more expensive than the new substitute. American whaling fleets were also stricken by catastrophic losses from ice in 1871, 1876, and 1897 that severely depleted their willingness and capability to continue whaling off the Alaska’s north and west coasts (Vanstone 1958; Dolin 2008, pgs. 332-362).

In a historical precedent that parallels how contemporary fracking in the continental United States has made Alaska’s North Slope and outer Arctic continental shelf hydrocarbons uneconomical to extract, the high costs and predicted low economic returns of whaling expeditions in the late 19th century kept the American government from investing in search-and-rescue resources in the Arctic (Vanstone 1958). The use of whale baleen for women’s clothing temporarily prolonged American Arctic whaling as the market for whale oil dried up. However, its high price also motivated entrepreneurs to find an acceptable and cheaper alternative around the turn of the century.

Alaska’s gold rushes at the turn of the century were also symbolic of how the boom and bust of resource markets alternatively attracted and then detracted American interest in the Arctic. The economic depression of 1893 left many Americans unemployed and resulted in runs on banks that increased the price of gold (Stevens 1894; Carlson 2005). These conditions attracted the unemployed, thrill seekers, and frontiersmen to the Yukon and made them
temporarily willing to endure the high physical, economic, and opportunity costs of obtaining Yukon “placer” gold which required little machinery or capital to extract (Berton 1972). The Klondike River, bordering Alaska and the Canadian Yukon, “was just far enough away to be romantic and just close enough to be accessible” (Berton 1972). Although the prospectors came from all over the world, the clear majority (approximately one hundred thousand) were American. Fur traders paved the way for the prospectors through their previous exploration of the Yukon interior. Their crude game trails later became thoroughfares for the rushers (Eichengreen and McClean 1994, pg. 302).

The Klondike Gold Rush left an indelible impact on the tens of thousands that took part in it, but its effect on the development of the American Arctic was more ambiguous. In one sense, the gold rushers “broke down the frontier and opened up the northwest” (Berton 1975, pg. 189). The Klondike Gold Rush forced the American government to officially recognize Alaskan citizens for the first time and a Homestead Act was belatedly extended to them (Naske 1973; pg. 4). The Klondike Gold Rush also belatedly opened many American politicians’ eyes to the potential resource value of the Arctic. In effect, private business interests finally led the United States government to establish a permanent presence in Alaska.

The United States Army constructed seven forts around Alaska to police and tax the new pioneers and set up the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS) to provide more rapid communication between the expanding American military presence in Alaska and the contiguous United States. The United States government also began construction on the Alaska Railroad, which would later connect the burgeoning interior mining town of

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12 According to the United States National Park Service (2015), “‘placer’ mining, “unlike hardrock mining, which extracts veins of precious minerals from solid rock, … is the practice of separating heavily eroded minerals like gold from sand or gravel…By far the simplest was the prospector’s pan that worked by swirling a combination of water and gravel or sand and allowing the lighter, rocky material to spill out.”
Fairbanks with Alaska’s growing southern ports. These events made subsequent development of the Alaskan Arctic interior easier and less expensive for subsequent settlers. Many new communities developed along the new transportation route to support the mines that grew up along it.

However, in a precursor to other commodity booms and symbolic of the institutionalized mobility of American (and Canadian) labor, many of the settlements that supported the rushes became ghost towns after the rushes had run their course in 1910. The Canadian settlement of Dawson City, which housed tens of thousands of Americans during the Gold Rush, now has a population of just over a thousand people (Yukon Government 2014). Nome, which is estimated to have had a population of twenty thousand people in 1909, declined to a population of less than one thousand people in 1920 and now has a population of just thirty-five hundred (US Census). The Yukon River, which was such an important line of communication during the rushes, is “no longer utilized as the great artery of the north” (Berton 1972, pg. 415), leaving the region relatively isolated and unpopulated again today.

Overall, the gold rushes, like the hunt for Arctic whales before it and oil after it, showed how latent American material power could be rapidly mobilized to develop northern territory when commodity prices are high. However, when commodity prices decreased, American labor migrated away, as it did during World War I when over seven thousand people moved from Alaska (See Table 1). Additionally, as American international commerce and industrialization increased, the United States became less dependent on its own natural resources since it could procure those resources more cheaply elsewhere.

In addition to the harsh climate and austere conditions, business syndicates that quickly entrenched themselves in Alaska made it more difficult to expand American presence in Alaska.
The syndicates made it difficult for newcomers to obtain property rights and to compete economically. This restricted potential settlers’ ability and willingness to populate and develop interior and Arctic Alaska. Since the American federal government officially owned all the land in Alaska, it also controlled access to Alaska’s resources. Many of the American government officials appointed to oversee Alaska were either incompetent or gained their position through political patronage associated with economic special interests (Nichols 1924, pgs. 19-20). This favored politically connected business interests like the Guggenheims and J.P. Morgan, who actively worked in Washington D.C. to monopolize economic activity in Alaska (Tower 1996). The syndicates created company towns that dominated large parts of southern Alaska. The syndicates transported workers to the region during temperate months when production could be maximized. When resource extraction became uneconomical, companies shut down their operations and whole towns dried up, taking their temporary workers with them. Increased mechanization also decreased the need for labor and the size of economic settlements as time passed.

Consequently, much of Alaska’s economy was controlled by interests from outside of Alaska, and much of the profits from Alaska’s extractive resource economy was also exported outside of Alaska. In this sense, Alaska’s political system was colonial (ibid., pg. 4), and there was little motivation or tax revenue to provide public goods to develop local government institutions, transportation networks, education, and the like that otherwise may have induced further economic development. Alaskan syndicates cynically argued that the relative lack of tax revenue from Alaska, and the seasonal labor force they employed, meant that Alaskans could not afford to govern themselves - further prolonging the colonial nature and stagnation of Alaska’s economy and population (Naske 1973).
However, the power of the syndicates also intermittently promoted the American government to expand its sphere of influence into the Arctic when these syndicates’ interests were threatened by external forces. This occurred during the Bering Sea Fur Seal controversy that ran from the 1880s until the second decade of the 20th century. The high demand for seal furs during this time led many American commercial hunters to the Pribilof Islands shortly after the Alaskan Purchase. These commercial hunters decimated the herd to such an extent that the United States government made the islands into special reserves and began to regulate hunting in 1869, leasing the hunting rights exclusively in twenty-year leases – first to the Alaska Commercial Corporation (ACC) and then to the North American Commercial Corporation (NACC).

This protected the economic viability of the herd in the short-term, but international commercial interests developed pelagic (open sea) hunting techniques in the following decades that again put the NACC’s future economic prospects in doubt. Consequently, Russia, like the United States, prohibited the killing of seals at sea (Thompson and Randall 2002, pg. 63-64), which angered Great Britain and Canada, whose companies were engaged in the pelagic hunting. The United States went as far as to claim sovereignty over all of the Bering Sea to protect the seals and the NACC’s profits (Foster 1895, pg. 694-695; Campbell 1963, pg. 347).

Significantly, the NACC had direct financial ties with the current American President, Benjamin Harrison, and his Secretary of State James Blaine, who negotiated the dispute for the United States (Campbell 1961, pg. 396-397). These ties influenced the United States government to act more forcefully in the dispute than otherwise might have been the case. The United States sent Coast Guard revenue cutters to seize British-flagged Canadian sealing ships in the Bering Sea in 1886, 1887, and 1889. The British put naval ships in Yokohama and Esquimalt that
successfully deterred the United States from further seizures in 1890 (Gibb 2002, pg. 820; Campbell 1963, pg. 399). Once the Harrison presidency was over in 1901, the Democrats that took over did not have any commercial ties with the NACC and were therefore more amenable to compromise with the British – which they did (Gibbs 2002, pg. 831).

The personal connection between the NACC and the federal government of the United States enabled the NACC to enlist the power of the American government to protect its interests. However, just as the NACC lost favor when its patron administration left office in 1893, future American commercial concerns would also gain and lose protection depending on the personal connections the businesses had with political figures and the ideological convictions of the administration. One of the ideological convictions that resulted in less forceful American governmental presence at the conclusion of the Fur Seal imbroglio was a growing value placed on conservation and the wilderness environment, something that will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter.

The willingness of the American government to step back from its initial hard line in this case was also symbolic of the American government’s willingness to appease other countries in the relatively insignificant High North to further larger geopolitical and economic aims in more strategically important areas – even if the appeasement personally cost American elites economically. Per Gibbs, the Senate’s veto power in the Bering Fur Seal Case was overcome only after the more pressing Spanish-American War made compensation to Canadian Bering Sea’s sealers necessary to gain British neutrality in the war (ibid., pg. 836). The commercial peace that was emerging between the United States, Canada, and Great Britain, as well as converging geopolitical interests between the United States and Great Britain, meant that the United States and Great Britain did not want to come to blows over this relatively insignificant
disagreement between them and so they agreed to international arbitration to settle the dispute (Foster, pg. 697).

The United States lost its argument at the Tribunal, but the Tribunal also initiated international regulations on sealing that influenced future international negotiations that did successfully protect the viability of the species in subsequent decades (Foster, pg. 701). And, even before the Tribunal concluded, the British and Americans had agreed to temporarily close regions in the Barents Sea and the Pribilof Islands from sealing (Gibb 2002, pg. 820, 826). The countries finally came to a final resolution of the disagreement in 1911 (ibid., pg. 820), with Canadian sealers receiving compensation from the United States for limiting their sealing in the Bering Sea.

The use of international law and negotiation, instead of military force, to resolve the Bering Fur Seal dispute built on previous agreements between the United States, Canada, and Great Britain that predated even the 1871 Treaty of Washington. It, along with the 1903 Alaska Boundary Tribunal, set the precedent for future commercial dispute resolutions between Great Britain, Canada, and the United States in the Northern Pacific Region that discouraged increased military presence by the United States. As such, America’s faith in the value of international law and arbitration, at least when dealing with fellow democracies like Great Britain and Canada, restrained American willingness to utilize its superior material power to monopolize the region’s resources as realists would have assumed.

Canada’s willingness to challenge American economic domination in the Bering Fur Seal dispute was also symbolic of Canada’s belief that it must attempt to restrain American economic expansion into the sparsely settled north, even though it was unable to usefully exploit the region’s resource itself in many cases. This “dog in the manger” policy was passed down from
the British, who transferred their claims to the Arctic Archipelago in the Northwest Passage to Canada in 1874, in part because an American requested mineral rights to Baffin Island. The main object of this gambit, according to the British Colonial Office, “was to prevent the United States from claiming them, not from the likelihood of their being any value to Canada” (qtd. in Grant 1988, pg. 5). These events set a precedent and emboldened Canada to restrain subsequent American attempts to economically expand into the region by resorting to international arbitration and by asserting official control over the locations.

As in the cases of the Bering Fur Seal imbroglio and Baffin Island, Canada felt threatened by America’s increased economic interest in the Yukon during the Alaska Gold Rushes. The large influx of Americans during these rushes endangered Canada’s ability to maintain sovereignty over this thinly populated territory. Canada quickly and decisively moved the Northwest Mounted Police (NWMP) into the region, just as it had used it previously to secure sovereignty over Canada’s western provinces (See chapter 1).

The NWMP did a few key things to maintain Canadian sovereignty. The primary thing it did was establish de facto control of the Chilkoot and White Passes that served as the main entrances into the Yukon (Berton 1972, pg. xvii). At the outset of the Klondike Gold Rush, it was unclear if these passes belonged to the Americans or the Canadians (Berton 1972, pg. 157), but America did not readily challenge Canada and so the Canadians were able to establish de facto sovereignty over the passes with a few Winchester rifles and Maxim machine guns. In fact, when the Yukon military force Canada sent to man the passes went through customs at the port of Wrangell in the Alaskan Panhandle, American soldiers at the Wrangell Army Garrison welcomed them (Eyre 1981, pg. 29). This symbolic acknowledgment legitimized Canada’s
proactive attempt to provide order to the unruly area and relieved sparse American officials of this onerous responsibility.

Since the bulk of the American rushers went through these passes on their way to the Yukon, it allowed the Canadians to control the flow of prospectors into the region. They did this by ensuring the rushers had a years’ worth of supplies before continuing through the passes. They also shot a “sore or injured horse on sight if he was brought across the passes into Canada” (ibid., pg. 142). By doing so, the Canadians likely saved lives, but they also minimized the flow of prospectors into the Yukon and collected a sizable rent from customs’ taxes on American goods coming into Canada and Canadian gold going out. Their actions provided a strong official Canadian presence in the region and successfully defended Canada’s territorial claims.

The difference between the way the Canadians and the Americans dealt with the rushers also highlights how the differing cultures and institutional settings of the two countries affected their central governments’ willingness and ability to forcibly claim and govern territory in the High North. Significantly, Canada was much more willing and ready to use government agents to support their claims than the United States was. Lipset (1990) suggests that these cultural and institutional differences stemmed from the American Revolution, which institutionalized a loathing of centralized government power in the United States while at the same time motivating Canadians to be fearful of the unrestrained popular sovereignty of their southern neighbor, which they believed should be guarded against with a strong elite ruling class and government of their own. As Lipset (ibid., pg. 14) put it, many Canadians believed that “freedom wears a crown” and that the Canadian government must defend Canadians against the possible democratic tyranny of their southern neighbors. As such, the Canadians, who inherited colonial pacification techniques from the British and prioritized law and order over individual enterprise, sent the centrally
directed NWMP and military to preside over the Yukon and to ensure the region remained both 
Canadian and peaceful. In contrast to the Canadians, the American government prioritized 
individual rights and limited government and allowed frontier settlers to democratically elect 
marshals from amongst themselves to establish law and order in the Alaskan interior. The more 
official Canadian presence in the Yukon was ultimately more successful at establishing 
sovereignty than the less official American presence.

The Canadian decisiveness was also motivated by lessons learned from previous 
American frontier settlers. Canadian historian W.R. Morrison (1977, pg. 95) points out, “The 
Dominion government of the day was not slow to react in this case, for the nineteenth century 
territorial quarrels between Canada and the United States, especially the Oregon crisis of 1846, 
stood as examples to apprehensive Canadians of the results of permitting Americans to occupy 
an area in dispute or under question. The example of California, and to a lesser extent, British 
Columbia, show what could happen if public order were neglected during a gold rush. The 
[Canadian] North-West Rebellion of 1885 had, perhaps, [also] taught the government the 
dangers of procrastination.” The British also displayed to the Canadians how successful a small 
military force, like the NWMP, could be used to maintain sovereignty and instill law and order 
against a rush of American prospectors during the Fraser River gold rush in British Columbia in 
the 1850s.

The NWMP was an embodiment of this decisiveness and the previous lessons learned. 
Before the Klondike Gold Rush, the NWMP was a critical element the Canadian government 
used to unify and maintain sovereignty over its fractious western provinces after Confederation 
(Fanning 2012) and was used to protect Canadian sovereignty against their more numerous 
American neighbors. During this key transitional era between Confederation and the Klondike
Gold Rush, the NWMP kept American workmen in check during the building of the Canadian Pacific Railroad (Berton 1970, pg. 38) and provided community service and promoted social institutions that “transformed the Prairies from a collection of isolated settlements into a network of communities” (Fanning 2012, pg. 515) that allowed Canada to maintain a necessary level of economic independence from the United States. Canada’s first prime minister, John Macdonald, probably did not envision the future success of the NWMP (ibid., 516) in securing territory for Canada, but by the time of the Klondike Gold Rush Canadian Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier did.

Overall, the Canadians’ experience during this era “inspired a sense of national unity by creating a unique identity in an American dominated continent” – a distinctly northern identity (Grant 1990, pg. 17). For the next forty years, this growing identity “meant that Ottawa's concern about the north was less for its development, than fear lest they lose it” (Grant 1990, pg. 30). This meant Canadians would continue to try to restrain American economic penetration into the North American Arctic. In contrast, the United States would continue to view the region as relatively insignificant economically and not use its superior material force to bully Canada like it could have. America’s lack of assertiveness, or support for its citizens who penetrated the North en masse for the first time during the gold rushes, firmly established Canada’s legitimate claims to Yukon afterwards. It also cemented the mutual ideational construct between Americans and Canadians that the North American Arctic overwhelmingly belonged to Canada, and Canada was free to choose how to manage that territory – even if that included restricting American economic access to the region.

Like Canada, Russian economic nationalism also restrained American economic expansion into the Arctic as the nineteenth century progressed. But, unlike Canada, Russia did
not have the organizational power to resist much of America’s economic advancement into the islands of the Bering Sea and northeast Siberia at the time. And, in contrast to Canadian-American relations, as the United States became more inclusive and democratic, the Russian government reverted to greater authoritarianism and moved to establish firmer control over the country’s economic institutions. This divergence increased the geopolitical ramifications of joint economic ventures in the thinly populated Arctic between Russia and the United States, creating a zero-sum Russian perception that further motivated it to restrain American economic expansion into the region as World War I approached.

In this regard, the Russo-Japanese War was a turning point in the countries’ relations. Afterwards, Russia’s willingness to allow Americans to operate in Russia diminished. By 1905, Russian anti-Semitism and George Kennan’s (1891) widely heralded report on Russia’s growing Siberian exile system soured the American public on Russia (Weeks and Baylen 1974, pg. 69). Wealthy American financier, Jacob Schiff, and others went as far as to partially underwrite the successful Japanese war effort against Russia (Steinberg 2008, pg. 5) to punish the Russian government for its intolerant behavior against their co-religionists. In reaction, the Russian press accused the United States government of supporting Japan in the war and attributed American efforts to its humiliating defeat (Baylen 1974, pg. 66).

The most poignant example of how this tension affected American economic expansion into the Russian Arctic was the case of the Northeastern Siberian Company (NSC). The NSC was a joint venture between American businessmen and Russian state-sponsored agents that began in 1902 to extract gold in the thinly populated and austere Chukchi region of northeastern Russia. In another historical parallel to today, Russia needed foreign capital and technology to
extract Arctic resources, but it still wanted to direct the operations and accrue the bulk of the profits from the venture.

According to Owen, the NSC’s Russian agent, Colonel Vonliarliarskii, “faced four major tasks when he led the company: 1) to raise investment capital, 2) to establish communications between St. Petersburg and the peninsula, 3) to maintain control over mining experts and laborers, and 4) to keep the confidence of the imperial government (Owen 2008, pg. 56).” These insurmountable tasks pushed him to team up with Norwegian-American businessmen from Seattle whom he let manage the company’s operations, despite the growing Russo-American tension.

The NSC was the only Russian corporation managed by an American, who resided outside the Russian Empire at the time. This unique situation meant that the company increasingly became vilified within Russia. Historian Thomas Owen claims Russian bureaucrats, legislators, mining engineers, and journalists were especially critical of the venture and that their “criticism represented a particularly important case of economic xenophobia,” with “their negative stereotypes of American capitalists persisting into the Soviet and post-Soviet periods as well” (2008, pg. 51). In the end, the venture failed because of technical difficulties and the tension between the Russian and American management. Colonel Vonliarliarskii did not want to give up administrative control of the company to the Americans, which made it difficult for the Americans to successfully utilize their capital and expertise to exploit the region’s gold (Owen 2008, pg. 83). The company dissolved in 1914.

The Russians also allowed Americans to obtain short-term leases to harborage in the seal-rich Commander Islands of the Bering Sea and to mineral-rich grounds in Chukotka province of northeast Siberia around the turn of the century, because Russia did not think it had the ability to
stop the Americans and because its leaders were determined that they should “at least profit in some way from land that otherwise did [Russia] no good” (McCannon 2012, p. 157). Ultimately, “in an irony not much to the tsars’ liking, the U.S. exercised more economic influence over northeast Siberia during this half-century than Russia did” (McCannon 2012, p. 157). This situation made the Bolsheviks even more anxious than the Romanovs they replaced, and they moved to limit American economic penetration into Siberia when they came to power.

American business interests were also thwarted by Norway in the Finnmark region of northern Norway and in the semi-terra nullius Svalbard archipelago of the Barents Sea. In Finnmark, an American miner, John Longyear, was unable to secure any concessions due to national protectionism (Berg 2017, pgs. 27-28). He had better luck in the Svalbard archipelago, over which Norway had less control than Finnmark. He gained a concession there because he was one of the few people in the world to have the “financial resources to build up, develop, and operate a substantial and sustainable mining centre” in such an austere location (Berg 2017, pg. 27). Even still, he was unable to make a profit with the Arctic Coal Company he established in 1906. The iron ore he hoped to extract did not exist in sufficient quantities, and the coal trade was not lucrative enough to make a profit. In turn, he transferred responsibility for his Svalbard operations to a Norwegian state company. As was the case for other American commercial enterprises in the Arctic, the Arctic Coal Company (ACC) was beset by numerous problems that made doing business more difficult and costly in Svalbard than in other regions where Americans operated.

First, the cost of supplying the operation was expensive since there was little local material or supplies from which to choose. Second, labor was expensive and/or inefficient since the company had to pay large amounts of money to induce skilled labor to deal with the austere
conditions or, alternatively, to employ transient and difficult Norwegian workers to do the grunt labor. There was no effective local government that the company could rely on to protect it against worker uprisings, which made dealing with laborers even more difficult and inefficient. Third, the summer/winter cycle the company was forced to work under put it at a direct disadvantage with English competitors that could work and send out coal supplies year-round to the same factories in northern Europe the ACC attempted to supply. Fourth, the Norwegian government, unsurprisingly interested more in the Norwegian citizens the ACC employed than the ACC, looked to replace the ACC’s presence in the archipelago. The American government, distracted with many more pressing concerns and interests than the Norwegian government, was slow to support the ACC (Hartnell, 2009). British explorer, Rudnose Brown (1915), suggests the United States foreign office contemplated extending American protection over Svalbard to protect the ACC in 1909, but decided against it. The ACC then looked to the British to protect their interests, but also did not find support there.

World War I hastened the company’s demise. American national attention was directed away from the Arctic. As with Alaska, potential laborers were pulled away from the Svalbard archipelago to fight in the war effort or work in the logistics operations to support the war effort, and shipping and supplies to austere regions like the Svalbard became even more expensive and difficult (Hartnell 2009). The Norwegian state-owned company, Store Norske Spitsbergen Kulkompani, bought the ACC and continues to operate its mines, often at a loss (Fjeldsbo 2015). In contrast to the United States, the Norwegian government was willing to subsidize a money-losing company in Svalbard to secure an independent supply of natural resources and to maintain influence in a region that was much more significant to it than it was to the United States. Even the name of the mine has been changed from that of “Longyear,” the first American owner, to
the Norwegianized “Longyearbyen” to reflect the more recent Norwegian ownership. Interestingly, the Russians bought their own money-losing Svalbard mine, Artikugol, from the Dutch in 1932, which they also used to maintain national influence in the region afterwards (Economist 2004).

Overall, America’s business expanded their operations into the Arctic more than any other country before World War I. However, America’s international relations and its market economy restricted the Americans from making further, and more sustained, forays into the Arctic. Instead, these initial forays into the Arctic engendered national opposition by America’s Arctic neighbors, who moved to keep the Americans from expanding further. Importantly, the American government did not feel its Arctic businesses were important enough to subsidize or protect.

3.2 Russian Economics:

Like America, Russia initially lacked the motivation to economically develop the Arctic before the Bolsheviks took over. The major factor that decreased the Russian government’s interest in the Arctic was the declining availability and demand for Arctic furs. As in Alaska in 1867, the Russian government-sponsored fur companies had also overhunted sparsely populated Eastern Siberia, making furs harder to find by the end of the century (Armstrong 1965). With declining revenue coming from the region, the government lost interest in promoting further economic activity there.

A second factor, noted in chapter one, for decreased Russian economic interest in the High North was the acquisition of the Amur region from China in the Treaty of Aigun in 1858. This acquisition pushed Russia to divert people and resources from its northern territories, and recently-sold Alaskan territory, into this more temperate and geo-strategically valuable region.
The Amur was more economically attractive than the Russian Arctic because agricultural activity, which was the main component of the Russian economy at the time, was viable there and because it was much closer to the large markets in China that the other western powers, including the United States, competed with Russia to control. Consequently, Russia only maintained a dwindling economic presence in the Arctic that became more tenuous as its distance from the more heavily populated European part of Russia increased (ibid., 107). Armstrong notes (1965, pg. 81), that the peasant occupation of the Russian Arctic that was left over after the fur trade diminished gave continuity to Russia’s hold over its northern territory that was otherwise "superficial and sporadic."

Towards the turn of the 20th century, Russian Arctic economic neglect slowly transitioned to economic interest. The first reason for increased interest was the enlarged presence of foreign commercial interests in the western Arctic. European and American explorers and businessmen, with much more freedom from government interference than their Russian counterparts and much more access to technology, were much quicker to recognize and exploit the vast resources of the High North than the Russians (Josephson 2014, pg. 21). An example of this discrepancy was that, between 1908 and 1913, Russian fisherman harvested just over five hundred tons of fish in the Barents Sea compared to the more than eighty-six thousand tons harvested by English and German fishermen (ibid., 26). Russian Pomors started trading Siberian timber with Norwegian fisherman, initially forming a mutually beneficial economic relationship. But, towards World War I, the Russian government looked at Norwegian commercial expansion into the Arctic more distrustfully and actively tried to limit it (Nielsen 2001; Horensma 1991, pg. 17). Another example of the economic discrepancy between Russia and its European neighbors in the Arctic were the British companies who first established commercial voyages to
the Russian Ob and Yenisei rivers between 1893 and 1899 (Josephson, 2014 pg. 24). Russia subsidized its own shipping company to establish trading routes between the Kara Sea and the Yenisei River (Horesnma 1991, pg. 18) to compete with these foreign interlopers. Ultimately, all of these companies proved uneconomical and were discontinued, but the Bolsheviks revived the Russian remnants of the Russian companies when they came to power.

The heightened international interest in the Arctic waters near Russia’s coast line influenced Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich (brother of Tsar Nicholas II) to go on an expedition in the mid-1880s to scout the economic worth of the region (Ibid., 22-23). However, he was unable to push the cash-strapped Tsarist government to fund the trip or to invest in other commercial enterprises in the Russian High North. Financier M.K. Sidorov more successfully promoted the economic prospects of the Russian Arctic. He used the wealth he gained from Siberian gold mines to promote northern economic development in the press and through open lectures, which “spread his ideas to the public” (Horensma 1991, pg. 7). However, most of the Russian citizenry was illiterate, so Sidorov’s work was more effective at getting the Russian government to work with him to deny access to other countries than to develop Russia’s own ability to develop the north.

A more influential motivation for developing the High North was the Tsarist government’s desire to connect the economy of European Russia with Eurasian Russia. Primarily, the Tsarist government wanted to supply slowly industrializing and urbanizing western Russia, and European markets, with excess wheat production and timber from Siberia. The Russians built the Trans-Siberian Railroad, in part, to do this. However, Russia’s deficient transportation infrastructure made this endeavor difficult and motivated the government to develop sea lanes north of its coast line to move supplies for the Trans-Siberian Railroad’s
construction (the sea lanes were later named the Northern Sea Route [NSR]). The Trans-Siberian Railroad also failed to transport the wheat in a timely manner, causing much of the wheat to rot before it reached its destination (Josephson 2014, pg. 29). This further motivated the Russian government to develop the NSR to supplement and serve as an alternative to the railroad. The Russian government installed radio stations in the Kara Sea and near Novaya Zemlya to promote the route (Horensma 1991, pg. 19). But, as was previously mentioned, difficult environmental conditions and Russia’s lagging industrial expertise kept Russia from developing the NSR more fully. As such, there were no successful Russian commercial trips on the NSR between 1902-1912 (Josephson 2014 pg. 29) and even the lone Norwegian company using the route stopped in 1916 (Horensma 1991, pg. 19).

The main reason for the Tsarist government’s lack of capability to develop the Arctic was Russia’s economic structure, which was largely based on rural farming. Even though Alexander II formally emancipated Russian serfs in 1861, they had difficulty escaping from feudal economic structures that were centuries old. Many of the former serfs became landless, illiterate, and discontented peasants, and many of their former feudal lords were frightened of losing their wealth and political power, which made it difficult for Russia to industrialize. This forced Russia, to its consternation, to rely on foreigners to develop the Russian north. In addition to the previously discussed Northeastern Siberian Company, the Siberian Railroad Company employed English ship captain Joseph Wiggins, who was, in turn, supported by a British syndicate, to bring rail for the Trans-Siberian Railroad by way of the NSR (Josephson 2014, pg. 25). Like the Americans in the NSC, Wiggins’s efforts were ultimately undermined by Russian economic nationalism.
Another way Russia addressed its industrial deficiency was by tapping into its relatively abundant and cheap labor. Despite emancipating the serfs in 1861, the Russian noble class and Russian state continued to own most of the land, and village elders continued to direct the employment of people in their families, meaning true labor liberalization was slow to enact. Elders, motivated by abject poverty, led bands of peasants to mines in the sub-Arctic taiga to earn a living. Far from civilization, the peasants were contracted under harsh terms into “company towns,” where labor was coercively extracted, and monetary compensation was minimal (Melancon 2006). In a parallel to Russian Arctic towns today, peasants found it difficult to return to their homes or to get out from their contracts when they wanted; many were stranded at the mines.

Additionally, in a move that would have long-term consequences for the Soviet Union’s eventual “conquest” of the Arctic, the Tsarist government expanded on the already institutionalized state exile system it used to settle and develop the Arctic. The exile system provided a solution to two of the Russian elites’ problems at the time. The first was what to do with people perceived to be dangerous to the Russian political elite’s hold on power. The number of these people increased with Russia’s economic woes and the 1905 revolts that were instigated by Russia’s disastrous war with Japan.

The second was how to populate and extract the potentially rich resources of thinly populated eastern and northern Russia (Applebaum 2003, pg. xxxi). While most of the over seven hundred thousand exiles, forced settlers, and their families between 1824 and 1889 (ibid., pg. xxxi) were sent to southern Siberia, those being punished severely for heinous crimes or for extreme political acts that threatened the Russian noble class were sent to the north (Armstrong 1965, pg. 81-82). Some of these were sent to Solovetsky Island, an isolated monastery in the
White Sea that would later become the Soviets’ first concentration camp for political prisoners in 1926 (MacFarquhar 2015). Others were sent to newly established gold mines like those in the northern Lena River basin that were jointly financed by the Russian ruling class and British capital. However, once exiled, many of the political prisoners were given a relatively large amount of freedom to congregate and travel.

Notably, the political prisoners at these northern sites included the future Soviet dictators Vladimir Lenin and Josef Stalin. Stalin was exiled multiple times in the sub-Arctic province of Vologda and to the small Arctic village of Kureika from 1913-1916. Stalin later reminisced about the harmonious, if tough, time he spent in Kureika (Montefiore 2007). Thousands of other political prisoners spent time in the sub-Arctic taiga of the remote Lena river basin and helped orchestrate a large strike there in 1912. The tsarist regime relied heavily on the mines to fund the state treasury and notable members of the noble class were personally invested in the mines. This motivated them to enforce harsh labor laws and forcibly put down the strike, killing over two hundred people, which further agitated public opinion against the tsarist regime (Melancon 2006). This event “irremediably damaged late tsarist state-society relations” and also weakened right-wing support for the government (Melancon 2006, pg. 152).

Political agitation increased until World War I, when the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution brought Russian agents to power, many of which previously honed their organizational and leadership skills in Arctic exile. Lenin, Stalin, and other Bolsheviks’ experiences in tsarist Arctic camps likely influenced them to reinvigorate and expand the Arctic exile system when they came to power. Like the tsarist regime before them, they too had many political opponents they wanted to get rid of and they too needed raw resources to modernize and industrialize their country. Similar to the tsars before them, and motivated by a socialist ideology, they legitimized Arctic
labor camps as a way to rehabilitate wayward individuals that had crossed the political elites. Bolshevik “class warfare” made rehabilitation through Siberian and Arctic exile even more palatable than it was under the previous tsarist regime it replaced.

Apart from establishing and maintaining a Russian presence in the region, exiles made some important contributions to Russia’s knowledge of the Russian north that eased the way for future economic expansion into the region during the late-tsarist era. For instance, exiled intellectuals from the Polish rebellion of the 1860s made important surveys of the geographical features and people of northern Russia (Armstrong 1965, pg. 84). However, most of the northern exiles did not prove to be adequate settlers and therefore had only a marginal role in expanding Russia’s hold over its Arctic territory in the short-term. Armstrong claims, “The exiles tended to drift into the gold mines, to which they were also in the main unsuited, and frequently ended as vagrants” (ibid., 85). Even so, the use of exiles during tsarist rule set the precedent for future Soviet attempts to do the same.

Like Russia, the United States also contemplated using its newly acquired and thinly populated northern territory of Alaska as a place to exile criminals, rationalizing the potential enterprise as a way of rehabilitating the criminal class and colonizing the underpopulated region. On February 10, 1874, California's legislature recommended, and then postponed, measures to create a penal colony in Alaska that attracted New Jersey legislators’ attention (Hinckley 1973, pg. 8, 12).

However, American public opinion, likely affected by the liberal and progressive turn in the country, ultimately was against the idea (ibid., pg. 9). Critics of the idea claimed that making Alaska a penal colony meant that American states like California and New Jersey would be shirking the moral responsibility of dealing with their own social ills by unfairly transporting
these problems to Alaska (ibid., pgs. 9, 15). Additionally, it appeared to many Americans that liberalizing Russia appeared likely to end its system of using Siberia as a prison after the Alaskan Purchase, which would make the United States look less enlightened by comparison (ibid., pg. 11). When Russia turned back to authoritarianism towards the end of the century, prominent American critics went on the attack. Former Russophile, George Kennan, wrote the influential book *Siberia and the Exile System* (1891). His subsequent lecture circuit across America, based on his visits to Siberian penal colonies, reached a wide audience and soured Americans on the idea of forming a similar penal system in Alaska. It also soured many Americans on Russia itself and diminished the previously warm Russian-American relationship that bound the two countries together.

British-American journalist Edmund Nobel was also highly critical of the idea of turning the American Arctic into a penal colony. In 1887, Nobel emphatically made this argument:

> “You ask that America shall stretch out the blood-stained hand of a new slavery to our human brethren in the West that two territories, the homes of the Anglo Saxon American and of the Russian Slav, shall kiss each other beneath the sea, not with the salute of countries pledged to universal freedom, but with the greeting of territories alike cursed with the evils of convict servitude and punitive exile. The heart revolts against such a project the reason condemns it. No! There will be no American Siberia!”

Ultimately, the United States decided against populating their northern territory with convicts and instead relied mainly on market forces and individual free will to develop the
region. This contrast with Russia had profound and long-lasting effects on the differing Arctic development trajectories of the two countries.

A final influence that pushed Russia economically into the Arctic again at the turn of the twentieth century was its reliance on natural resources, another parallel with the Russian government of today. The Tsarist government, and the provisional and revolutionary governments that followed it, relied overwhelmingly on resource rents. To catch up economically with its neighbors, Russia also needed resources to industrialize and to trade with other countries for hard currency to buy machinery it could not manufacture itself (Horensma 1991). Due to droughts and a growing population, the wheat Russia formerly used for hard currency was increasingly consumed domestically, forcing it to look to the Arctic for export substitutes for the wheat. Unlike the United States, there were no significant market institutions or environmental groups that could constrain Russia from this endeavor (Weiner 1999). On the contrary, the Arctic was increasingly perceived as a region that needed to be developed and economically conquered by Russians to achieve their deserved place in the world order.

Overall, Russia lacked America’s material capability to exploit the Arctic during this timeframe, but it did have the willingness and the domestic institutional capability to do so as World War I approached. The authoritative and coercive political and economic institutions that deepened within Russia enabled it to subsequently assert itself economically in the Arctic in ways that the contrasting American political and economic institutions proved incapable and unwilling to emulate.

4. Identity

4.1 American Identity
It is significant to note that America’s august polar adventurers and its military actions in the Russian Arctic during and prior to World War I are still largely unknown to the American populace. Unlike other countries, who utilized polar exploits conducted by their citizens during this transformative time to develop a narrative of their countries as “polar countries” and to justify sovereignty claims, the region has been peripheral to America’s consciousness.

The American government appreciated its citizens’ polar exploits during this timeframe, because they brought prestige to the country; however, it also did not use these exploits to claim territory or establish a polar identity. This contrasted greatly with other Arctic littoral states. While President Harrison downplayed Robert Peary’s expedition to the North Pole, Norway internalized the exploits of Roald Admunsen, Fridtjof Nansen, and Harald Sverdrup to constitute themselves as a polar country “of adventurous, bold explorers on cross-country skis” (Jensen 2017, pg. 138). Canadians expropriated the conquests of their former colonial patrons, the British, to seize an Arctic identity and legitimize claims to Arctic territory in North America that they neither discovered nor occupied themselves.

Similarly, while the Bolsheviks celebrated America’s retreat from the Russian Arctic at the end of World War I, President Wilson downplayed the occupation, and the American populace quickly forgot about the event. Underlining this spatial and historical amnesia, during the Cold War, American presidents Nixon and Reagan erringly proclaimed that America never fought in Russia. In contrast, Soviet children were taught about the successful discharge of American Arctic occupiers by the Bolsheviks at the end of World War I at their schools, heightening the Soviet populace’s attachment to the Arctic.

Even the Klondike gold rush that included tens of thousands of Americans has receded in American memory, while it has remained a prominent event for Canadian identity. Ultimately,
America’s domestic and global interests eclipsed any fleeting interest the country might have had in the Arctic, and American Arctic explorers quickly transitioned to exploring the Antarctic. To most Americans, including the ones that fought the Bolsheviks in Murmansk and those that set out and then retreated from the Klondike, the Arctic was a cold and desolate place not worth fighting over. This meant that America almost imperceptibly and unconsciously allowed not only Russia, but also its future NATO allies of Canada, Norway, and Denmark, to assume a greater ideational attachment to the Arctic than themselves. This ideational attachment would motivate these countries to restrain American presence in the Arctic.

Notably, Canada seized on America’s neglect of the Arctic to make the north a part of their national psyche and a geographic differentiator between themselves and America as well as a unifier between their own conflicting Anglo and French populations. In 1908, prominent Canadian lawyer Robert Stanley Weir wrote the popular hymn that would become the nation’s anthem in 1980. It proudly proclaimed Canada was “the True North strong and free.” In doing so, Weir and Canada appropriated the North American Arctic for themselves, effectively making the United States an Arctic alien despite its possession of Alaska and the unrivalled exploits of its polar explorers until that time.

4.2 Russian Identity

In contrast to the United States, Russia had very few accomplishments that could serve to wed them to the Arctic during this era of discovery. It lagged behind the Americans, and many other European countries, in exploration and exploitation of the Arctic. However, Bolshevik social entrepreneurs quickly used the Allied occupation of the Russian northwest during the
Russian Revolution to ultimately attach the Russian psyche to the region more thoroughly and deeply than the Arctic has ever been attached to the American psyche.

The Bolsheviks successfully propagandized the Allied occupation of Murmansk as a hostile capitalist takeover. This propaganda helped them enlist northern recruits that allowed the Soviets to mount an offensive against the Allied troops in Murmansk. The success of this insurgency, in turn, influenced President Wilson to bring American troops home in 1919 (Lee 2011). The Bolsheviks initial Arctic propaganda success was taught in Soviet schools thereafter to extol the strength of the Soviet state and warn against the imperialistic nature of the capitalist West (Fussell 2010). According to this narrative, the Soviet-Russians had out-endured their capitalist enemies in the Arctic due to their superior strength and ability to endure physical hardship, which proved a valuable selling point for the newly installed Bolshevik regime that desperately needed legitimacy at the time. In doing so, the Arctic became an influential prop for shaping the Soviets’ new “imagined community” (Anderson 2006) – a “Red Arctic” (McCannon 1998) image that would gain momentum as the Bolsheviks solidified their hold over Russia.

5. Environmentalism

5.1 American Environmentalism

The growing value Americans placed on conserving natural resources in the nineteenth century further hindered American willingness to develop the Arctic and created a shared conception amongst many American elites that the Arctic was a place that should be preserved in its primitive wilderness state. This occurrence created another divergence between American and Russian constructs of the Arctic that ultimately affected their relative willingness to push their respective presence into the Arctic in ways that belied their relative material strength to do so.
The American Arctic environmental movement was spurred by multiple influences. The first, and debatably most important, was America’s growing recognition that Canada had legitimate sovereignty over most of North America’s territory north of the forty-ninth parallel. This recognition meant that Alaska now had a special place in the American consciousness as America’s “last frontier” and “last wilderness.” Furthermore, there was a significant backlash against both American industrialization and the industrial magnates who looked to extract resources in Alaska. Finally, the overwhelming federal and economic neglect of Alaska in the decades after the Alaska Purchase led many people to recognize Alaska for its “beauty without utility” (Heacox 2014, pg. 12) – even though most of them had never personally visited the region.

The growing value placed on natural resource conservation and wilderness protection in Alaska coincided with a growing American realization of the importance of America’s dwindling frontier. The eminent American historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, wrote “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” and presented it at the World Exposition in Chicago in 1893 to high acclaim. The Turner monograph highlighted the frontier’s special role in America’s exceptional development, especially in the development of American democracy and individualism. One of the conclusions of the Turner thesis was that America may lose its exceptionalism and its vitality if it no longer had a significant frontier for its citizens to explore. As such, Alaska became significant to American nationalists who wanted to preserve America’s frontier spirit and influenced them to protect this “last frontier” from permanent development. These nationalists included elite and highly influential progressive politicians like President Roosevelt, who used his position to institutionally preserve Alaskan resources and territory from human civilization. Roosevelt saw Alaska “as a primitive wilderness, full of game, with waters
teeming with fish without end, serving as a long-term salve to the inherent rottenness of industrialization” (Brinkley 2012, pgs. 36-37).

Historian David Brinkley describes naturalist William Dall as another embodiment of the environmental movement that inspired Roosevelt. According to Brinkley (2012, pg. 34), Dall believed Alaska represented the “ecological, moral, scientific, and spiritual values that would help preserve the [American] frontier spirit if properly managed by the federal government.” Dall successfully lobbied the federal government to limit and regulate extractive industrial activity in Alaska so that it could be “sensibly developed” (Brinkley 2012, pg. 33).

John Muir, future leader of the Sierra Club, was likely the most important promoter of Alaskan preservation, however, because of his abilities to network with American elites. He was a naturalist, a frontiersman, and a wilderness promoter who preached his theologically toned wilderness ideas in popular American media. Significantly, he was one of the first Americans to explore as far north as Wrangel Island, searching for the remains of the U.S.S. Jeanette from 1879-1881 which gave him notoriety and legitimacy (Muir 1921). With Canadian independence and unification, it was becoming clear to Muir that Alaska was the “last frontier” of intact wilderness area that the United States would possess in North America. As such, he looked to preserve as much of this territory as possible in its “pristine” state and spurred the first wilderness tourism into the state at the turn of the century.

He added to the growing body of popular American transcendentalist literature that expressed appreciation for wild nature, first popularly expressed by Thoreau and Emerson in the 1850s. He found a willing audience with a growing American population who had "misgivings about the social, psychological, and environmental effects of the Industrial Revolution" (Kaye 2006, pgs. 8-9). More importantly, Muir’s writing connected him with influential economic and
political elites like Roosevelt, Robert Underwood Johnson, Edward Harriman, John Burroughs, and George Bird Grinnell. Through, and with, these important intermediaries, he institutionalized his vision of a wild and pristine High North in the American consciousness (Heacox 2014, pg. 64, 108).

The Bering Sea Fur Seal dispute and the Klondike Gold Rush initiated hostile reactions from these increasingly influential quarters of the American populace who came to believe that Alaska’s resources should be institutionally protected by the American government and should remain as much as possible in its “pristine” state. The following passage by Treasury Department officer Henry W. Elliott (1907, pg. 436), when analyzing the difference between the fate of the North American Buffalo and the Bering Sea Fur Seal, is indicative of this belief and the exceptionalism of the High North in American thought:

"If that immense fur-seal herd of 1874 had been in the path of commerce, or blocking the settlement of a new domain, or in the way of railroads or mines and mining, then by the law of our civilization it could not by any reason be suffered to exist. But, it was not so standing: it was confined, by its natural order of life, to a small area of worthless rock and land, and to a desolate waste of sea and ocean. It fed chiefly upon small pelagic fishes that man never has captured, and never will. The buffalo did block the settlement of a new domain; it had to go; there was no alternative. But the case of the fur-seal of Alaska is just the reverse; it should not be abused by us, since, if it were rightly treated, it would live
and endure forever, to the great annual gain and good of all mankind.”

Significantly, because of his position in the American government, Elliot was able to effectively influence American policy and restrain American business interests in the Pribilof Islands where the seals resided. In 1889, the United States Treasury Department sent Elliot to ascertain the status of the seal rookeries. His report indicated that the rookeries were being decimated, which led the Treasury Department to order the North American Commercial Company (NACC) to halt sealing in 1890. President Harrison, moved by Elliot’s report, also called on the Canadians and Americans to cease all sealing on land and at sea in 1891 (Campbell 1963, pg. 404-405).

However, the NACC, with whom Harrison and his Secretary of State, Blaine, had strong economic ties, pressured Harrison and Blaine to secretly reverse their decision, and they gave the NACC secret permission to continue hunting (ibid., 405). Not to be deterred, when Elliot found out about the special permit, he conferred with British Foreign Secretary, Julian Pauncefote, who pressured the Americans to stop sealing operations. Elliot also outed the Harrison government in the New York Evening Post and the Cleveland Leader and Morning Herald, where his articles highlighted the decimation of the fur seal population and the Harrison administration’s duplicitous efforts to keep sealing going (ibid., pgs. 410-411).

Public pressure from these revelations pushed Harrison to backpedal a second time and revoke the special permits his administration had given the NACC (ibid., pg. 411). British Prime Minister Salisbury reciprocated by prohibiting Canadian sealing in the Bering Sea in 1891 (ibid., pg. 411). In effect, Elliot had used the relatively open government institutions and media of the
United States, Canada, and Great Britain to restrict extractive operations in the High North for the first time.

John Muir also utilized these open institutions to restrain the resource extraction that proceeded the Klondike Gold Rush in Alaska. He equated the rushers with “a nest of ants taken into a strange country and stirred up by a stick” (qtd. in Berton 1972, pg. 137). Muir feared that the resource extractors would treat Alaska like they had California, "ravaging streams and mountainsides, poisoning water, and bringing out the worst in men" (Heacox 2014, pg. 131). Shortly thereafter, in 1905, the United States formed the National Forest Service, an idea of Roosevelt’s Boone and Crockett Club, which stewarded land that had been removed from the public domain by the Forestry Act of 1891 and provided the first example of the American government’s willingness to institutionally protect previously untouched American resources.

Between 1906 and 1913, the American government protected Alaskan coal, oil, and timber resources from extraction through executive order, federal regulation, and Congressional legislation (Naske 1973, pg. 62), making it much more difficult for companies to extract these resources and setting an important precedent for the environmental movement. In 1909, former chief of the National Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot, moved quickly to stem what he perceived was the anti-conservationist movement in the newly installed Taft Administration’s Department of Interior, under Richard Ballinger. Pinchot was a friend and mentee of both President Roosevelt and John Muir (Miller 2001, pg. 136).

The following “Ballinger-Pinchot Affair” centered on whether Ballinger had aided the powerful Guggenheim-Morgan syndicate to obtain resource rights to Alaskan coal fields that were stewarded by the Department of the Interior (Ganoe 1934; Miller 2001, pgs. 209-210). The “Affair” gained national attention through Pinchot’s use of the media and his affiliation with
Congressional representatives who held hearings on the matter and read them into the Congressional Record. The affair ultimately led President Roosevelt to attempt to “remove all Alaskan lands from potential coal claims” (Capelotti 2005, pg. 391).

The reclamation of Alaskan coal lands forced other resource extraction companies to expensively import coal from Canada and the contiguous United States to fuel their operations, which stunted incipient resource extraction and infrastructure projects in the Alaskan interior and destroyed the settlement prospects of planned southern Alaskan port towns (Miller 2001, pgs. 206-207). Angry residents of Cordova, Alaska, symbolically dumped three hundred tons of Canadian coal into the water and set effigies of Pinchot alight, but were unable to get the American government to change its mind (Miller 2001, pg. 218).

Although Ballinger was eventually recused, the “Affair” split the Republican Party that Roosevelt and Taft were both in at the time and set the stage for future attempts by segments of the American citizenry to institutionally preserve Alaskan land in its primitive state. Because of this small, but growing and very influential, bunch of wilderness believers, historian David Brinkley (2012, pg. 21) notes there was a domestic battle on against “those who wanted to extract wealth from minerals, salmon, glacier ice, timber, and later, oil" from Alaska. There was also a contested construct of what Alaska and the Arctic should mean to the United States. This contested construct contributed to government gridlock on Alaskan affairs between those who wanted to extract resources and those who wanted to keep Alaska “pristine.” This gridlock diminished America’s potential governmental and economic expansion into the region after the Klondike Gold Rush (Nichols 1924), especially in comparison with subsequent decisive actions by Russia to “conquer” the Arctic and extract its resources. In parallels to the development of
contemporary American Arctic policy, this government gridlock also hampered decisive American decision making regarding the Arctic.

5.2 Russian Environmentalism

There were elements of Russian environmentalism that mirrored American environmentalism at the turn of the twentieth century, especially in western Russia, which was influenced by a burgeoning German environmental movement at the time (Weiner 1999). However, Russian circumstances differed greatly from the United States in many respects, which kept environmentalism from becoming an influential element in subsequent Soviet Arctic policy-making calculus.

First, Russia was a late industrializer, and most of its citizens were impoverished peasants who lived off the land. As such, there was little anti-industrial or anti-modernism sentiment that could give rise to calls for environmental preservation in the Russian Arctic. In contrast, the Bolsheviks who took power after the Russian Revolution looked to quicken Russian industrialization and modernization - especially in the Arctic (Bassin 1992).

Second, unlike the United States, Russia had a vast amount of wilderness remaining, so there was little push to keep the Arctic “pristine.” In fact, the vast expanses of the Russian Arctic increasingly were perceived by the Russian government as a physical obstacle that needed to be overcome to ensure the country’s growth, prosperity, and greatness (Bassin 1992; Bassin 1993).

Third, in comparison to American institutions, the Russian government did not allow significant political openings for social entrepreneurs like Elliot, Muir, and Dall to direct romantic notions of a “pristine” Arctic into actual policy-making (Weiner 1999). Ultimately, this meant environmentalism played a very insignificant role in constructing Russia’s perception of
the Arctic and did nothing to restrain Russia from asserting a forceful physical presence in the
Arctic before or after World War I.

6. Native Rights

6.1 American Native Rights

Americans entered their relationship with the Alaskan natives under a paradoxical political construction that can best be described as contested sovereignty (see Strang 1996). On one hand, the natives were not provided a negotiating role during the Alaskan Purchase and so their ability to influence American policy towards the region was noticeably muted from the very beginning. In this respect, the United States took over from Russia, and the natives continued their role as a conquered and inconsequential people in Alaskan political life.

This subordinate role was exacerbated by the natives’ relative dearth of material power and very limited understanding of American legal and political institutions. On the other hand, the Treaty of Cessation that concluded the sale of Alaska provided natives a significant degree of de jure property rights and autonomy to self-govern that Russia did not provide its Arctic natives. The inclusion of these rights into the treaty was inspired by evolving American law towards natives that had gradually progressed since colonial times to give natives more rights to maintain territory and sovereignty (Korsmo 1994, pg. 93). There was also generally a greater sympathy for natives within the American population than there was in Russia. Eventually, the law and this sympathy would provide Alaskan native groups a degree of self-determination that would mark its divergence from Russian Arctic native policy and complicate the American government’s ability to govern millions of acres of northern Alaska.

That being said, initial American rule in Alaska was mostly neglectful and adversarial towards native interests. At the time of the Alaskan Purchase, the United States was fighting a
series of Indian Wars in its western territories. This caused it to predominantly regard the Alaskan natives as potential adversaries. This explains why the United States initially put a military commander in charge of Alaska (Hensley 2017). But the American government was also unwilling to expend much effort or resources towards occupying Alaska. This explains why the American force was mostly symbolic due to its small size and limited geographic reach.

In a carryover from Russian rule, initial American presence concentrated in Alaska’s southern islands and river basins (Schneider 2017, pg. 80) and was almost non-existent in northern Alaska and the Alaskan interior. Under Russian occupation, the Alaskan native population had declined precipitously. The Russians “ruled over the native populations in their areas with an iron hand, taking children of the leaders as hostages, destroying kayaks and other hunting equipment to control the men and showing extreme force when necessary” (Hensley 2017). According to Alaskan historian and native rights activist, William Hensley, this cruel treatment, disease, and violence caused the Alaskan native population to decrease from over one hundred thousand in 1741, when the Russians first occupied Alaska, to less than thirty-three thousand when America took over (See Table 1). In the Aleutians, where Russian activity was highest, the population plummeted from seventeen thousand to approximately fifteen hundred people (Hensley 2017). Even the Inupiat population of northern Alaska suffered under Russian and American rule and decreased from twenty-nine hundred people in 1840 to approximately one thousand in 1918 (Bodenhorn 2000, pg. 131).

Initially, American rule was less institutionally harsh than its Russian counterpart, but its ultimate results were similar to what the natives underwent under Russian rule. Commercial interests encroached on traditional native hunting land and waters in southern Alaska to extract timber, fish, sea mammals, and minerals (Schneider 2017, pg. 81). Commercial interests also
enmeshed southern Alaska natives in extractive resource enterprises that depleted the very resources on which the natives formally subsisted, leaving them dependent and vulnerable. At the same time, the natives were exposed to new diseases and easy access to alcohol. This brutal mixture decimated the ranks of some tribes (Jordan 1898) and native population numbers noticeably declined under American rule (See Figure 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Native</th>
<th>Non-Native</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>33,426</td>
<td>32,996</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>32,052</td>
<td>27,642</td>
<td>4,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>63,592</td>
<td>32,931</td>
<td>30,661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>63,356</td>
<td>27,747</td>
<td>35,609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>55,036</td>
<td>27,025</td>
<td>28,011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 6: Native Alaska Population from 1880 to 1920. Source: Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Addition, Volume I: Population (2006)*

Although the American government’s approach to the Alaska natives can be categorized as neglectful, like other imperial efforts (Hobson 2005) around the world at the same time, American religious missionaries quickly moved into the governmental vacuum to drive America’s native policy. Paradoxically, the missionaries attempted to both assimilate and segregate the natives in order to protect them from the harmful effects of western civilization, while forcing them to merge with America’s dominant political, social, and economic institutions.

In the assimilation mold, American missionaries worked with the federal government’s Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to “eradicate indigenous languages, religion, art, music, dance,
cereemonies and lifestyles” (Hensley 2017). Unable to gain sufficient federal attention or federal appropriations for their work, however, many of the missionaries also obtained local political office to aid their efforts. For instance, a Presbyterian missionary, John G. Brady, was elected Alaskan governor and another Presbyterian missionary, Sheldon Jackson, was made the General Agent of Education in the 1880s (Lazell 1960). Using these offices, the missionaries pushed natives into boarding schools where the natives were immersed in American culture and language. This weakened the natives’ ties to their tribes and their former way of life (Easley 2005). However, missionaries also paradoxically helped the natives maintain some separation and protection from the incomers and helped them maintain a measure of self-determination that was not paralleled in northern Russia. Many of the Alaskan missionaries, and other influential Americans, had a growing sympathy for the native way of life.

This sympathy was influenced by popular American Romantic movement authors like James Fenimore Cooper who extolled the virtue of natives, the shame some Americans came to feel in regards to the harsh treatment towards natives in the “winning of the West,” and the traditional value for self-determination that was institutionalized in many of America’s founding documents. Elements of these feelings were underlined by prominent American historian William Bancroft. In 1886, he wrote, “The [Alaskan native] discontent arose, not from any antagonism to the Americans, but from the fact that the territory had been sold without their consent; and that they had received none of the proceeds of the sale. The Russians, they agreed had been allowed to occupy the territory partly for mutual benefit, but their forefathers had dwelt in Alaska long before any white man had set foot in America. What had not the seven and a half million dollars been paid to them instead of the Russians?” (qtd. in Hensley 1966).
The sympathy also came from the leading voice of the growing American environmental movement, John Muir. He extolled the virtue of the “noble native” Chukchis of Alaska, whom he believed were being ruined by American civilization when he visited them during the U.S.S. Jeannette affair. He claimed they were “better behaved then most white men, and not half so greedy, shameless, or dishonest” (qtd. in Sides 2014, pg. 217). This initial contact between the naturalist and the native would portend future attempts by influential American environmentalists to work with, and for, Arctic natives to limit America’s physical presence in the Arctic.

American sympathy for the natives was also reflected in American law. Eminent Supreme Court Justice Marshall established Indian Laws in the early nineteenth century that eventually were extended to natives in Alaska. The natives that survived the early years of American rule eventually learned to work within American law and the American political system – often with the help of American missionaries. The natives developed networks with influential and sympathetic Americans that allowed them to gain a measure of self-determination that Russian natives could not duplicate in their own Arctic territory. The Alaskan Native Brotherhood, an example of this, was established in 1912 and worked with Alaskan politicians like Alaskan Congressional delegate, James Wickersham, to gain formal American citizenship, compensation, and land claims (Schneider 2017, pg. 81). Wickersham also protected native rights to land being encroached upon by miners in the interior during the Klondike Gold Rush and, with the natives’ urges, worked to attain schools for native children and ensured natives received substantial contracts with American business interests operating in Alaska (Schneider 2017 pg. 84, 86).
These efforts were eventually institutionalized when incoming Americans demands for increased home rule were met with the First Organic Act of 1884. This legislation provided natives a degree of formal legal claim to territory in Alaska. It stated, “Indians or other persons in said district [Alaska] shall not be disturbed in the possession of any lands actually in their use or occupation or now claimed by them, but the terms under which such persons may acquire title to such lands is reserved for future legislation by Congress.”

This initial legislation was later expanded and solidified. In 1905, in the case of United States vs. Cadzow, the American judicial system ruled that, “The aboriginal tribes of Alaska have a right to occupy the public lands of the United States therein subject to the control of both lands and the tribes by the United States.” Similarly, the 1906 Native Allotment Act (United States Congress) specified that the American government was “to allot not to exceed 160 acres of vacant, unappropriated, and unreserved nonmineral land in Alaska…to any Indian, Aleut, or Eskimo of full or mixed blood who resides in and is the head of a family, or is twenty-one years of age.” While Schneider (2017, pg. 85) suggests that the Allotment Act was designed to break down native tribal allegiances and assimilate natives into American property practices, it also ensured that they had rights to property that would be protected by the federal government. Many natives did not understand the language, or the law, and had limited cultural proclivity to obtain private property at the time, which resulted in less than four hundred allotments being given to them (Hensley 1966). However, the legislation also set a precedent that allowed natives to protect their access and ownership of land when it was later encroached upon by American business interests and American government agencies.

Ultimately, many Alaskan native groups were heavily influenced by American expansion into Alaska in the decades after the Alaskan Purchase, but not dominated to the same degree that
Russian natives were at this critical juncture. This was especially the case in northern and interior Alaska, which was insulated from outside control by its geographic austerity. Significantly, American Alaskan natives were able to regroup and find their own voice within America’s relatively progressive and open political system at the beginning of the twentieth century. As such, Hensley claims that “Alaskans, Natives, and Americans of the lower 48 – should salute Secretary of State William H. Seward, the man who eventually brought democracy and the rule of law to Alaska” (Hensley 2017). Arctic scholars should also recognize that democracy and the rule of law have allowed Alaskan natives the ability to restrain America from expanding its Arctic sphere of influence in a way that is not paralleled in Russia.

6.2 Russian Native Rights

The Russian institutions that affected Russia’s northern natives were deeply rooted historically by the time of the Alaskan Purchase, making it difficult to change their course even with the liberal leadership of Alexander II, who sold Alaska to the United States partly because he abhorred the way the Russian American Company treated the natives (see Chapter 1). Alexander II’s father, Emperor Alexander I, established a Code of Indigenous Administration in 1822 that nominally gave natives the same rights as Russian colonizers and protected their culture. This code was improved upon with the 1892 “Statute of the Indigenous Peoples.” But, in practicality, the natives’ rights were “practically nil” (Vakhtin 1994, pg. 38).

Instead, Russian northern government administrators and traders used superior military strength, hostage-taking, sugar, tobacco, alcohol, and infectious disease to pacify and dominate the natives, forcing them to pay tribute with furs. Russian trappers often took natives as wives and forced them to take on Russian customs (Slezkine 1996, pg. 44). While native groups living on the tundra maintained their access to land and reindeer, other northern native groups lost their
fishing and hunting grounds to Russian colonizers and were forced further north and east to
 evade the oncoming Russians (Vakhtin 1994, pgs. 37-38).

There were some Russian equivalents to James Fenimore Cooper, like the Siberian
Regionalism school (Vakhtin 1994, pg. 38), but Romantic Russian intelligentsia were ultimately
attracted to the “peasants in southern Russia more than they were the northern indigenous
groups, and it was widely believed that all northern people would eventually be Russified
(Slezkine 1996, pg. 75).” This explains why the Russian government neglected to even track the
different tribes and population sizes of northern native groups before the Bolshevik Revolution.

The Russian Orthodox Church, like its missionary Christian brethren in Alaska, was also
an agent that attempted to acculturate and protect native groups in the Russian High North from
harmful western influences. But the Russian Orthodox Church was also a formal institution of
the Russian government, unlike the American missionary groups. As such, the Russian Orthodox
Church attempted to make Christians and Russian citizens out of the natives, which did not
provide them any measure of self-determination or self-governance (Slezkine 1996, pgs. 43, 49).
The Russians considered the obedience of the northern conquered people to be a matter of
international prestige (Slezkine 1996, pg. 60).

Overall, by the Bolshevik Revolution, Russia’s Arctic natives were much more subsumed
by the Russian culture and government than Alaskan natives were. They also lacked the
institutionalized legal protection and measures of self-determination that existed for Alaskan
natives. Only the natives’ nomadic lifestyle, their distance from Russian political power, and the
decline of the fur trade kept them from being completely subsumed into the domineering Russian
political system. None of these restraining factors, however, would keep the Bolsheviks from
extending Russian government reach and power over northern natives’ lives in the decades that
followed. Unlike in the United States, there was no “contested sovereignty” in the Russian Arctic that could constrain Russia’s expanding colonization of the region. Instead, the Russian governing institutions were set to intensify their domination of northern indigenous populations in the decades that followed.

7. Path Dependence

Ultimately, the Arctic was peripheral to the overall global concerns and ambitions of both the United States and Russia during most of this timeframe. However, by the end of its Revolution, and despite lacking the relative physical wherewithal, Russia was primed to assert itself in the Arctic. Geopolitically, it was forced to divert its relatively weak organizational and material strength to build Arctic-specific capabilities and presence or give up pretenses to Great Power status. Politically and economically, autocratic institutions solidified that would allow Soviet Russia to expand into the Arctic in a way that the more market-based and individualistic American institutions were incapable and unwilling to match. Finally, the Bolshevik government-initiated efforts during the Russian Revolution to construct the Arctic as an important part of the Soviet identity to legitimize the domestic power they coercively grabbed. This construct made it easier for the Soviets to legitimize their subsequent attempts to “conquer” the Arctic and to expand the Soviet sphere of influence into the Arctic in the decades that followed.

In contrast to Russia, the United States was not forced to protect itself in the Arctic or to project power outward through the Arctic. In fact, the United States consistently neglected the Arctic and allowed materially weaker countries to push it from expanding its sphere of influence in the Arctic because it felt relatively secure and had the ability to expand its influence into other areas that were more strategic than the Arctic. In the end, the region was not critical enough to
American interests to forcefully exert itself. Politically and economically, American institutions also restrained the United States from turning its latent material wealth into an overwhelming presence in the Arctic. In many respects, Alaska was treated like a colony by the federal government. But, unlike most other colonial enterprises of the time, the United States was unable and unwilling to coerce people to deal with the high costs and difficult climatic conditions to settle and exploit the Arctic and also lacked the willingness to thoroughly assimilate the native tribes and expropriate native lands. Even when high commodity prices pushed American businesses interests into the Arctic, the United States was willing to compromise with neighboring countries so that it could focus on larger international or domestic concerns. Environmentalists also seized on Alaska’s place as America’s “last frontier” and “last wilderness” to increase the transaction cost of resource extraction that would have increased American presence in the Arctic.

These influences, and Alaska’s geographic dislocation from the United States – something Canada rationally and consistently acted to sustain as it consolidated its hold over most of the North American Arctic – meant that the Arctic meant relatively little to the United States’ populace and government. This was the case despite daring American expeditions that discovered new Arctic territory, including the symbolic North Pole, for the first time.

Ultimately, Russia had the will to establish itself in the Arctic but largely lacked the organizational and material means to do so. In contrast, the United States lacked the will to establish itself in the Arctic even though it had the material means to do so. In the decades that followed, the Soviets would gain the organizational and material means to establish a sphere of influence in the Arctic that the United States would still be unwilling to match – even as the two countries became global rivals.
Chapter 3: The Bolshevik Revolution to World War II (1919-1939)

1. Introduction

The Russian Revolution was a critical juncture that changed the dynamics of the world and set Russia on a path that continues to deeply influence Russia’s capability and willingness to expand its sphere of influence in the Arctic today. The highly contingent victory of the Bolsheviks greatly affected Soviet Russia’s international relations and economic institutions. Stalin, who rose to power in 1929, especially motivated the Soviet Union to “conquer” the Arctic in ways that its other Arctic neighbors were unwilling and incapable of matching. In contrast, the United States’ economic institutions and geopolitical situation contributed to its continued neglect of the Arctic.

2. Geopolitics

2.1 Soviet Geopolitics:

World War I again taught Russia that its lack of access to warm-water ports was a serious weakness that made it vulnerable to foreign aggression and unable to project power outwards. Even so, Russia’s immense amount of available manpower and natural resources made it a potential adversary for other European countries. These assets also made it a potential ally for Great Powers like England, France, and Germany in the continued balance-of-power construction of Eurasian politics that dominated the interwar period.

When the Bolsheviks came to power after World War I, they slowly overcame their post-war weakness to address the geopolitical deficiencies that the 1905 Russo-Japanese War and World War I exposed. With Japan and Germany on both sides of it, threatening its access to the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Soviet Union moved to develop its Arctic transportation infrastructure to ensure its access to the oceans and its own far-flung Eurasian territory,
especially after Germany and Japan militarized and expanded their borders in the 1930s (Smolka 1938).

Nevertheless, the catastrophic human losses that occurred during World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution left the Soviet Union, like most of Europe, temporarily weak. This meant that its sphere of influence further diminished in East Asia after World War I, where a resurgent China and Japan rivaled it. In Europe, prospects were brighter. Germany no longer posed an immediate threat to Russia and the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires were dismantled. However, the Soviets were forced to relinquish Finland, the Baltic States, and Poland to nationalists because they barely had the power to hold onto Russia.

This loss of territory near its most important cities threatened the Soviet Union’s access to the Baltic Sea and heightened its apprehension of being attacked through Scandinavia and northeastern Europe. These fears grew when France constructed a “cordon sanitaire” to keep Soviet Communism from spreading into Europe after World War I (Wuorinen 1963, Loc. 668). As the 1930s progressed, the Soviets feared that potential adversaries would ally with each other to further weaken Russia. In the Arctic, Russia specifically feared Germany or Great Britain would ally itself with Finland and attack the Soviet Union through the Baltic Sea (Wuorinen 1963, Loc. 794; Molotov 1940).

These Soviet fears were underlined by Germany’s support for Finland’s independence efforts during World War I and Great Britain’s strong economic ties with Finland before and after the war. This caused the Soviets to more assertively attempt to influence the foreign policy of their neighbors on the Baltic Sea (Lewallen 2010, pg. 3). Finland attempted to ease Soviet fears by claiming formal neutrality and worked intently within the multilateral framework of the League of Nations, and a nascent Scandinavian Bloc, to push for peaceful resolution of regional
disagreements with the Soviets. But these actions did not sufficiently soothe the revisionist and insecure Soviets.

Despite its material weakness after the war, Soviet Communism was attractive to industrializing and urbanizing citizens of Western Europe. This allowed the Soviet Union to wield a significant dose of “soft power” that greatly enhanced the material power it lacked. Once Lenin and his Bolshevik cabal successfully consolidated domestic power in Russia, it attempted to spread Communism quickly across Europe (Service 1997, pg. 48). This made the Soviets instant adversaries of the capitalist countries with which they were previously allied and contributed to France’s construction of the *cordon sanitaire* and the Allies’ occupation of northwestern Russia that was described in the previous chapter.

Consequently, many Western European states as well as the United States did not even officially recognize the Soviets as the legitimate leaders of the newly established Soviet Union that replaced Russia after World War I. It is unlikely that the relationship between the Soviet Union and these countries would have been as bad if the more moderate socialists, liberals, nationalists, or monarchists that competed for power during the Russian Civil War had come out ahead. As it stood, the contingent victory of the Bolsheviks negatively affected its relations with other European countries and the United States and motivated the Soviets to increase their power to operate in the Arctic.

After consolidating domestic power, the Soviets attempted to relieve their geopolitical anxiety. They sent Soviet military forces westward to gain access to the Baltic Sea and “create a Red Bridge to Europe -- particularly Germany -- which [Lenin] was certain was ripe for Communist revolution” (Heatherington 2012). Poland, the first road block, was internationally isolated and technologically backward like the Soviet Union. It had only one soldier for every
five Soviet soldiers. The Soviets quickly pushed the Poles back, which encouraged Soviet generals to take even more territory (Fiddick 1973). However, Soviet military operations went awry when Polish General, Joseph Pilsudski, successfully, and surprisingly, stopped the Russians short of Warsaw. As historian Peter Heatherington (2012) asserts, “by inflicting a clear-cut, overwhelming military defeat on the Red Army, the Poles not only prevented the Soviets from physically invading Central Europe, but destroyed their aura of invincibility, and hence, the intoxicating appeal of inevitability” of the spread of Communism. The Soviet army also was defeated in Estonia, leading to the Treaty of Tartu which established formal borders between it, the Baltic states, and Finland in 1920 (Sliwa 2010).

These treaties again severely restricted USSR access to the Baltic Sea and forced it to focus inward, and to rely more fully on the ideological appeal of Communism versus its material power, to achieve its expansive territorial goals. In Finland, they did this by assisting local Bolsheviks who attempted to seize power through a “red revolt.” However, the Finnish Communist insurgents were put down by an “equally drastic white terror” that decimated the Finnish Communist Party, causing its leader, Otto Kuusinen, and other notable Finnish Communists to seek refuge in Soviet Russia (Kaljarvi 1948, pg. 212). Finland then established an anti-Communist, democratic government that further weakened Russia’s ability to expand its sphere of influence over Finland and left Russia’s important northwest cities insecure. This increased the Soviets’ fear of being blockaded in the Baltic Sea, which motivated them to construct a canal between the Baltic Sea and the White Sea and move more of their Northern Fleet from the Baltic Sea to the Barents Sea.

The Soviet Union’s precarious geopolitical position also pushed it to act assertively in the peripheral Svalbard archipelago. Even though it was not invited to the Versailles Treaty
negotiations due to its poor relations with the victors of World War I, Soviet diplomats were able to secure access to the Svalbard archipelago and to make sure that other states could not militarize the archipelago during the 1920 Svalbard Treaty that followed Versailles. It also persuaded Norway to recognize the Bolsheviks as the legitimate government of the USSR when recognition was slow to come from other western democracies (Rossi 2015, pg. 132).

These diplomatic coups temporarily secured the Soviet sea lanes to and from northern Russia (Flake 2015, pg. 81). They also highlighted other countries’ relative lack of interest in the Arctic and Norway’s desire to maintain good relations with its potentially hostile Great Power neighbor. However, the Svalbard Treaty also spawned future Soviet and Russian resentment because the deal was made during a moment of Russian material weakness. Russian foreign policy makers have since resented being forced to share the islands with competitors who have used the islands to monitor its naval activity and could potentially use the islands to block critical Russian sea lanes and the Russian Northern Fleet in the Barents Sea (Rossi 2015, pg. 132).

The USSR also decisively seized control of Wrangel Island in the Chukchi Sea in 1924, when a Soviet boat was sent to arrest American and Canadian settlers that had been previously placed on the island by Canadian-Icelandic-American explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson, who attempted to claim the island alternatively for Canada and the United States.

The Soviets utilized a potential trade deal with Britain (Glenny 1970) to get the British to condone Russia’s forceful attempted to gain sovereignty over the island. The British also feared that a potential Japanese-American alliance could procure the island and use it as a base to threaten British interests in the North Pacific and deemed the Russians as the lesser threat. Canada did not act more forcefully to secure the island for itself, because it feared that doing so
would damage the legitimacy of its own sector theory of sovereign control in the Arctic, and it did not see much economic value in the territory.

For its part, America did not officially recognize the Soviet Union’s claim to the island, but it also neglected to react to the occupation forcefully. Similar to the British, it perceived that the relatively weak Soviets were less threatening to its interests in the North Pacific than the Japanese and British (Fogelson 1985, pgs. 143-144). Ultimately, no country was willing to confront the Soviets over Wrangel Island. Soviet fears of encirclement and the thought the island might be a good spot for burgeoning airways to connect Europe, Asia, and North America motivated the Soviets more than their competitors (Diubaldo 1967).

Taking confidence from Canada’s sector approach to the Arctic (Flake 2015, pg. 82) and the precedence of the 1916 Russian Tsarist decree that claimed large swaths of Arctic territory for Russia, the Soviets issued a declaration in 1926 that further cemented their claims to Arctic littoral islands, despite the previous lack of Soviet discovery or occupation of these islands. The territory claimed was: “north of the shores of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics up to the North Pole between the meridian 32° 04’ 35’ E. long. from Greenwich, running along the eastern side of Vaida Bay through the triangular marker on Cape Kekurskii, and the meridian 168° 49’ 30’ W. long. From Greenwich, bisecting the strait separating the Ratmanov and Kruzenstern Islands, of the Diomede group in the Bering Sea” (USSR Central Executive Committee 1926).

It is likely that other countries did not react more aggressively to these ambitious claims because of the islands’ austerity and their proximity to the Soviet Union’s northern coastline. Likewise, the world did not react very assertively to the Soviet Union’s official claim to sovereignty over a twelve-mile territorial sea from its coastline in 1927, which pushed its jurisdiction into the Arctic Ocean for the first time (Hollick 1981, pg. 236). Soviet legal jurists
went so far as to suggest Arctic ice could be treated as sovereign Soviet property and also claimed sovereignty over entire seas off Russia’s Arctic coastline during these heady days (Lajeunesse 2012, pgs. 69-70). These claims never achieved official Soviet sanction - likely because the Soviet government was afraid to push international norms too far while it was materially weak (Flake 2015, pg. 2015). Nevertheless, the boldness of the jurists’ claims reflected the Soviet Union’s territorial ambition in the Arctic under Stalin.

By the 1930s, Stalin had centralized political power and worked forcefully to industrialize and militarize the Soviet Union. This physical power allowed the Soviet Union to cement the earlier diplomatic claims it made to Arctic territory. With a resurgent Germany on its western border, and a more assertive Japan on its eastern border, the Soviets moved decisively to secure physical dominance in the Arctic (Horensma 1991, pg. 53). It wanted to secure the airways that were beginning to connect Europe, Asia, and North America through the Arctic (Horensma 1991, pg. 45), and it wanted to secure its northern coastline so that it could transport forces if war broke out.

The most significant result of these efforts was the Soviet construction of a canal between the White Sea and Baltic Sea that had been envisioned since the times of Peter the Great. The Belomor Canal was constructed, at great human expense, to allow Soviet naval and merchant ships to transit between the two seas (Morukov 2003, pgs. 152-153). The canal functioned poorly but still critically improved the Soviet Union’s ability to avoid blockade in the Baltic Sea and to project power in the Barents Sea. The Northern Fleet, itself decimated during the Russian Civil War, was re-established and installed at the newly established base of Polyarnyi on the Kola Peninsula. It was composed of “8 destroyers, 15 submarines, 2 torpedo boats, 7 patrol ships, 2
mine-sweepers and 116 aircraft” by 1941 (Luzin et. al 1994, pg. 7). This was, and remains, the largest naval force in the Arctic.

The Soviets also moved decisively to make the Northern Sea Route a viable sea lane, something that had been envisioned since the 1904-05 Russo-Japanese War. The Soviet government established and generously funded Arctic-specific scientific institutes to support the Northern Sea Route. The scientific institutes worked with newly formed centralized government agencies to establish Arctic weather forecasting and navigational aids and prodigiously constructed icebreakers, ports, and airfields along Russia’s northern coast line.

By the late 1930s, the relationship between Finland and Russia soured because of the Finnish government’s anti-communist and pro-German rhetoric (Spring 1986, pg. 211). This motivated the Soviet Union to further militarize the Kola Peninsula. It utilized local gulag operations, the “only organization in the region with substantial labor and material resources at its disposal,” to establish extensive defense works throughout the region (Joyce 2003, pg. 177) and to militarize the border region with Finland (Manninen 2004, pgs. 7-28).

In contrast to realist assumptions of international relations, and indicative that domestic politics can affect international politics substantially, Stalin eliminated thousands of his best officers and technical specialists in 1937-38 to solidify his hold over the Soviet Union just as conflict appeared more likely in Europe. This action highlights that authoritarian rulers like Stalin are often more fearful of revolt from within than from aggressors outside of a country’s borders. The purges provided another large source for Soviet Arctic labor (discussed in more detail later in this chapter), but also forced Stalin to look for allies to balance against other expansionary powers in Eurasia. He was unable to sign an anti-Fascist pact with the United

13 The gulag is an acronym for the Soviet secret police administration that operated the concentration camps, the Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei.
States or Great Britain (although he did form an opportunist entente with France as World War II approached). There was not enough trust between the Soviets and these western countries, or enough shared fear of Nazi Germany, to bring them fully together before the war. Failing this, and also fearful of getting involved in a two-front war with Japan, Stalin opportunistically gambled by bandwagoning with Germany – a country against which its forces had just fought during the Spanish Civil War.

Avoiding a two-front war was also favorable to Germany, which wanted to expand westward. The infamous 1939 non-aggression pact Stalin made with Germany, which was Japan’s nominal ally at the time, allowed Stalin to mass his forces to defeat the Japanese in a contingent, but decisive, battle at Khalkhin Gol (Goldman 2012). The Russian victory motivated Japan to turn its attention southward towards the Pacific and away from the resources of Siberia afterwards. This, in turn, allowed Russia to maintain control over Siberia and pushed Japan into its subsequent conflict with the United States (Goldman 2012). It also gave Stalin the breathing space needed to refocus on securing the vulnerable Soviet northwest.

The decreased risk from Japan, the Soviet non-aggression pact with Germany, and the confidence the Soviet military acquired at Khalkhin Gol motivated Stalin to intimidate Estonia and Latvia into allowing the Soviet Union to build military installations on their territory shortly after the conflict with Japan ended. Finland declined to accede to similar Soviet demands, resulting in Stalin’s decision to invade Finland in November of 1939, which became known as the Winter War. This invasion highlighted the Soviets’ exceptional geopolitical interest and perceived vulnerability in the Baltic/Barents region before World War II really got started. Specifically, by invading Finland, the Soviets wanted to ensure access to the Gulf of Finland in case of future hostilities with the other European Great Powers and to secure a territorial buffer
between these potential foes and its most important cities - Leningrad and Moscow (Spring 1986, pg. 208, 216). Occupying Finland would help ensure both objectives and secure the Soviet Union’s access to the valuable natural resources and coastline of northern Finland. Furthermore, the Soviet Union claimed it was supporting an incipient Communist Revolution in Finland to legitimize its invasion and was therefore acting nobly as the vanguard of international communism.

As a result of the Bolshevik Revolution and the disastrous American occupation of Murmansk, the United States and Russia continued to harbor great distrust towards each other after World War I. The Soviet government distrusted the capitalist dimension of the United States’ economic system, which was anathema to the international proletariat revolution the Soviets were trying to lead. In turn, Americans distrusted the USSR for the peace it made with Germany at the end of World War I, its human rights abuses against its own citizens, its lack of religious freedom, and its attempts to incite class conflict in the United States (Saul 2006). Despite their mutual animosity, their mutual fear and dislike of Japan and Germany brought them closer together as World War II approached (Taubman 1982). Fascism was antithetical to both country’s governing institutions, and America’s desire to improve trade with the economically resurgent Soviets during the Great Depression led the United States to formally recognize the Soviet government in 1933 – 15 years after the Bolsheviks came to power. This convergence of interests allowed the United States to temporarily overlook Stalin’s alliance of convenience with Hitler and motivated it to come to Russia’s subsequent aid after Hitler turned on Stalin in 1941.

2.2 American Geopolitics
American military strategists and leaders continued to neglect the Arctic in the interwar period. One main reason for this was, unlike the USSR, the United States emerged from World War I strengthened, optimistic of the future, and highly isolationist. It did not have identifiable threats that pushed it to secure northern approaches to the country until World War II, and it had the Panama Canal and an extensive interstate railroad system that gave it ready access to both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. This sense of security decreased its willingness to establish itself more forcibly in the Arctic. Instead, it insisted on equal international access to the Arctic (Fogleson 1985, pg. 147) – a foreign policy position it still maintains.

Most significantly, Canada, America’s only contiguous Arctic neighbor, did not threaten it. In fact, Canada’s “stock of field gun ammunition was less than 90 minutes' firing and she did not possess a single modern anti-aircraft gun” (Laing 1938, pg. 795) as World War II approached. Canada also had a paucity of military personnel (approximately forty-five hundred ground, eighteen hundred sea, and thirty-one air servicemen) (Dziuban 1959, pg. 4) to operate its scant military equipment.

Furthermore, American-Canadian relations improved as a result of World War I. The alliance between the United States, Canada, and Great Britain formed a nascent “special relationship” between the nations that was sealed with blood and strengthened by a shared liberal ideology and a common distrust of strengthening authoritarian powers like Germany, Japan, Italy, and the USSR. World War I also increased the independence movement within Canada that made it, in America’s perception, a more autonomous and legitimate owner of its own territory. These ideational similitudes further diminished the perceived threat coming from the United States’ north and restrained any lingering desire American politicians might have to take advantage of Canada’s relative material weakness to gain sovereignty over all of North America.
As such, the United States did not react firmly to Canada’s attempts to expand its sovereignty over previously unoccupied and unexplored North American Arctic territory. The Canadians sent Royal Mounties to Banks and Victoria Islands and established police posts on Bylot, North Devon, and Ellesmere islands in 1919 and 1920. Canada also enacted a law in 1925 that required foreign scientists and explorers to obtain permission from the Canadian government to visit the Northwest Territories (Fogleson 1985, pgs. 135-136). These moves symbolized Canada’s effective sovereignty over these Arctic lands and America’s tacit recognition of that sovereignty.

The Americans did, however, vehemently object to a Canadian ploy in 1920 to involve Great Britain to secure first rights to the sale of Greenland. America asserted that arrangement would contravene the Monroe Doctrine, a dictate that continued to guide American foreign policy (Fogleson 1985, pg. 185). In effect, the United States would not allow a European power, even a relatively friendly one like Great Britain, to expand its sovereignty over territory in the western hemisphere. Canada, since it was not a European power, did not fall under the Monroe Doctrine and was given more leeway than Great Britain – even though Canada’s continued formal ties to Great Britain muddied the waters. Ultimately, the muddied waters, and the relative insignificance of the Arctic, allowed the Canadians to solidify their claims to the North American Arctic during this formative period. In fact, as American international law expert David Hunter Miller exclaimed in 1925 (pg. 52), “the average American would have no objection to the Canadian title. Certainly, we would prefer Canadian ownership to any other ownership.”

The enduring peace between the United States and Canada also underlined an American sentiment that relations in the “New World” favorably contrasted with the bloody conflict
continuing to foment in the “Old World.” President Roosevelt underlined this feeling, and the strength of America’s relationship with Canada as World War II approached, by asserting “that this hemisphere at least should remain a strong citadel wherein civilization can flourish unimpaired” (qtd. in Fenwick 1938, pg. 782) and promised American assistance to Canada if it were attacked. Many Canadians approved of the protective sentiment emanating from America at this time, because it was becoming apparent that British relative material strength was waning, and they hoped that American strength could deter potential aggression from an increasingly aggressive Germany (Laing 1938; Dziuban 1959, pg. 8). Even still, the High North appeared as a permanent barrier “more formidable than the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans” (Eyre 1987, pg. 293) to both United States and Canada.

The USSR, although adversarial with the United States and showing a greatly improved capability to operate in the Arctic, also did not sufficiently motivate the United States to militarize Alaska. In 1939, prominent Arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson expressed his concern that the Soviets were building up their military in Siberia in a letter to the head of the Army-Air Service, but the American public still greatly favored isolationism and was more concerned with Germany than the Soviet Union (Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pgs. 24-25).

More strikingly, America also neglected the increasing threat coming from Japan. The most prominent reason for America’s lack of concern was that the United States Navy wrongly believed the Japanese would abide by the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922 that limited the size of the Japanese naval fleet and prohibited fortification of Japanese islands in the North Pacific that could threaten Alaska. This perception continued even after the Japanese withdrew from the treaty in 1934 and invaded Manchuria (Conn et al. 1962, pgs. 223-224). Even still, there was a shared, and as it turns out unfounded, sentiment by many military leaders that Hawaii, let alone
Alaska, was unlikely to be attacked if a sizable naval force was based at Pearl Harbor to deter the Japanese (ibid., pg. 151). America’s previous geographic invulnerability had lulled many of its leaders, and a large percentage of its populace, into a false sense of safety that its territory would be immune to foreign aggression.

In addition to the false sense of security, the continued prioritization of regions in more southern latitudes decreased America’s attention to Alaska and the Arctic. These southern regions appeared to be at greater risk than America’s northern territory and much more valuable (Dziuban 1959, pg. 7). The United States, specifically, moved to strengthen Pearl Harbor and the approaches to the Panama Canal before moving to secure Alaska. Pearl Harbor was perceived to be a critical military supply station, a stepping stone for American merchants, and a key to American Pacific naval power. “In the two decades after World War I the Army… built up formidable coastal defenses on its south shore to protect Pearl and Honolulu harbors, and installed air defenses to guard vital installations against this new element (aviation) of warfare that developed so rapidly between world wars” (Conn et al. 1962, pg. 151). To compare with Alaska, by 1938 the American military had expended over two hundred and twenty-five million dollars on Pearl Harbor (Conn et al. 1962, pg. 153). In contrast, it wasn’t until 1938 that the United States Navy recommended that Congress should appropriate the relatively insignificant sum of nineteen million dollars for the defense of the geographically much larger Alaska (Conn et al. 1962, pg. 224).

Cost and effort were reasons the United States neglected expanding its military presence in Alaska, even as the chances for conflict grew with the approach to World War II. The remoteness, geographical impediments, and lack of transportation infrastructure - to and within Alaska - “posed tremendous barriers to military construction and operations” (Conn et al. 1962
It was assumed by American strategists that potential adversaries would find these problems just as daunting as they were to the United States and precluded the chances of a major ground invasion of Alaska. They assumed that the most likely forms of attack would be “small-scale air or ground raids made by an enemy who would strike without warning.” Therefore, “the key to Alaskan defense, was to keep it from becoming a base from which an aggressor could attack the continental United States” (Conn et al. 1962 pg. 225) instead of a base in which to extend American power outward into the Arctic and North Pacific.

Alaskan delegate Anthony J. Dimond pushed the federal government for more protection as early as 1933, requesting military planes and airfields as well as a highway to connect Alaska with the continental United States, but was denied any appropriated money to make any of these requests an actuality (Naske 1973, pg. 56). He also warned Congress in 1935 that Japan could “take Alaska at one gulp, for at the present time Alaska is absolutely undefended by any military force or installation of any kind...except....a force that is not sufficiently powerful enough to be of any use against a foreign attack” (Naske 1973, pg. 56). Still, the United States’ government was loath to spend money on building Alaska’s military defenses. Major General Smedley D. Butler went so far as to suggest that the United States should abandon Alaska in case of war (Naske 1973, pg. 58). Consequently, as late as 1938, Alaska had only approximately three hundred infantry troops and six naval planes at the southern Alaskan towns of Haines and Sitka to protect all of Alaska (Naske 1973, pg. 56).

Despite continued neglect, there was a growing awareness in some American military circles of how advancements in aviation and radio technology could increase the geopolitical importance of the Arctic and Alaska. The American airpower pioneer and advocate, General Billy Mitchell, for one, believed that Alaska had become "the most strategic place in the world"
during the interwar period, due to the relatively short distances in which airplanes could connect North America with Asia and Europe through the Arctic (Twichell 1992, pg. 29). He designed demonstrations to prove the point but was pushed out of the service for insubordination for attempting to change solidified paradigms about aviation and the Arctic (Twichell 1992, pgs. 29-32).

Future General of the Air Force, Hap Arnold, also identified Alaska as an important locale as World War II approached. He led reconnaissance flights to Alaska to look for potential military airfields in 1934 and to gauge the territory’s defense (Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pgs. 15-19). Arnold selected both Anchorage and Fairbanks as the two most promising sites for future airbases on the territory, due to their location and existing infrastructure. Indeed, the two localities would become the major hubs for Alaska’s defense establishment in the decades that followed, and Fairbanks would become the primary base for the U.S. military cold weather testing. The Secretary of War, George H. Dern, proclaimed that Arnold’s trip “forged a new link between Alaska and the people of the United States” (qtd. in Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pg. 19) because it demonstrated how the airplane could open up this formerly insular northern territory.

In the end, a paltry one and a half million dollars were allocated for the defense of Alaska during the Depression-era years between 1933 and 1937. Most of this did not go to the Air Force, but instead to “support civilian-related projects such as harbor improvements” in southern Alaska (Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pg. 11).

American naval aviator Richard Byrd also forcibly pushed America into the Arctic despite official reticence during the interwar period. He and his accomplices were arguably the first in the world to fly over the North Pole, the Greenland ice cap, and the Queen Elizabeth Islands as well as the first to land in the shallow water near Ellesmere Island. Notably, Byrd
financed his trips with private capital, not with money from the United States Navy. This was made possible by his celebrity status in the burgeoning American mass media. The privatized Byrd efforts resulted in limited government support for his expeditions and even less official American willingness to claim Arctic land discovered by Byrd. Influential military officers, including Billy Mitchell, loudly denounced Byrd’s expeditions as stunts to “sell radios and magazines” (Rose 2002, pgs. 176-177). Byrd’s efforts were also diminished by increasing dissatisfaction with fellow polar naval explorer Robert Peary, who was known in Navy circles as a “glory-hunting adolescent trading on his professional affiliation for personal aggrandizement” (ibid., pg. 200).

In any case, America’s attention was quickly distracted from the strategic aspects of Arctic aviation and Arctic colonization by subsequent attempts to explore and colonize Antarctica in the 1930s (Hofstra 2002). As World War II approached, American efforts to establish a foothold in Antarctica led to more strident attempts to preserve their presence and access to that region than Americans were prepared to do to protect their actual possessions in the opposite polar regions of the Arctic. As historian Lisle Rose intimates, “In early 1939, with Hitler on the march in Europe and a Nazi expedition on its way back from Antarctica, Franklin Roosevelt ordered that the Monroe Doctrine be extended” to portions of Antarctica south of South America to keep them from coming under possession of Germany and Japan (Rose 2002, pg. 197).

This pronouncement led to the creation of the United States Antarctic Service and the expansion of American bases in Antarctica (ibid., pg. 199) – but also to further neglect of the Arctic, where these specialized resources could have been used instead. Antarctica was a more prized possession, because, unlike the Arctic, it was an actual continent and possibly habitable,
while it was becoming apparent that most of the Arctic was ocean and uninhabitable (Miller 1925). The Great Depression also decreased America’s appetite for expanding its sovereignty over polar regions. Byrd was taken aback as American society berated him “for stupidity and selfishness” when he undertook a second expedition to Antarctica from 1933-35 “when the country was in a bad way” (qtd, in Rose 2002 pg. 181).

The Depression also contributed to the United States’ continued reticence to purchase Greenland from Denmark while it had the chance. This was the case, although Greenland is within the geographical confines of the Monroe Doctrine, and some American military leaders realized that expansionary Germany could utilize Greenland to disrupt the sea and air lines of communication between North America and Europe by the mid-1930s. New scientific research also showed that weather stations in Greenland could help forecast weather in the North Atlantic and northern Europe and give America a strategic advantage over potential adversaries if war broke out in northern Europe. Even still, the United States did not feel like Greenland was sufficiently vulnerable or strategic enough to overcome its isolationist tendencies, and detractors felt that it would be very difficult to establish airbases on the island because of its topography (Carlson 1962, pg. 51). Furthermore, the island was already contested by Norway and Denmark, and detractors believed America’s relationship with Great Britain and Canada would suffer if America purchased Greenland. Finally, the United States did not want to set a legal precedent by purchasing Greenland that could weaken its potential claims to Antarctica, which it favored at the time (Fogelson 1989).

Since the United States neglected the Arctic territory of North America as World War II approached, it is not surprising that it neglected the Eurasian Arctic even more. This region was decidedly outside of the geographical dictates of the Monroe Doctrine. Finland, specifically,
suffered from this neglect. After the 1939 non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and Germany, Finland looked to the United States and Great Britain for protection. As will be explained in more detail in the next chapter, and in line with liberal assumptions of how international relations should play out, elites in America voiced appreciation for Finland’s ability to pay back World War I loans to the United States, for Finland’s ability to gain and maintain self-determination after World War I, and for Finland’s democratic institutions (Lewallen 2010). However, these liberal ties were not enough to sway the United States to defend Finland. Instead, America’s longstanding reticence to get involved in European affairs, and the fact that many American diplomats believed Finland still fell under Great Britain’s sphere of influence, kept the United States from deterring Soviet aggression against Finland more forcibly at this critical juncture than it did. After the Soviet invasion in 1939, American appeasement of the Soviets’ aggression soured Finns’ long-term perception of the United States and allowed the Soviet Union to force Finland back under its shadow – greatly affecting the subsequent triangular relationship of the three countries during and after the Cold War.

The United States’ approach to the Svalbard archipelago was more nuanced and likely affected by the Wilsonian internationalism that influenced American foreign policy shortly after World War I. At this time, the United States realized Svalbard’s rich coal deposits could be controlled by a belligerent power and that negotiations over its future could be used to support international treaties and promote international access to the Arctic. Norway, a neutral country during World War I that leaned towards the Allies (Rossi 2015, pg. 131), appeared to be less likely than other countries to withhold coal in case of a future conflict and had a strong claim to the archipelago based on international law, so the United States promoted Norway’s attempts to
semi-sovereignty over the archipelago, and over nearby Jan Mayen, if it promised to allow all countries to have commercial access to the territories.

Although Soviet Russia was not hampered by the agreement and continued to have access to Svalbard, the United States also used the opportunity to insist that Russia be termed a “regime,” not a legitimate country, during the negotiations. This approach was an outgrowth of America’s belligerence against Bolshevik forces in Murmansk and Siberia during the last years of World War I (see the previous chapter). Americans believed the Soviet government was illegitimate and detrimental to the spread of democracy and international trade. America’s approach to Russia during the Svalbard Treaty signaled the growing rivalry and distrust between the two countries that lasted throughout most of the interwar period (Fogelson 1985, pg. 141).

In contrast, the agreement improved relations between the United States and Norway (Berg 2017, pg. 34), setting the stage for the growing relationship which would result in Norway helping the United States externally balance Russia in the Arctic in the decades that followed. Even more interestingly, the final agreement that occurred from what American Secretary of State Robert Lansing (1917) called a “unique international problem,” resulted in a unique condominium construct where Norway was given political, but not territorial, sovereignty over Svalbard. As a result of this unique historical construct, Norway, Russia, the EU, and others continue to compete for control and influence in and around Svalbard today, while the United States largely neglects the islands (Rossi 2015).

Overall, the Arctic remained peripheral to American geopolitical interests in the interwar period because it did not feel overly threatened by Arctic countries. While American relative material power increased until the Great Depression and its citizens were the first to discover large parts of the Arctic, it did not seize on the opportunity to claim this territory for America.
during this critical juncture when borders were malleable. Instead, its relatively weaker Arctic neighbors, especially Russia and Canada, solidified their sectoral claims to disputed Arctic territory through shrewd diplomacy and proactive occupation.

3. Economics

3.1 Soviet Economics

Russia, already comparatively economically backward before World War I, was weakened more than any other power by World War I. Its population decreased from one hundred and seventy million people to one hundred and thirty-two million people after the Civil War ended in 1921. Additionally, the “loss of Poland, Finland, and the Baltic States removed many of the country’s industrial plants, railways, and farms and the prolonged fighting destroyed much that remained” (Kennedy 1989, Loc. 7200). With this low starting point, there was a lot of room for improvement after the war. A sizable amount of this improvement occurred in the Arctic.

Initially, Lenin improved the economy through his New Economic Policy that abandoned failed attempts at communization by relying on small private farms that increased agricultural production. Even still, Lenin centralized control and used coercive devices to force economic development in the Arctic. When Stalin came to power in 1929, he reversed many of Lenin’s policies with far-reaching and enduring effects – his agency in the Soviet Union’s economic affairs during this critical juncture irrevocably changed Russia’s presence and posture towards the Arctic forever. Stalin’s Communist Party embarked on a rapid, reckless, and radical program that changed Russia’s economy from one based on peasant farming to one that was based on autarkic industrialization, urbanization, and militarization. This transition, and the paradigm that drove it, economic socialism, resulted in a centralized command economy that
concentrated on extracting the resource wealth of the Arctic – which Russian experts Fiona Hill and Charles Gaddy have aptly termed the “Siberian Curse” (1994).

The initial Bolshevik centralization and industrialization led to increased returns in comparison with the Tsarist regime they replaced. Lenin’s New Economic Plans motivated experts to move to relatively austere Arctic regions like Murmansk to establish scientifically based enterprises that initially improved production. Many of the experts relished the challenge and saw the possibility of rapid large improvements through their work. They were supported by government efforts to educate the mostly illiterate population. One example of this was the Northern State Fish Trust in Murmansk where experts were recruited to modernize the Russian fishing industry. According to former Fish Trust manager Vladimir Tchernavin (1935, pgs. 16-17), the fish catch in Murmansk increased from a meager nine thousand tons before the Bolsheviks came to power to over forty thousand tons by 1920. Not incidentally, the population of Murmansk increased from four thousand people in 1926 to a bustling town of over fifteen thousand people in 1929.

Ironically, the labor the Bolshevik Party claimed they were liberating served as the main facilitator, and main victim, of the radical, economically irrational economic shift during the Stalinist regime. As was noted in the previous chapter, Tsarist exile institutions paved the way for Stalin’s even more ambitious Arctic economic gambits. But Trotsky and Lenin also played an instrumental part in this transition by utilizing concentration camps during and after the Russian Civil War to punish their adversaries who painstakingly extracted resources for the Red Army (Pipes 1994). At the end of the Russian Civil War, twenty-one labor camps had been created, and by 1920 that number had multiplied to over one hundred (Applebaum 2003, pg. 9). Some of

14 Richard Pipes (2014) suggests there were 300 camps by 1922.
these, like Khomolgory and Petrominsk, were constituted in former Russian Orthodox monasteries in the Archangelsk region, far north of Moscow and Leningrad (Applebaum 2003, pg. 16).

Taking a page from the Tsarist workbook to which they had been subjected, the Bolsheviks reconstituted the Tsarist-era exile place, the Solovetsky Islands, as the country’s most notorious concentration camp for political prisoners in 1923 (Tayler 2012). Unlike the Tsarist era, however, the Bolsheviks’ prisoners would be forced to perform hard labor, and the camps were forced to be “self-supporting” (Pipes 1994). Lenin used his newly formed secret police, the Cheka (forerunner to the OGPU and KGB, which also adopted practices of the Tsarist Okhrana), to populate the Solovetsky Islands, and other new northern concentration camps, with “members of political parties opposed to the Bolsheviks (revolutionary socialists, constitutional democrats etc.), people linked to the Tsarist regime (officers, nobles, etc.), soldiers of the White Army, the religious, intelligentsy, and representatives of the bourgeoisie” (Gullotta 2010). In effect, the Bolsheviks created a large and ready supply of Arctic labor.

In spirit, these prisoners were to be “re-educated” through hard manual labor, which Soviet officials postulated would allow them to integrate into the “working class” that Lenin so favored. In reality, the camps were used to keep these groups from communicating with the rest of the world, to colonize distant, environmentally harsh places, and ultimately, to annihilate these groups so they would not challenge the Bolsheviks (Applebaum 2003, pgs. 18–42). The camps also effectively stifled economic competition by undercutting private businesses that barely held on during the Lenin years of the Soviet Union (Applebaum 2003, pg. 34).

As Stalin worked to centralize power around himself after Lenin’s death, the number of political prisoners grew, and the concentration camps expanded to include anarchists,
Trotskyites, and soldiers whose loyalty to the regime was in doubt. Stalin legitimized and institutionalized these practices with the Politburo resolution, “On the Use of the Labor of Convicted Criminals.” The resolution “directed that a network of new camps be created in the country’s remote areas to colonize and develop ‘natural resources by using prison labor’” (Khlevbyuk 2003, pg. 45). Between 1923 and 1939, over forty thousand of the eighty thousand exiles sent to the Solovetsky Islands died from the hard labor, the elements, and mistreatment in the labor camps (Tayler 2012).

Despite the large number of fatalities, prison labor helped Stalin achieve his first ambitious 5-year plans and the epic “hero projects” that won the Soviet Union admiration from the West, especially during the Great Depression (Joyce 2003, pg. 165). For instance, prison labor was responsible for the Belomor Canal in 1933 – Stalin’s first large public works project using prison labor - a massive undertaking that was completed in just two years. The crude, shallow canal linked the White and Baltic Seas for the first time. However, the shallowness of the canal also meant that large barges had to be unloaded onto smaller barges to transit the canal (Joyce 2003), leading one analyst to call it an “expensive monument to the mismanagement of the Soviet system” (Khlevnyuk 2003, pg. 62). The highly expensive canal was a precursor to even more expensive and humanly destructive enterprises on which the Soviets would embark in the North in the years that followed.

More ominously for those who attracted the wrath of the Stalinist regime, the concentration camp on the Solovetsky Islands became the model camp for the rest of the Soviet gulag system, which rapidly evolved in the years that followed and filled with political prisoners created by successive waves of internal purges that reached their zenith between the years 1937
and 1938. Political and economic objectives were molded together in the Politburo to the harsh benefit of the rapidly developing Soviet Arctic.

During these purges, the overpopulated prisons of Ukraine and the cities of western Russia were unburdened, and prisoners were sent to “underdeveloped” lands in Siberia and Central Asia to extract natural resources and construct large public works projects like the Belomor Canal. The growth of this system affected the largely uninhabited far north more than any other region in Russia. It was the most underdeveloped, and its resources were needed to meet Stalin’s ambitious five-year plans (Applebaum 2003, pg. 49). Consequently, millions of Soviets were ushered into the gulag in the years that followed and coercively settled in the far north. The gulag’s own internal documents stated, “The history of the Gulag is the history of the colonization and industrial exploitation of the remote regions of the state” (qtd. in Gregory 2003). Future head of the Soviet OGPU, Genrikh Yagoda, stated this proposition even more clearly in 1929:

“It is already both possible and absolutely necessary to remove 10,000 prisoners from places of confinement in the Russian republic, whose labor could be better organized and used. Aside from that, we have received notice that the camps and jails in the Ukrainian republic are overflowing as well. Obviously, Soviet policy will not permit the building of new prisons. Nobody will give money for new prisons. The construction of large camps, on the other hand – camps which make rational use of labor – is a different matter. We have many difficulties attracting workers to the North. If we send many thousands of prisoners there, we can exploit the resources of the North…the experience of Solovetsky shows what can be done in this area.”
He also stated that once the camp prisoners had served out their sentence, they would be forced to resettle in the region of their camp permanently. Like the Tsarists before them, the Stalinists used exiles to colonize the North (Applebaum 2003, pg. 49) – but on a much grander, much more industrialized, and much more permanent scale. While outwardly they claimed the colonization was based on Marxist ideology, inwardly most of the communication appeared to point to material rationalism by the Soviet elite, which would explain why engineers and other specialists were rounded up by Soviet secret police to work in Arctic camps when they could not be enticed to work at them on their own (Nordlander 2003, pgs. 110-113).

Prisoners tortuously built the new concentration camps from scratch, living in primitive tents until they built settlements for themselves and their guards. Prison labor was supplemented with exile labor after the Soviet dekulakization program from 1929-32 rounded up hundreds of thousands of peasants that Stalin forced from the countryside to industrialize the Soviet Union and equalize its social classes (Applebaum 2003, pg. 47). Forced collectivization led to widespread famine that killed millions, but these famines were especially severe in the northern camps that could not grow their own food and depended on imported foodstuffs to survive. These new colonies were far from established transportation networks and lacked a climate suitable for agriculture. Many of the inhabitants in these new colonies were deemed to be expendable. Thousands of more “free workers” were also enticed to move to the northern regions by Soviet ideological propaganda and economic inducement to serve as prison guards, camp administrators, and laborers.

As World War II approached, the gulag prisoners were utilized to militarize the Soviet Union. By the beginning of World War II, huge labor camps had sprung up across the Russian North with concentrations around Murmansk, Archangelsk, Vorkuta, Ukhta, Norilsk, and
Magadan. Apart from Murmansk and Archangelsk, which were connected to Leningrad and Moscow by a railroad that was constructed by prisoners of war during World War I, these population centers were largely cut off from the existing Soviet road and rail infrastructure system. Politically, this worked because the Soviets were able to hide much of the repressive slave labor from their people, and the world, and were able to keep these potential agitators from challenging their rule. However, the isolation also made it difficult to transport the resources the new settlements extracted to international markets and to industrial centers within Russia, which motivated the Soviet government to increase its efforts to support the Northern Sea Route and erect northern railroads.

Despite initial economic success, Stalin’s centralization and five-year plans quickly led to bottlenecks and incongruity between complementary production centers that caused chaos where “both industry and government were working and building at random” (Tchernavin 1935, pg. 21). One example of this was the Northern State Fish Trust, which was ordered to make up for the failure of agricultural collectives and dekulakization by having its 1926 quota of forty thousand tons of fish increased to one and a half million tons in 1931 (Tchernavin 1935, pgs. 21-25). Even though the quotas were not met, they necessitated huge construction projects, with huge staffs, lots of labor, and the establishment of cities to house the new labor (Tchernavin 1935, pg. 32). Political bosses did not challenge the unrealistic quotas or the irrational northern migration and industrialization because they knew they were likely immune when the quotas were not met. Instead, “bourgeois” scientists, specialists, and kulak laborers suffered from accusations of “wrecking” (intentionally sabotaging production efforts) (Tchernavin 1935, pg. 31).
Additionally, the Soviet secret police learned to profit from the system. They traded and sold experts and labor to Soviet ministries that were tasked with setting up new industrial centers in the Arctic and elsewhere. By the early 1930s, the Stalinist purges catastrophically reduced the numbers of skilled experts available - making the Soviet Union even more dependent on coerced and unskilled labor that the secret police supplied at a profit (Nordlander 2003, pgs. 115-117).

As Tchernavin (1935, pg. 44) purports, the Soviets only slowly moved to mechanize operations in the Arctic and make them more efficient because “when an unlimited supply of free labor is available mechanization is superfluous.” Millions of people died from starvation and from the harsh working conditions in the northern exile communities and labor camps, but the system propelled itself forward, and the development of the Soviet Arctic progressed on the backs of disposable human labor (Remnick 2003).

After serving their sentences, the majority of former prisoners were not allowed to leave their new settlements. Some of them were rejoined by their families in their new locales. It is unsurprising to note that the Soviet system resembled Trotsky’s wartime Communism in many respects. Stalin was on a war footing with his own people, determined to centralize state power and resolved to internally balance against his European and Asian competitors. Ultimately, the sunk costs of this “Siberian Curse” (Hill and Gaddy 2004) established the Soviets in the Arctic in ways the American economic and political institutions would not, and could not, support in peacetime.

The following section briefly describes the development of each Soviet Arctic population center from west to east during this timeframe and then concludes with a discussion of the development of the Northern Sea Route and Arctic transportation infrastructure. This is to give a broader look at how Stalin’s efforts profoundly and decisively established the Russian northern
economy in the interwar period – a critical juncture which continues to greatly affect Russia’s present posture towards the Arctic.

SVALBARD: The Soviets established coal mines in the Norwegian-owned, but economically neutral, Svalbard archipelago to power Murmansk’s growing fleet of motorized fishing boats and the new Murmansk railroad, but these operations were as much strategic as they were economic. The Soviets first mined coal at Grumant in 1919, and then the newly formed Soviet national coal company, Arktikugol, bought more Svalbard coal claims in 1932 at Barentsburg and spread their operations to Pyramiden. Symbolic of other Soviet Arctic resource extraction operations, economic rationality was not a large part of the decision-making on whether to start or continue Svalbard operations, since coal from the Svalbard mines often cost more than it would have if the Soviets had bought the coal from England instead. However, cut off from trade by western countries and intent on becoming self-sufficient, the coal mines helped the Soviets to become energy independent and the hundreds of miners that eventually resided on Svalbard gave the Soviets an overwhelming presence in the strategic archipelago. For a large part of the Cold War, the coal operations allowed the Soviets to have twice as many people in the archipelago as the Norwegians (Jensen 2017, pg. 126).

KOLA PENINSULA: The Kola Peninsula was the first Russian Arctic region that was developed after World War I and became Russia’s most important economic region in the Arctic. Its surrounding waters, relatively warm and ice-free from the Gulfstream Current, provided Soviet merchants access to the high seas and the Barents Sea fisheries. Its key city, Murmansk, was established as a port city during World War I and was connected to St. Petersburg with a railroad, both of which served as foundational anchors for the region’s economic growth.
afterwards. Murmansk became an important military city, hosting the Soviet Northern Fleet after World War I, but also bloomed into an important export hub and fish processing site. By 1927, it moved only six percent less cargo than was moved through Leningrad, the Soviet’s most important port (Luzin et. al 1994, pg. 4). The need to move resources extracted from the Soviet Union’s interior also caused the Soviets to make Murmansk the western terminus of the Northern Sea Route and the main port for the Soviet Union’s rapidly expanding fleet of icebreakers (Luzin et. al 1994, pg. 5).

Stalin also created many concentration camps on the Kola Peninsula that extracted and refined timber and minerals, expanded the region’s transportation infrastructure, and built the region’s hydroelectricity capacity. Prime examples of this were the establishment of the Tulomstroi hydroelectric power plant, the most northerly power plant in the world in 1937, and the timber pulp mill in the gulag town of Segheza (Joyce 2003, pgs. 170, 175). Tens of thousands of prisoners were extended spurs of the Murmansk railroad to new mining and timber communities, established the mines and smelters at Monchegorsk, and completed other regional projects from 1935-36 (Luzin et. al 1994, pg. 5). “Special settlers” from Stalin’s dekulakization campaign established large, urban mining and industrial centers at Kirovsk and Apatity (Joyce 2003, pg. 186). These developments caused the Kola region’s population to explode from just twenty-three thousand people in 1926 to over three hundred thousand people in 1940 (Luzin et. al 1994, pg. 5).

ARCHANGELSK: Archangelsk, which is situated across the White Sea from the Kola Peninsula, continued to serve as an important port city after World War I and supplemented Murmansk as a western terminus on the Northern Sea Route, which quickly took shape under Stalin. It too was infused with gulag labor. A number of camps were established near the town
after the Russian Civil War to confine and “re-educate” members of the White Army that put up a fierce resistance, until they succumbed to the Bolsheviks in 1920. The Soviets also concentrated efforts to extract nearby timber and fish.

UKHTA: Using artificially cheap prison labor (Emmerson 2010, pg. 173), the Soviets made their first industrial efforts at oil and gas extraction in the Timan-Pechora basin of the Komi Republic of Western Siberia in 1929. These camps became even more expansive during World War II (see chapter 4), when oil became critical to the survival of the Soviet war machine after the coal fields of the Donbass region came under German occupation.

IGARKA: Glavsevmorput established the port city of Igarka, on the permafrost bordering the Yenisei River, by prison and exile labor in 1929 as a sawmill and a port to cut and move lumber coming from southern Siberia to Great Britain (Smolka 1938, pg. 276). It was the “crown jewel” of the Soviet north and was heralded in Soviet state-sponsored media as reflecting the Soviets unique ability to develop the Arctic (McCannon 1998, pgs. 89-90).

VORKUTA: Vorkuta was established by gulag labor in 1932 to supply coal for Soviet industrialization and was a sub-division of the Ukhto-Pechorsk prison system until 1938. According to one source, two million prisoners spent time in Vorkuta from 1931 to 1957 (Balmforth 2013), and it became the administrative center for other prison sites in the Komi Republic. Prisoners built the prison camp and the railroad that connected the mines together. Despite the horrendous human costs associated with the Vorkuta mines, they proved critical to Soviet industrialization and militarization.
Since Vorkuta was far removed from existing Soviet infrastructure, it initially had to be supplied via a sea and river route that went twenty-three hundred kilometers to Archangelsk (Negretov 1977, pg. 566). Like other Soviet northern colonies, Vorkuta suffered from an alarming lack of machinery, which meant that its mines and its transportation infrastructure were finished almost completely by hand. Prisoners conducted an unsuccessful hunger strike in 1936. One analyst suggested, “Leaving quite aside the immeasurable cost in human suffering, and speaking in purely financial terms, the Gulag style of management may well have doubled the cost needed to create Vorkuta” (Negretov 1977, pg. 575).

NORILSK: Norilsk was established by over three hundred thousand prisoners, between 1935 and 1951, to mine and refine coal, nickel, and other precious metals under the auspices of the Soviet “Main Administration for Nonferrous Metal and Gold of the Supreme Council of the National Economy” (Ertz 2003, pg. 127-128). Soviet prison labor also built a railroad to connect it to the Yenisei River village of Dudinka and, from there, to the Kara Sea, so that its raw resources and refined ores could be shipped to markets in Russia and abroad via the Northern Sea Route. The metals were critical for Soviet militarization, which explains why it was funded so dramatically despite its isolated location in north-central Russia. This isolation also explains why the Soviets utilized penal labor to establish and develop the mining city. It would be difficult to get free labor to willingly move to such a harsh and remote place without coercion or expensive economic incentives. Supplying Norilsk and transporting the metal from it was both expensive and dangerous due to its isolation and the harsh climate. Gulag labor was supplemented with exile labor from Stalin’s dekulakization campaign and prisoners who served their sentences but were not allowed to leave (Ertz and Borodkin 2003, pg. 80-81).
KOLYMA: The Severo-Stochnochy penal colony, created in 1932 to mine ferrous metals in the far-flung Kolmya River region, established Soviet colonial presence on an industrial basis in northeast Russia for the first time. Dalstroi, (short for Glavnoe upravlenie stroitel’stvo Dalnego Severa NKVD SSSR), established over one hundred and thirty camp facilities in a three million square-kilometer area around the Kolmya River under Stalin’s regime (Gregory 2003, pg. 11). It was the largest entity in the whole gulag system and its gold was a critical commodity the Soviets used to exchange for foreign technology and machinery (Nordlander 2003, pg. 106).

Like other northern camp towns, productivity was relatively low per worker due to the lack of mechanization. Unlike other penal colonies, however, the Kolmya camps proved profitable due to the high cost of gold during the 1930s (Nordlander 2003, pg. 107). The port city of Magadan on the Chukchi Sea became the provincial hub for the regional camp system, forming the eastern terminus of the NSR, and it rapidly branched out from there. Between 1932 and 1936, prison labor rose from approximately ten thousand to over one hundred and sixty thousand inmates. These prisoners extracted enough gold in Kolyma alone in 1939 that its value matched that of the entire Russian economy before World War I (Nordlander 2003, pgs. 109-110, 115; Khlevnyuk 2003, pg. 47). Even still, the Soviet state heavily subsidized Dalstroi operations with money and prison labor, and it became less profitable as placer gold was depleted (Nordlander 2003, pg. 118).

NORTHERN SEA ROUTE (NSR): Along with creating prison settlements and rapidly expanding natural resource extraction operations across the Arctic, the Soviets also determinedly established navigation stations and river ports across the Arctic coastline and the Soviet Union’s
northern flowing Arctic rivers. This was needed because the isolated industrial centers the Soviets created across the Arctic required a robust maritime transportation system to get the resources to markets and factories. An example of how this evolved and worked was the case of the minerals from Norilsk. Instead of building a two-thousand-kilometer railway to the Kola Peninsula to refine the Norilsk ore, the Soviets established an extensive river and ocean transportation infrastructure. The Norilsk products were first moved to the newly established Yenisei River port of Dudinka and then moved by barge to another newly formed river port of Dikson, where the Yenisei flowed into the Arctic. The ore was finally moved from Dikson by ship to Murmansk and its nearby smelters (Luzin et. al 1994, pg. 10), often escorted by icebreakers, who were aided by iceberg spotters in airplanes operated from newly established Arctic airports, before being transported to population centers or exported outside the country.

A huge, centrally controlled government institution, Komseveroput, which was taken over later by an even larger organization, Glavsevmorput, was created to plan and operationalize the establishment of the NSR. These institutions mapped the Soviet Arctic coast, looked for natural resource deposits, supplied the new Arctic settlements, and moved the Arctic resources to markets. Along with the navigation stations and ports, the Soviets invested sizable human capital and money into icebreakers and scientific institutes to expand the length of time the NSR could be traversed each year (Josephson 2014). In addition to its economic necessity, Luzin, et. al (1994, pg. 5), claim that by establishing the NSR the “Soviet state could guarantee Soviet sovereignty and occupation, provide support for the Pacific Fleet (especially important given growing tension with Japan), and bring polar exploration under control of the state.” Still, ice and bad weather made operations on the NSR difficult, expensive, and unpredictable (Barr 1982).
In conclusion, the initial success of enterprises like the Northern State Fish Trust, the Dalstroi gold mines, the Vorkuta coal mines, the Igarka timber mills, and the Ukhta hydrocarbon operations gave the Soviet Communist Party the illusion that what they were doing was going to work in the long-run. It institutionalized inefficient extractive resource operations and infrastructure development based on artificially cheap labor. The urban centers that were set up around these resource extraction operations in the Arctic were often far removed from established transportation centers. Because of the difficulty of producing agriculture in the harsh northern climate, the new Arctic centers had to be supported expensively by the Soviet government.

The Soviets’ enormous efforts to conquer the north influenced them to subsidize subsequent operations there despite their economic irrationality. Good money was thrown on top of bad. One analyst suggests that gulag labor was only fifty to sixty percent as productive as non-gulag labor (Sokolov 2003, pg. 40). It is unlikely that “free labor” or the northern exiles produced much more efficiently than the northern prisoners because of the lack of mechanization and the harsh environmental conditions the workers faced. Still, without this massive mobilization effort, Russia would not have built up the physical presence it presently has in the Arctic. Free labor, like that of the United States, would not have chosen to develop the Arctic the way the Soviet gulag labor and exiles were forced to do – labor-intensive and inefficient as it was.

3.2 American Economics

The Soviets’ sharply focused Arctic economic development efforts stood in stark contrast to American economic efforts in Alaska and other Arctic locales after World War I. In contrast to the Soviet government’s rapid political and economic expansion into their Arctic territory,
American federal agencies and their officials slowly worked their way into Alaska after the gold rushes at the turn of the twentieth century. Since the government continued, like Soviet Russia, to “own” almost all the Alaskan land, these government institutions critically determined the rate of Alaska’s economic development. In contrast to the Soviets, however, American government institutions operated as much to restrain economic development as to promote it.

More importantly, the American economy continued to operate largely on the basis of market forces. This meant that the type of economic development on which the Soviets embarked remained prohibitively expensive for the United States, especially in northern Alaska. This expense was exacerbated by America’s Arctic neighbors who continued to restrict American businesses from setting up shop, because they feared that their lightly populated Arctic regions would be overwhelmed by superior American capital and labor.

This section goes through these contrasting economic situations point by point to illustrate in more detail how the United States’ economic presence in Alaska critically diverged with the Soviets between the two World Wars. It then explains how American economic expansion into other Arctic territory was restrained.

First, the fractiousness of the American government kept it from centrally working to exploit Alaska’s resources compared to the Soviets’ efforts in its own Arctic territory. In fact, Alaskan historian Claude Naske (1973, pg. 41) claims that in 1923 there were five federal cabinet officers and twenty-eight bureaus that exercised authority over Alaska, and that they were in conflict over how to develop and utilize the state’s resources (the number and conflicting objectives of institutions have only since increased). This was in large contrast to the Soviets, who set up large centralized organizations like Glavsevmorput that focused overwhelmingly on developing the economic potential of the Arctic in line with centralized Marxist-Leninist tenets.
Multiple Secretaries of the Department of the Interior (DOI) tried to streamline Alaskan development without much success. For instance, President Wilson's DOI Secretary, Franklin K. Lane, concluded that the complicated mix of governments agencies, each "intent upon its own particular business, jealous of its own success and prerogative, and all are more or less unrelated in their operations" were unnecessarily complicating Alaska’s development (qtd. in Naske 1973, pg. 50). Similarly, Hubert Work, who ran the DOI in 1926, claimed that "without the inspiration of self-government and freedom, [Alaska] is now being retarded by unnecessary activity of government bureaus" (qtd in Naske 1973, pg. 50). Alaska’s Congressional delegate, Judge James Wickersham, also argued in 1923 that the restraining "power of the national bureaucracy" was an "autocratic enemy to free government [that] is making its last stand for existence among a free people," and "there actually exists today a congressional government in Alaska more offensively bureaucratic in its basic principles and practices than that which existed here during seventy years of Russian rule under the Czar" (qtd. in Naske 1973, pg. 49).

Secondly, there were American bureaucratic agencies and cabinet officers that were distinctly conservationist and had significant authority over Alaskan territory. This conservationist value-set was a result of the increasingly institutionalized progressive movement (explained in Chapter 2) that was another restraining influence the Soviet government did not face when it developed the Arctic in the interwar period (Weiner 2000). Although the environmental movement will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter, I also quickly will show how it retarded economic activity in Alaska in this section.

The American Department of Agriculture, which included the United States Forestry Service (USFS), was headed by conservationist Henry C. Wallace in 1923 (ibid., pg. 41). In line with the policies Pinchot earlier laid out, Wallace and the USFS wanted to keep commercial
interests from plundering the resources of Alaska. Other federal officials were more preservationist than conservationist and attempted to restrain economic development in Alaska even more. For instance, National Forest Service officer, and influential ecologist, Aldo Leopold, characterized the wilderness movement he expanded in Alaska as "a disclaimer of the biotic arrogance of Homo americanus" (qtd. Kaye 2006, pg. 9) and a response to "the strangling clutch of mechanistic civilization" (qtd. Kaye 2006, pg. 13).

President Warren G. Harding was the first American President to visit Alaska in 1923. His visit underlined the bureaucratic wrangling and competing visions of Alaska that ultimately kept America from developing Alaska more than it did. First, Harding hammered in the golden last spike that celebrated the completion of the Federal Government's Alaska Railroad. This railroad corridor belatedly connected the resources extracted in interior Alaska with southern Alaskan ports and subsequently bloomed into the economic and population hub of Alaska between Anchorage and Fairbanks. However, Harding also endorsed the conservation policies of his predecessors and decided against giving Alaska more home rule (ibid., pg. 41).

The Sunset Magazine, a western conservationist tabloid, gushed, "Almost with his last breath Warren Harding bequeathed to the Far West a priceless legacy, his support of the forces that desire to build wisely, soundly for the future" (qtd. in Naske 1973, pg. 43). However, Alaskan author and lawyer J.L. Hellenthal blamed the very same "curse of conservation" for Alaska's economic and political stagnation, claiming that "at the present rate of progress, it will not be long before an Alaskan will need a license signed by a cabinet officer to kill a mosquito" (qtd. in Naske 1973, pg. 49).

Effectively, a battle now raged between Alaskan residents with the intention to improve their economy by extracting the state’s resources but holding very little political power to make
policy over their state’s territory, and the federal government that represented the rest of the country’s interests. Since the rest of the country’s interests largely did not include Alaska, and when they did, these interests were often against economically developing Alaska, Alaska stagnated. Ultimately, Alaska’s population decreased by over nine thousand people between 1910 and 1920 (Naske 1974, pg. 50). This occurred despite America’s otherwise booming population growth and the Soviets’ increasing settlement and economic exploitation of their own Arctic territory.

Third, the American government passed multiple protectionist laws and regulations which further increased the cost of shipping to, from, and within Alaska during the interwar period. These laws and regulations were uniquely onerous to Alaska because it relied on shipping so heavily. Its sparse settlements were separated by large distances, many of its ports were seasonally choked with ice, and it was physically separated from the contiguous United States by harsh terrain and Canada (Alaska Humanities Forum 2017 Chapters 4-8).

Specifically, the 1920 Jones Act (which is still in effect) required “all cargo transported by water between points in the United States be carried on vessels built and registered in the United States and owned by citizens of the United States” (GAO 1988, pg. 10). This law was designed to promote the development of a larger American merchant fleet but made some commercial operations untenable in Alaska by increasing their cost (GAO 1988, pg. 11).

The Tariff Act of 1922 further increased the costs of shipping in Alaska by requiring that “any repairs done abroad on U.S.-flag ships pay a 50-percent duty on the costs of repairs” (GAO 1988, pg. 11). Many of the closest ports to repair ships that operated in Alaska were necessarily foreign. Also, “in 1933 the federal Intercoastal Shipping Act placed common carriers on water
under government regulation” which eliminated the use of tramp vessels that seasonally operated in Alaska (Alaska Humanities Forum 2017 Chapters 4-8).

Fourth, unlike government policies during the previous recession of the 1890s, the Roosevelt government decreased the chances of a second Klondike Gold Rush by taking the United States dollar off the “gold standard” and insuring banks. These decisions limited runs on banks and limited gold hoarding – negating the impetus for another Klondike Gold Rush in Alaska. Roosevelt did increase the price of gold to devalue the dollar in 1936, which led to an increase in dredging operations in Nome and Fairbanks (Naske pg. 110), but these operations were mechanized and controlled by big business, meaning they did not have nearly the scale or development effect on Alaska as the previous gold rushes or the resource extraction settlements being created in the Soviet Arctic at the same time. Roosevelt’s social welfare policies also provided a safety net for individuals made destitute by the Great Depression that did not exist during the previous gold rushes, which decreased the attraction of prospecting in Alaska.

Fifth, government programs that were designed to facilitate Alaskan economic growth during the Great Depression were often ill-conceived and ill-executed during this period and fell victim to market forces that made them ultimately uneconomical after the Great Depression ended. The Matanuska Colony experiment during the Great Depression was a bellwether in this respect. The Matanuska Colony was a program run by Roosevelt’s Federal Emergency Relief Agency (FERA), which resettled over two hundred farming families from the Midwest to Alaska during the height of the Depression. Poor government execution led to delays building the colony and a huge cost overrun. It was predicted that the colony would cost less than one million dollars to set up but ended up costing over five million dollars (Lundberg, n.d). Due to a lack of knowledge of Alaska’s climate, the government also chose a region that was colder and not as
conducive to agriculture as it could have chosen (Stefansson 1939, pg. 516). The short growing season, cold temperatures, and high freight prices to transport goods to and from the colony made survival difficult and within five years half of the colonists left (Lundberg, n.d.).

Other polar countries also actively restricted American economic expansion into their Arctic territory. Canada was most illustrative of this despite its growing friendliness with the United States and its continued dependency on the American economy. First, the Canadian government rebuffed American and British Columbian efforts to connect the transport system of the contiguous United States with Alaska through British Columbia and the Yukon Territory in the early 1930s.

During these years, automobiles were mass-produced, and tourism and travel took off. Automobile clubs in Alaska and Northwest Canada, and trade groups like the Road Builders Association, lobbied hard for roads to connect the Northwest United States with Alaska (Twichell 1992, pgs. 12-15). They lobbied politicians from the state of Washington, British Columbia, Alaska, and North Dakota to stoke interest in the road throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, to no avail (Twichell 1992, pgs. 18, 23).

The British Columbian Premier, T.D. Pattullo, went so far as to travel to Washington D.C. to promote the project with the American federal government, against the wishes of the Canadian Prime Minister (Twichell 1992, pgs. 17-18). Canada did not want to pay for the road (Twichell 1992, pg. 15), but the bigger impediment to the project was that politicians in Ottawa feared they would lose sovereignty over their western provinces by making it easier for a large influx of Americans to migrate into the thinly populated region if a road to Alaska was constructed (Thompson and Randall 2002, pg. 168).
The Canadian government also successfully restrained Americans’ ability to extract resources in the Canadian Arctic during this era. Although the potential oil deposits of Alaska were thought to be greater than the resources in neighboring Yukon Canada at the time, the previously mentioned American executive orders and legislation that outlawed oil extraction in Alaska between 1910 and 1920 attracted American oil companies to deposits in Norman Wells, on the Canadian Mackenzie River Delta in 1921, instead (Twichell 1992, pg. 149).

However, politicians in Ottawa erected high tariffs to protect their economic sovereignty, and these tariffs forced American companies to form subsidiaries to operate in Canada. An example of this was Standard Oil of New Jersey, which bought Imperial Oil in 1898 and used the Canadian company as a front to extract oil at Norman Wells afterwards (Bone and Mahnic 1984, pg. 56). While a share of the profits from Norman Wells likely went to the company’s headquarters in the United States, this situation showed Canada’s sustained willingness and improved ability to keep American business interests from invading the country like they did during the Klondike Gold Rush.

Since Imperial was nominally a Canadian company, it largely employed Canadians, not Americans. This contrasts with the Klondike Gold Rush, during which the number of prospectors was overwhelmingly American. Forcing Standard to use a Canadian subsidiary also facilitated technology transfer from Americans to Canadians and improved Canada’s ability to extract its own hydrocarbon resources in the Arctic in the future. Furthermore, the oil that was refined by Imperial was utilized most often by local Canadian mining companies that were supported by the energy from Norman Wells (Bone and Manhic 1984, pg. 55).

Despite the development of Norman Wells and the mines nearby, there was little impetus for Canada to develop its northern territory either. The rising stock market of the 1920s, and
increased industrialization, also decreased Canadians’ interest in northern resources. They could make a good living with less risk and less effort in the south of the country (Grant 1989, pg. 33). After the stock market crash of 1929, the Canadian government, like the United States, provided a level of security and protection that kept Canadian citizens from moving north too.

American economic expansion into Russia was even more thoroughly restricted than it was in Canada. Thousands of Americans were attracted to the economically resurgent Soviet Union to help it industrialize during the Great Depression. But these workers were enlisted into Soviet-nationalized businesses that highly limited their ability to direct operations (Saul 2006). In any case, many of these workers became disillusioned with the USSR and returned home, while others were punished in the Stalinist purges and executed or used as gulag labor (Tzouliadis 2008).

American economic interests were also restricted from expanding into Norway. Norwegian historian Roald Berg (2017) suggests that the Secretary of State at the time, Robert Lansing, was attempting to protect American economic concerns with the Svalbard Treaty of 1920. He points out that Lansing had connections with the American mining magnate, John Longyear, and appreciated the potential resource wealth of the Svalbard archipelago. Lansing (1917), himself, claimed that American “enterprise and energy” was responsible for showing the world that Svalbard’s barrenness and ice could be overcome to recover its rich resources (Carroll 1987). However, Longyear sold his Svalbard mining concession to a national Norwegian company in 1916 (see previous chapter), so it is unlikely that Lansing worked to help Longyear specifically. In any case, unlike Russia and Norway, the American government was unwilling to subsidize commercial operations in Svalbard. The high costs and uncertain rewards of resource extraction deterred other potential American economic ventures after the Svalbard Treaty.
concluded, even though the treaty gave Americans equal access to the resources of the Svalbard archipelago afterwards.

Improving technology meant that a brief window of opportunity emerged to establish airways across the “great circle route” linking North America with Eurasia, using stepping stones like Iceland and Greenland during the interwar period. Here also, Americans were hesitant to seize the opportunity and reluctant to sink costs necessary to establish operations in these northern locations, despite their technological lead in aviation. At this time, aircraft range and reliability did not permit safe transatlantic flights, so these “great aircraft carrier” islands of the Arctic\textsuperscript{15} were necessary to span the shrinking gap between Eurasia and North America for passenger-carrying aircraft (Carlson 1962, pgs. 9-10). American companies actively looked to test the economic feasibility of these new routes. Pan Am, for one, partnered with the University of Michigan to research the possibility of developing airfields and air routes from Greenland to Northern Europe and enlisted the services of legendary aviator Charles Lindbergh, who flew to and over Greenland in 1931 and 1933 (Carlson 1962, pg. 41).

Ultimately, Lindbergh concluded that flying across Greenland’s ice sheet, mountains, fjords, and foul weather was very dangerous and that there was a lack of suitable Greenlandic airfield sites that could be used to connect the two continents. He believed (correctly, it turns out) that future range and mechanical aviation improvements would soon obviate the use of austere stopping points like Greenland on transatlantic routes (Carlson 1962, pg. 50).\textsuperscript{16} His analysis greatly diminished Pan Am’s interest in Greenland before the war. Furthermore, Pan Am

\textsuperscript{15} This term for the North Atlantic islands is borrowed from pioneer American aviator Bernt Balchen, who also researched the possibility of establishing airports in Greenland before and during World War II (Carlson 1962, pg. 50).

\textsuperscript{16} That being said, I have recently used airports in Iceland to fly between North America and Europe in business jets that lacked sufficient range to fly directly between the American East Coast and northern Europe, illustrating that these territories continue to be important for general aviation.
expected that Norway would try to block its attempts to establish air routes through Greenland, which kept it from moving forward with the project (Fogleson 1989).

Markedly, the lack of support the American government gave Pan Am contrasted greatly with the Soviet government’s contemporaneous approach to Arctic aviation. While the Soviet Union invested heavily in airfield construction across the Russian Arctic, and even on Arctic ice floes, in an attempt to stimulate and dominate the emerging air routes (McCannon 2010) the American government was content to allow private interests to fend for themselves.

American economic interest in the cryolite mines of southern Greenland also spiked as World War II approached. These mines were the only ones in the world, and demand was high because it was found to be a stellar material for aviation aluminum production by the 1930s. However, the mines were controlled by a Danish national company, and most of the material went to Northern Europe, until Denmark was invaded by Germany in 1940 (Hobbs 1941, pg. 95).

The one place the American government worked to protect American business interests in the North was the Alaska salmon industry, which was controlled remotely from the state of Washington. Even these efforts, paradoxically, would set a precedent that would ultimately limit subsequent American ability to operate economically in much of the Arctic Ocean.

The basis for this precedent was the Japanese fishing fleet’s expansion into the Bering Sea in the 1930s. The American salmon industry pushed the United States Commerce Department, the Department of the Interior, and the State Department to protect its interests against the Japanese fleet, especially in Bristol Bay, even though there was little evidence that Japanese fishing vessels even operated in that region (Hollick 1981, pg. 22). Washington Senator Harold T. Bone drafted legislation in 1937 with support from President Roosevelt that made
salmon hatched in Alaska’s waters American property. He wanted to extend American protection of the migratory fish to twelve miles from the shoreline out to two hundred miles where the water was shallow (Hollick 1981, pg. 23). America’s tense relationship with Japan, and Japan’s diverted attention in Manchuria at the time of the legislation, made its timing opportune (Hollick 1981, pg. 26).

As the State Department intimated at the time the legislation was drafted (Hollick 1981, pg. 27), its precedence would likely result in reciprocal measures by other countries. Indeed, as was previously mentioned, the Soviets had already claimed sovereignty over waters 12 miles from its coastline in 1927. The American legislation therefore, ironically, provided legal support for the Soviet claims to expansive waters in the Arctic. Hollick (1981 pgs. 22-28) convincingly argues that the Alaskan salmon debate also set the precedent for the even more significant Truman Proclamation in 1945. The players that were central to the salmon debate took even more prominent roles in the American government that pushed the Truman Proclamation, which allowed coastal states to expand their economic jurisdiction of resources even further into coastal waters (see Chapter 4).

Hollick (1981 pgs. 28-30) also points out that technological improvements underlined the attempts by the United States, the Soviet Union, and other coastal countries to protect frontier regions like northern coastal waters. Not only were fishing fleets catching fish further from their own shore, but industry was finding ways to exploit oil in the seabed further than the three-mile territorial sea that international law gave them control over at the time. The significance of protecting oil resources in frontier regions was underlined by the American government’s decision to establish a massive **Naval Petroleum Reserve in northern Alaska in 1923** as the United States transitioned its naval fleet from coal to oil – a precedent that would make it easier
for American industry to expand into the region during the oil crisis of the early 1970s (see Chapter 6) and push it to claim an exclusive economic zone to its coastal waters in subsequent decades. In the end, however, America’s attempts to protect its northern resources at this stage gave American industries less international legal support to exploit Arctic waters afterwards, because they had significantly less coastline than Russia and Canada, who expanded their claims to Arctic coastal territory at the same time.

Ultimately, even with a more attentive and amenable government, it is unlikely that American economic expansion into Alaska or in other countries’ Arctic territory would have developed much more quickly than it did during the interwar period. Northern territory was still far removed from markets and existing transportation systems. It was expensive to induce America’s mobile labor to work in this austere and harsh environment, and the lack of agriculture meant that it was also expensive to sustain settlements. All these factors meant that the Arctic continued to be overwhelmingly uneconomical for the United States to develop and reflected America’s relative unwillingness to exploit or claim the region’s resources in line with its material capability to do so.

4. Identity

4.1 Soviet Identity

During this formative time, the Soviets worked diligently to tie the Arctic to Russia’s primordial past and to make the Arctic central to Soviet Russia’s imagined future destiny. Three factors converged between the World Wars to elicit a strong and lasting Russian ideational attachment to the Arctic.

The first factor was increased literacy rates which made state-sponsored media more effective at instilling a national identity than otherwise would have been the case (Anderson
2016). The Soviets utilized their almost total control of the country’s media to shape the national consciousness and slowly replaced the more local spatial identity many Russian had before World War I with a national consciousness (Kaiser 1994) that included the Arctic as a special part of the narrative. This Arctic attachment was even molded in the growing prison population of the Soviet Arctic, where many convicts believed they suffered for the glory of the USSR, which they were told was the vanguard for a better international society (Nordlander 2003, pg. 123-124).

The second factor was the Soviet government’s penchant for “hero projects” in the Arctic, which it utilized to illustrate the Communist system’s superiority over the capitalist system with which it competed and to legitimize its own harsh rule to its citizens. Many of these hero projects, like the Belomor Canal and the establishment of Igarka, were audacious, expensive, and risky. The harsh northern environment maximized the propaganda value of these projects.

The third factor was a concerted effort by the Soviet government to uncover links to prove that Russians historically discovered and occupied territory in the Arctic as a way to secure de jure sovereign rights to it in line with international law (Horensma 1991). These attempts also deepened Russia’s perception that it was primordially attached to the Arctic.

All these factors converged to create what John McCannon (1998) termed the “Red Arctic” – the Soviet Union’s ability to create a Russian identity rooted in the Arctic. It was successful because, according to McCannon, the Arctic remained a “popular genre of Soviet propaganda” until the USSR dissolved. Even now, nostalgic Russian nationalists have borrowed elements of Soviet “Red Arctic” ideation to legitimize Russia’s present assertiveness in the Arctic (Schnirelman 2014). The rest of this section explores these factors in greater depth.
The first things the Bolsheviks did in their centralized attempt to industrialize and create a “politically conscious,” indoctrinated citizenry (Kenez 1985) were to make public education mandatory and to embark on literacy campaigns the tsarist regime had started before them. Kenez (1985, pg. 83) writes, “the early Soviet literacy drive was a success…The literacy drive was one of the means through which the regime attempted to spread its ideology and to mobilize the population for its purposes.” These efforts worked on the back of Tsarist literacy campaigns that began before the Bolshevik Revolution. The campaigns moved the working-age literacy rate from approximately twenty-eight percent in 1897 to practically full literacy by the beginning of World War II (Timasheff 1942) and successfully penetrated even the rural areas by the time Stalin took power. As planned, the power of the press increased with literacy. The press was highly controlled by the Soviet party, which propagated newspapers throughout the country. The dual-pronged literacy and propaganda campaigns allowed the Soviets to shape the historical narrative of their country in this incipient post-Revolution stage. As was noted in the previous chapter, the Bolsheviks utilized the Allies’ retreat from Murmansk as one story in the years that followed the Revolution. This story was powerful because it was the one victory over foreigners to which the Soviets could point at this early stage of their reign, and which followed decades of humiliating Russian military defeats.

Stalin’s propaganda machine further solidified the importance of the Arctic to the Russian historical narrative and firmly installed it in the national psyche after he took over from Lenin in the late 1920s. Contingency contributed to his efforts. In 1928, the Soviets sent the icebreaker, Krasin, to rescue the Italian Nobile Airship that crashed near Novaya Zemlya on its failed attempt to reach the North Pole by air. Soviet propaganda, produced for both domestic and international consumption, claimed the event showed that Russians were superior operators in
the Arctic compared to Europeans, because the Russians could competently operate in this region, while the weaker Europeans perceived it to be a “white hell” (Horensma 1991, pgs. 36-51). Stalin was surprised by the successful and laudatory international and domestic attention to the propaganda, which motivated him to invest in even more audacious Arctic “hero” projects that were also mythicized by the Soviet state-run media.

One of these schemes, a transpolar flight by Valery Chkalov in 1936, shaded the Soviet Air Force’s relatively poor performance in the Spanish Civil War and added to the Soviet’s attachment to the Arctic (Boyd 1977, pg. 65). Another significant Soviet Arctic scheme was the *Chelyuskin* expedition – an early Soviet attempt to traverse the Northern Sea Route (NSR). The *Chelyuskin* was tragically caught in ice in the Chukchi Sea, near the Bering Strait in 1933, leaving over one hundred people adrift for months. The passengers were eventually saved by the daring exploits of Soviet pilots. Stalin awarded the pilots as the first “Heroes of the Soviet Union” – which became the highest honor awarded by Soviet government (Horensma 1991, pgs. 57-58).

Subsequent Soviet maritime and aviation exploits in the Arctic were also memorialized in the Soviet press, in movies, on the radio, in published diaries of expedition leaders, children’s books, and even postage stamps, which further established the Soviet Arctic myth (McCannon 1998) and created a feedback loop between propaganda and ambitious (although largely uneconomical) Soviet attempts to “conquer the Arctic.” Head of Glavsevmorput, and famous Soviet Arctic explorer himself, Otto Schmidt, epitomized this loop, claiming in 1938 that, "The English say that the sea belongs to the nation with the strongest navy. We can say that the North Pole belongs to the nation which has the strongest air fleet" (qtd. in Brontman 1938, 150). This
“othering” in the Arctic served to motivate further Soviet Arctic capability and infrastructure development.

The most famous early example of this was the construction of the Belomor Canal. The Soviets successfully used propaganda to legitimize the brutal slave labor they used to build this canal that connected the White Sea with the Baltic Sea. Famous Soviet writer Maxim Gorky put the gulag island prisoners of Solovetsky and their grueling construction work of the Belomor Canal on a pedestal in a well-read travelogue essay in 1929 and an edited volume of the Belomor Canal construction published in 1933. According to Gorky, the Soviets undertook a grand experiment by using Arctic labor prison to transform criminals into useful, hard-working Soviet citizens. He proclaimed the “Stakhanovite” effort of “shock workers” (the Communist gulag quickly gained its own vocabulary) was critical to completing the important work.

Gorky proudly proclaimed in his 1929 essay, “If any so-called cultured European society dared to conduct an experiment such as this colony, and if this experiment yielded fruits as ours had, that country would blow all its trumpets and boast about its accomplishments” (qtd. in Remnick 2003). According to Applebaum (2003), Gorky’s work successfully legitimized the “violence of the Solovetsky camps” and “helped reconcile the public to the growing, totalitarian power of the state,” which was critical to Soviet efforts to expand their capability and presence across the Eurasian Arctic. The canal also put Stalin on par with Peter the Great, who also successfully coerced Russian labor to achieve great industrial works on the periphery of Russian civilization (Applebaum 2003, pg. 52). Strikingly, the gulag administration put up a sign in the main Solovetsky camp that asserted, “With an Iron Fist, We Will Lead Humanity to Happiness” (qtd. in Remnick 2003).
While most Soviet citizens were decidedly not happy with their forced labor in Arctic gulags, Soviet propaganda did successfully legitimize their placement there and glorified the tremendous sacrifice that they performed on behalf of the Soviet state to open the northern frontier. In Igarka, Gorky even managed to get settlers involved in the narrative that the Soviets were heroically conquering the Arctic. In his edited book, *We Are From Igarka*, schoolchildren are quoted as saying “Soviet power has made the North unrecognizable…Igarka is not only a town or a port. It is a forepost of culture” (qtd. in McCannon 1998, pg. 89). This narrative attached many Soviets ideationally to the Arctic to a depth that legitimated the state’s actions. In many respects, this narrative continues to reverberate with the Russian citizenry, including those living in former Arctic concentration camps, today.

Soviet state-sponsored propaganda was also used to tie much earlier Russian activities in the Arctic to increasingly expansive claims to Arctic territory in the interwar years. Soviet historians and archeologists like Dyakonov, Vize, and Samloyovich, caught up in Stalinist fervor or eager to please Soviet nomenklatura, dug up often forgotten and tenuous Russian connections to the Arctic (Horensma 1991, pgs. 47-49). Not only did these connections help legitimize Soviet claims internationally, but they also provided a convincing narrative that tied Russians primordially to the region, making many of them believe they were eternal products of this frozen “Motherland” and supportive of their government’s expansion into the Arctic. Conversely, this spatial nationalism bred national resentment when the government failed to gain proprietorship over Arctic territory it historically and psychologically believed belonged to it – as was the case with the Svalbard archipelago, where it was forced into a subservient relationship with Norway during the interwar period that continues to irritate Russian foreign policy practitioners today (Rossi 2015, pg. 132).
In sum, the Lenin and Stalin regimes successfully tied Russia, and its people, eternally to the Arctic. They made the Arctic a place of Russian heritage and heroic suffering – a place where Russians overcame extreme hardship and conquered – even if that hardship was created by their own government and the conquering was often coercively wrung from its citizens. The Soviet elites created this influential narrative by using their overwhelming power and direction over almost every aspect of Russian society to profoundly shaped society’s perception of the Arctic at a very formative time in the country’s history.

4.2 American Identity

In contrast to the Soviet Union, the American government, due to its plural institutional structure, its lack of control of the media, and its overwhelming lack of interest in the Arctic, played a relatively small part in crafting the American narrative of the Arctic. Instead, wealthy private individuals took the lead and attempted to take advantage of the culture of hero worship that emerged in America in the 1920s into which polar adventurers fit neatly.

Instead of the Soviet narrative of the Arctic as a region that could and must be conquered by the collective actions of the state, American media overwhelmingly portrayed American exploits in the Arctic as epic individual efforts into a beautiful, harsh, and ultimately unlivable unknown. In some respects, this was a continuance of the narrative that emanated from America’s earlier forays into the Arctic, when the expeditions of Fredrick Cook and Robert Peary were underwritten by newspapers interested in heroic stories to attract readers. Now however, wealthy media moguls used new electronic media and the traditional paper media to push the exploits of explorers, like retired Navy officer Richard Byrd, to the “fore in the popular mind in the 1920s and 1930s” (Matuzozi 2002, pg. 210). American polar aviators, (like they were in Russia), were “promoted by the press as avatars of progress and spiritual enlightenment,”
with a flight like Byrd’s to the North Pole having “consequences out of proportion to the practical results achieved” and the race to the North Pole portrayed as a “battle for national prestige” (ibid., pg. 218).

Unlike Soviet polar exploits, however, these expeditions were privately funded and took a large hit when the Great Depression emerged and after the race for the Pole concluded. Many American readers were unable to buy newspapers, and many of those that could were turned off by the enormous sums needed for polar expeditions when they were struggling to survive. Furthermore, by the late 1920s, American polar aerial explorers like Byrd were wooed away from the Arctic to compete in the emerging race to explore Antarctica. Unlike the mostly maritime Arctic, the terra incognita of the large Antarctic landmass suggested a potential treasure trove of recoverable resources. These influences, and the lack of state support for an American Arctic narrative, ultimately limited the staying power of Byrd and his ilk’s exploits in the Arctic (ibid., pgs. 222-223). Instead, like the Klondike Gold Rush and Peary’s and Cook’s race to the North Pole, these Arctic exploits failed to make an indelible impact on the American consciousness, in which the Arctic remained etched as a far-away frontier.

As New York Times journalist Malcolm Browne (1996) more recently proclaimed, in America, “Few people today really care about conflicting and mostly forgotten claims of polar discovery, because the romantic age of exploration is past. After all, the world has seen men walk on the moon.” But, in Russia, the Arctic has retained its national importance because Russian exploits occurred there just as the Soviet Union established itself as a world power – a status it clings to now – and because the Soviet Union actively used propaganda to instill a national attachment to the Arctic that could not easily be erased.

5. Environmental Policy
5.1. American Environmentalism

As previously mentioned in this chapter, the burgeoning American environmental movement restrained economic development in Alaska. Additionally, it proceeded to reserve expansive swaths of Alaskan territory where almost all human activity was disallowed during the interwar period for the first time. The Pinchot-Ballinger affair highlighted the growing battle between conservationists and industrialists in Alaska. But there was also a growing push by preservationists to go beyond conservation of Alaska’s resources to maintain the “pristine” nature of Alaska’s wilderness forever.

Many advocates of the wilderness philosophy also were employed within executive branch agencies which effectively governed the majority of Alaska’s territory, which gave them great power to enact policy. The institutionalization of the preservationist ethos was also advanced by elite, wealthy adventure tourists that pushed for Alaskan preservation. Consequently, Mt. McKinley National Park was created in 1917 and federal protection of Glacier Bay followed in 1925 (Heacox 2014, pg. 199) – leading the way to further institutionalized protection of Alaskan land thereafter.

Significantly, the primeval construct of the Arctic linked Alaska to the romantic ideas of earlier American wilderness writers like Thoreau and Emerson and was continued in the works of Jack London, who connected his readers to processes and time scales in the Arctic that extended far beyond their life and lifetime (Kaye 2006, pg. 37). United States Forest Service (USFS) officials such as Aldo Leopold and Robert Marshall, and the United States’ Biological Survey official, Olaus Murie, were inspired by this construct and advances made in ecology that proposed that nature was fragile and connected. Significantly, they had the official position and scientific legitimacy within the American government to promote wilderness protection against
encroaching civilization in Alaska. Many other American government officials created and joined environmental organizations to promote wilderness preservation outside of their official channels. For instance, Leopold formed the Wilderness Society in 1935, which subsequently recruited other government employees, like Marshall and Murie, to lobby the federal government for wilderness preservation.

For instance, Bob Marshall wrote an influential appendix in the United States government’s 1937 *Recreation Survey on Alaska* that highlighted the value of Alaskan wilderness and proposed that the United States government “keep northern Alaska largely a wilderness” (qtd. in Kaye 2006, pg. 2). He also lobbied against efforts in the 1930s to build a road between Fairbanks, Alaska and Seattle, because it was incompatible with his vision of wilderness protection in Alaska (Nelson 2004, pg. 23). His 1940 book *Arctic Village: A 1930s Portrait of Wiseman* was also very influential and promoted the romantic wilderness lifestyle of the few American Arctic citizens who embraced wilderness living in northern Alaska.

Olaus Murie’s articles about his biological expeditions into the Alaskan interior also contributed to the efforts of Marshall and John Muir to influence government policy and to attract the American public’s attention to the value of Alaskan wilderness (Kaye 2006, pg. 28). Murie believed wild animals needed ample room to survive and that even benign practices like reindeer farming had terrible ramifications in the Arctic. He exclaimed, “The caribou’s greatest menace is not the wolf nor the hunter but man's economic development, principally the raising of reindeer. Wherever reindeer herds are introduced, caribou must of course disappear for both cannot occupy the same range” (qtd. in Glover 1992, pg. 139). The instinctive policy prescription for Murie’s observation was to outlaw commercial reindeer farming, the likes of which were promoted at the same time in the Soviet Arctic, and also to promote the institutionalization of
wilderness areas in northern Alaska to protect wild caribou and other Arctic animals from human encroachment.

More than anything else, Leopold, Marshall, Murie, Muir, and the networked communities they formed during this era would be instrumental in the post-World War II era, when the debate between Alaskan economic development, conservation, and preservation reached a fever pitch. These visionaries and the organizations they founded, the Sierra Club and Wilderness Society, grew into a strong and enduring movement that pushed the federal government to institutionally preserve Alaskan wilderness and restrained American willingness to expand its physical presence into Alaska. Many more Americans, including influential elites, came to believe during this time that the Arctic was a threatened hinterland that belonged to all of humanity and, thus, needed to be protected from human encroachment, while the Soviet citizens were being taught that the Arctic needed to be conquered by the scientific and technological might of the Soviet proletariat.

5.2 Soviet Environmentalism

In contrast to America’s growing attachment to wilderness and the environment, Soviet Russia’s “visions of nature were informed by deeply Promethean sensibilities” due to the primacy given to technology and progress within Marxist ideology (McCannon 1998, pg. 82). In fact, the founder of Russian Marxist thought, Georgy Plekhanov, “inverted Fredrick Jackson Turner’s ‘frontier hypothesis’” by concluding that Russia’s harsh northern environment had doomed it to a “perpetual state of stagnation” (ibid., pfg. 82). As such, the Communist government that took over after the Bolshevik Revolution saw the Arctic wilderness as something that could and should be conquered by the Russians as their national advancement “depended on the subjugation of the elements” (ibid., pg. 83).
The Soviet government was therefore eager to tame its Arctic wilderness and largely heedless to the environmental cost of doing so. In fact, the Soviet government was even more heedless to the human cost of conquering the Arctic. Without restraining institutions, or influential citizens that could lobby for environmental protection, the Soviet government ambitiously pushed to mold the “pristine” Arctic into something more functional. This was seen in the large gulag establishments across the Soviet Arctic, but also in the smaller reindeer collectives that the Soviets attempted to develop with native labor to feed the growing Soviet Arctic population. Even the wilderness spaces the Soviets did protect in the Arctic at this time (zapovednie) were a part of a larger scheme to make the region more economically productive. The zapovednie were established to study the natural environment so its resources could be more easily extracted. Overall, the difference between the environmental outlook of Russia and the United States could not be much greater during this era and contributed to the two states’ relative willingness to expand their spheres of influence into the region in the decades that followed.

6. Natives Rights

6.1. American Natives Rights

After World War I, native rights increased as the American government became more progressive and established in Alaska. Not only did the American government push for the self-determination of people in other countries, but it also increased its respect for its own native groups. This positively affected Alaskan natives’ ability to influence American Arctic policy in their favor and to veto policies they felt would negatively affect their lifestyles.

Chapter 1 established that the Treaty of Cession with Russia created a modicum of de jure native rights to govern themselves and maintain rights over land and property (Schneider 2017, pg. 88). However, federal neglect of Alaska kept these de jure rights from becoming a
practicality until the American government became more knowledgeable of Alaska with the Klondike Gold Rush. In the 1920s, national legislation was created which gave Alaskan natives more de jure rights and greater ability to maintain their hold over property and to retain local governance than natives in the contiguous United States were previously given. Significantly, this legislation was felt greatest in Arctic Alaska, where encroachment on native land was the least pronounced in the whole country because of its austerity.

In 1924, the American government created the Indian Citizenship Act, which made Alaskan natives citizens of the United States and gave them the right to vote and own property (Schneider 2017 pg. 88). Two years later, the Native Townsite Act gave Alaskan natives the ability to obtain deeds to property in town sites free of cost. Due to a lack of cultural value placed in private property, however, natives were slow to obtain the deeds (Henley 1966). In 1934, the Indian Reorganization Act (aka the Wheeler-Howard Act), pushed by Alaskan Congressional delegate Anthony Dimond, expanded native property rights and formally allowed natives to govern themselves through tribal governments. This arrangement fit better with the natives’ cultural understanding of property rights and gave them greater sovereignty over Alaska’s northern territory than at any time since before the Russians colonized Alaska (Hensley 2017). It also prevented non-natives from buying up native land claims at artificially cheap prices due to the native’s ignorance of the significance of the land claims they were previously given (Hensley 1966).

In 1937, the chairman of the Department of Interior, Harold Ickes, underlined how the value structure of portions of the American government towards natives had changed and how that affected legislation and policy. He stressed that coercively integrating Alaskan natives into the American wage economy would be harmful to the natives. He stated that he feared that “a
people which once was self-sufficient has become dependent upon external forces which are
totally disregardful of their needs…The whites of Alaska cannot continue to profit at the expense of the natives. Constitutionally suited to life in the Arctic, the Eskimo and the Alaska Indian must form the foundation to any long-range planning for the development as contrasted to the exploitation of the Territory" (qtd. in Stefansson 1939, pg. pg. 514).

This more benign approach resulted from the government’s reflection that the boom-and-bust natural resource cycle of the American economy had disproportionately affected Alaska’s natives, and they needed to retain elements of their former subsistence lifestyle to survive during bust eras. In any case, the bust cycle of the interwar period allowed native populations to stabilize and then increase, as the flow of American citizens from outside of Alaska also slowed (See Figure 2). It is important to note that most of the population flow into Alaska also continued to be into southern Alaska. Whaling’s decline meant that northern Alaska saw a slight decrease in non-native population, as can be witnessed by the population of Barrow, the largest whaling station on Alaska’s Arctic coast (Figure 3), where a government rescue station, built in 1889, was closed in 1895 due to its lack of use (Kennedy 1979). Also, the decline of whaling and gold mining led to an exodus of non-natives from the northwestern port of Nome and interior Fairbanks (See Figure 3). Both towns only regained some of their population when military operations ramped up as World War II approached.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Native</th>
<th>Non-Native</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>63,356</td>
<td>27,747</td>
<td>35,609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>55,036</td>
<td>27,025</td>
<td>28,011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, Alaskan native groups increased their ability to govern themselves and to hold property in America’s relatively open political system as World War II approached – especially in northern Alaska, which experienced relatively little encroachment by non-native populations. This development created a further veto point in American Arctic policy and restrained America’s economic and physical expansion into the Arctic. Unlike the Soviets, the American government did not have the willingness to completely subjugate their Arctic native population and left the native population a modicum of sovereignty that further complicated the potential for an expansionary Arctic foreign policy in the future.

6.2 Soviet Natives Rights

Before the Bolshevik Revolution, the Soviets already dominated Arctic natives in Russia to a much greater extent than the Americans did. The Soviets’ dramatic economic push into the Arctic after the Revolution put them into greater contact with indigenous groups and exacerbated this domination and the internal colonization that occurred.
After the Bolshevik’s victory, there was a vibrant debate between Soviet radicals and conservatives over whether the natives should be protected or merged into “one Soviet people” (Vakhtin 1994, pg. 40). During this debate, Soviet domination took on a paternal approach that even exceeded America’s evolving approach to its own natives in Alaska. The Soviets studied the natives, educated the natives, gave to them written alphabets for their languages, and provided health care that improved the natives’ living conditions. They also created their first census that included the natives (See Figure 2). This approach to the native groups increased Soviet international soft power in an age when self-determination was also being promoted by its capitalist competitors. Soviet radicals perceived the natives to be a part of the international proletariat and victims of international class warfare. They asserted that they were aiding and not taking advantage of their natives, as they insisted was occurring in capitalist countries. More importantly, however, the aid they provided became a benevolent excuse for dominating these marginalized groups even more.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Population in 1926</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aleuts</td>
<td>3,354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chukchi</td>
<td>12,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuvans</td>
<td>705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolgans</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entsy</td>
<td>482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eskimos</td>
<td>1,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evenks</td>
<td>38,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evens</td>
<td>2,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itel'mens</td>
<td>859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kets</td>
<td>1,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khants</td>
<td>17,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koryaks</td>
<td>7,439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mansi</td>
<td>6,095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanais</td>
<td>5,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negidals</td>
<td>683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nenets</td>
<td>16,217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nganasans</td>
<td>867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nivkhi</td>
<td>4,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orochi</td>
<td>647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oroks</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saami</td>
<td>1,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sel'kups</td>
<td>1,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tofalars</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Udege</td>
<td>1,357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ul'chi</td>
<td>723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukagirs</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>127,626</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 9: Russian northern native populations in 1926. Source: Vakhtin 1994 (pg. 34).*
However, Soviet radicals won out when Stalin emerged as the Soviet leader in 1929. Within a few years, Soviet policies for the natives moved from benevolent paternalism to forced assimilation. In the name of class warfare, the Soviets disrupted the natives’ hierarchical governing systems, which they claimed were antithetical to international socialism. They also collectivized many native groups into reindeer farms and other economic activities to provide local food and labor for the industrial cities the Soviets were rapidly establishing on the Arctic tundra.

Nikolai Vakhtin claims that natives were “turned into mere food and transport suppliers” for the Soviets. The journal for the Soviet Committee for the North also stated that concern for the natives was subordinate to industrial development (1994 Vakhtin, pg. 41). Even more land and resources were taken from the natives to feed the industrialization. In this way, the Soviets effectively and conclusively integrated the natives into the Soviet economy and political system and internally colonized them. There was very little self-governance or self-determination for the natives. Nikolai Vakhtin (1994, pg. 39) suggests that, by 1923, “the dominance of the Soviet authorities was complete in most parts of the North. The former native administrative structures, together with all the organs of the former Tsarist administration, had been dismissed and the “Statute of the Indigenous Peoples” had been abrogated.” This dominance would only increase as the Soviet system became further entrenched in the Russian Arctic, and the number of Russians moving into the Arctic overwhelmed many of the native tribes (See Figures 6 and 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Indigenous percent of population in northern territory in 1926</th>
<th>Indigenous percent of population in northern territory in 1937/1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

199
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1926 Percentage</th>
<th>1937/1939 Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chukotka</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamchatka</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komi</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>72.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yakut</td>
<td>81.6</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuvash</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karelia</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 10: Indigenous Population Percentage in northern Russia in 1926 and 1937/1939. Sources: Vakhtin, 1994, pg. 51; Kaiser 1994, pgs. 116, 174-175*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage of Russians in northern territory in 1926</th>
<th>Percentage of Russians in northern territory in 1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Komi</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yakut</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuvash</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 11: Russian Population Percentage in northern Russia in 1926 and 1937/1939. Sources: Vakhtin, 1994, pg. 51; Kaiser 1994, pgs. 116, 174-175*

Ultimately, as World War II approached, the Soviet Arctic natives were firmly under the control of the Soviet government and became a minority population group after the Soviets migrated millions of Europeans into the Soviet Arctic (Josephson 2014; Slezkine 1996). As was the case in other regions of the world, the Europeans brought diseases and alcohol with them, further weakening the native population. Ultimately, Soviet relations with Arctic indigenous groups during the interwar period were formative (Vakhtin 1994, pg. 38) and greatly weakened any future ability these groups would have to restrain the Russian government’s expansion into the Arctic. In contrast to natives in northern Alaska, the Soviet government did not even pretend
to give natives any autonomy. Instead, the Soviets institutionalized their domination of the natives.

7. Path Dependence

The Soviets’ historic and unparalleled efforts to claim, conquer, and develop the Arctic were something that the United States did not have the desire, nor the institutional capability, to replicate during the interwar period. Unlike the Soviets, the United States did not face credible international threats coming from the Arctic or feel like the Arctic environment was containing it, like the Soviets did. The Soviets’ aggressive move towards Marxist-Leninist Communism, which it tried to export throughout Europe and North America, as well as its historic enmity with European states and Japan, isolated it and pushed it to assert sovereignty throughout a growing section of the Arctic and to develop a greater capability to protect that sovereignty.

In contrast, the United States was positively engaged with countries it construed as friendly neighbors with complementary governing systems in the Arctic. For one, Canada and its patron, Great Britain, went to World War I with the United States, solidifying a “special relationship” against authoritarian states like Germany and Russia. This special relationship meant that the United States was not threatened when Canada diplomatically asserted control over the North American Arctic and the islands contiguous to the North American Arctic. Secondly, America’s relative material strength and lack of nearby threats meant that it was motivated to secure its material interests in regions that it felt were more threatened and which were of more economic and military significance than the Arctic to the United States, such as the Panama Canal and the South Pacific, which contributed to its neglect of the Arctic as its international borders solidified.
Institutionally, Leninist, and especially Stalinist, Russia were also more adept at expanding a physical presence in the Arctic than the United States. In many respects, Lenin and Stalin further centralized Tsarist institutions to gain hold over the country. However, two large points differentiated Lenin and Stalin from the Tsars. First, Lenin and Stalin were bent on industrializing the country. Second, Lenin and Stalin were much more ruthless in their efforts to centralize control over the country than even the most aggressive Tsars were. The seemingly irrational efforts to populate and industrialize the Arctic were an effect of these coercive institutions since gulag and exile labor were the key tools the Soviets used to “conquer” the Arctic during this timeframe – including forcibly collectivizing and assimilating Arctic indigenous groups into Soviet society.

Effectively, Soviet political and economic institutions, when intertwined with geopolitical considerations, provided the Soviets with both the capability and willingness to endure the high economic and human costs of pushing the Soviet sphere of influence into the Arctic and created the presence and capability that subsequent Soviet and Russian regimes would use to expand their sphere of influence in the Arctic.

In contrast, the much more competitive and open American political and economic institutions largely pushed the United States from asserting itself more positively in the Arctic, even though America had the relative material strength to do so. The high transportation and labor costs of operating in the Arctic limited the economic benefits of extracting the area’s rich resources. International economic competition also made it more difficult for American businesses to compete in other Arctic countries, including Canada and Russia, which further detracted from American willingness to expand its economic might into the Arctic. Furthermore, the increasingly institutionalized environmental value placed on the Arctic and a growing respect
for native rights further diminished the American government’s willingness to be more assertive in the Arctic than it was.

Overall, the Soviet Union attempted to conquer the Arctic, while America alternatively neglected the Arctic or attempted to preserve it in its wilderness state for the native people that first inhabited it. The vast divergence between the two countries during this era set the Russians and the Americans on different paths in the Arctic that continue to this day. Unlike how realists would theorize, this divergence had little to do with how much material power each country had. If this was the case, the United States should have forcefully pushed its way into the Arctic, and Russia should have retreated in the interwar period. Instead, this divergence had more to do with how the states’ respective domestic institutions were shaped and how the respective nations constructed the Arctic region and their relationships with other regional states. In a region as inhospitable and severe as the Arctic, it took a strong and coercive Soviet state to assertively stake its claim, where its strongest Arctic neighbor, the United States, was reluctant and ultimately incapable politically, of mobilizing the country’s superior resources to balance the Soviet threat.
Chapter 4: World War II (1939-1945)

1. Introduction:

World War II increased the United States’ and the Soviet Union’s capability and willingness to expand their respective spheres of influence into the Arctic. The war also created new state-to-state relationships and domestic institutions that motivated the two countries to approach the Arctic in a new and more expansive way after the war. As such, this chapter primarily focuses on explaining how geopolitics influenced both countries’ approaches to the Arctic and only secondarily explains how the states’ economic institutions, identity, environmentalism, and native rights were influenced by the war and affected the states’ Arctic policy thereafter.

2. Geopolitics

2.1. Soviet Geopolitics

Because of its tenuous position in Eurasia, and its tense relations with its neighbors, the Soviet Union was involved in the Arctic to a much greater extent than the United States at the beginning of World War II. Unable to goad the United States or western European democratic states into a military alliance before World War II, the Soviet Union settled on a tenuous alliance with Nazi Germany that was concluded with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939, as was documented in the previous chapter. This contingent and tenuous agreement was the first critical juncture of the war. It had a profound and long-lasting impact on Russia’s Arctic geopolitics, when the Soviets agreed with the Germans to split northern Europe into two spheres. It was secretly agreed that northwestern Europe (Norway, Denmark, and western Poland) would belong to Germany and northeastern Europe (the Baltic States, Finland, and eastern Poland) would belong to Soviet Russia.
Germany and the Soviet Union moved quickly to establish themselves in their agreed-upon spheres of influence in northern Europe. The Soviet Union forced Estonia and Latvia to sign mutual assistance pacts and occupied eastern Poland. In doing so, the Soviets regained territory they were forced to give up after World War I and re-secured access to the Baltic and Barents Seas. More critically, the pact with the Nazis allowed the Soviets to establish a firm territorial buffer between themselves and the Great Powers of Western Europe (Molotov 1940) – a goal of Russia since the times of Peter the Great. The buffer between itself and its newfound ally, Germany, was especially critical. Despite their fast alliance, both states viewed each other with trepidation and suspicion. Stalin and Hitler believed that National Socialism and Communism were antithetical political systems, and both did not trust each other – a lasting remnant of their adversarial relationship from World War I as much as their competing political ideologies.

The Soviets then turned their military attention to the circumpolar country of Finland, which proved more problematic. Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov (1940 pgs. 6, 17) explained that bringing Finland into the Soviet sphere of influence was done to safeguard Leningrad and the Murmansk railroad. Molotov used a 1919 article from the London Times to support his argument. The article stated: “If we look at a map we shall find that the best approach to Petrograd [aka Leningrad] is from the Baltic and that the shortest and easiest route is through Finland, whose frontiers are only about thirty miles distant from the Russian capital. Finland is the key to Petrograd, and Petrograd is the key to Moscow” (qtd. in Molotov 1940, pg. 14). Germany’s bombardment of Leningrad from Finland during World War I further contributed to Soviet paranoia.
The Soviets’ realist fear of attack from Finland was magnified by the Communist ideology that dominated its foreign policy. According to Molotov, the capitalist countries’ threats to the Soviet Union were “still more pronounced (compared to threats posed by Nazi Germany), vividly showing how profound are the class roots of the hostile policy of the imperialists toward a socialist state” (Molotov 1940, pg. 4). He accused “western imperialist powers” of using Finland as a possible conduit to attack the Soviet Union and blamed Allied economic aid to Finland for thwarting Soviet attempts to quickly conquer Finland in 1939 (Molotov 1940, pg. 6). He declared, “Finland was not merely our collision with Finnish troops. It was a collision with the combined forces of a number of imperialist states most hostile toward the Soviet Union” (Molotov 1940, pg. 12).

Finland’s move towards the West during the interwar period also provoked Soviet aggression. Gaining its independence from a materially weakened Russia after World War I, Finland weathered a domestic communist uprising that would have linked it more firmly into the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence. In defiance of Soviet wishes, the democratically elected and newly independent Finnish government expressed sympathy for western liberalism and increased its political and economic integration with its liberal neighbors in Scandinavia, which garnered Soviet disdain (Dancy 1946, pg. 515). After the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, exiled Finnish Communists in the Soviet Union “prompted by their own wishful thinking, asserted that [Finland] was ready to be taken” (Elting 1981, pg. 22). In accordance with these assertions, Molotov claimed the Soviet invasion was designed to relieve the Finnish working class from the “barbarous Finnish whites” (Molotov 1940, pg. 9) and to reintegrate Finland into the Soviet sphere of influence.
Finland’s own material weakness and sudden international isolation made it vulnerable to Soviet aggression. At the start of the Soviet invasion, the Finnish air force consisted of less than one hundred airplanes, many Finnish soldiers had never seen a tank, and most of Finland’s munitions were from World War I (Elting 1981, pg. 22). The Finns hoped they could make up for this weakness, and the sudden loss of the German counterweight to the Soviets, by enlisting the support of their democratic Scandinavian neighbors as well as Great Britain and the United States. This liberal attempt at external balancing proved tragically illusory. Finland was unable to persuade Sweden, Norway, or Denmark to ally with it. This was partly because these countries were restrained by their own long-standing identities as neutral countries that did not get involved in other countries’ affairs and partly because of their own rational fear of becoming embroiled in a tragic war with the more powerful Germans or Soviets. Dancy (1946, pg. 525) convincingly claims that the Scandinavians’ failure to come to Finland’s aid had long-lasting ramifications – it meant that “Finland's experiment with a Scandinavian orientation is over…a northern union or bloc has passed outside the sphere of practical politics.”

Additionally, the proximity of the German military behemoth situated between the United States (Lewallen 2010) and Great Britain and Finland kept these democratic Great Powers from intervening more forcibly to protect Finland (something explained in more depth later in this chapter) during the early stages of the war, when it was unclear just how aggressive Hitler or Stalin would get. This left Finland geographically isolated and forced it to face the Soviets alone.

Despite its large military, the Soviets overestimated their own military strength and underestimated Finland’s willingness to resist Soviet occupation. First, the Soviets failed to strong-arm Finland, through both pro-Communist, anti-fascist propaganda and threats of force, into a pact that would have made the Finns amenable to Soviet occupation, as they had
successfully done with the Baltic States (Kalijarvi 1948, pg. 215). Second, the Soviets were unable to intimidate the Finns into accepting Soviet occupation after their initial invasion. Inspired by nationalism and the strong military leadership of Field Marshal Mannerheim, not to mention utilizing effective hit-and-run guerilla tactics on terrain that the Soviets were unaccustomed to fighting on, the Finns put up a spirited resistance that surprised the Soviets and kept them from occupying all of Finland (Elting 1981, pg. 26).

Nevertheless, the Soviets pushed Finnish forces eastward and regained control over the mineral-rich Pechenga region and the Rybachy Peninsula, which borders the Barents Sea, before signing a peace pact with Finland in 1940. In addition to these advances, the Soviets regained control over eastern Karelia and forced Finland to lease territory in southwestern Finland to the Soviet Union to be used as naval bases (first Hanko in 1940, later substituted for Porkaala in 1944) and tentatively secured access to neutral Sweden, providing another source of raw materials and supplies to support its war effort (Kaljarvi 1948, pg. 217). These gains secured Soviet access to the Baltic Sea, gave the Soviet Union greater political leverage over Finland, and denied Finland access to the Arctic Ocean – circumstances that continue to hamper Finland now. In the short term, these circumstances provided the Soviets a critical territorial buffer between the important Soviet cities of Leningrad and Moscow and Germany, however.

A second critical juncture that greatly increased the Soviets’ willingness and capability to expand its sphere of influence in the Arctic was Germany’s tragic decision to attack the Soviet Union in 1941. The German military operation, named Barbarossa, existentially threatened the Soviet Union. The Soviets now needed the territorial buffer established by its previous gains in northwestern Europe. This buffer stretched German logistical lines and helped the Soviets survive until the extreme Russian winter weather relieved the debilitating sieges on Leningrad,
Moscow, and Stalingrad in 1942. The surprise German invasion also destroyed Soviet industrial capacity and military material. The Russian Arctic now became a critical source of resources and supply lines for the Soviets – something that will be explained in the economic section of this chapter.

The German invasion also caused a dramatic realignment of short-term alliances that would greatly affect the Arctic’s regional construction during and after the war. The first change in this realignment was Finland’s decision to become a co-belligerent with Germany against the Soviet Union. This choice was not made out of the blue. In spite of Germany’s collusion with the Soviets during the Winter War, Germany had helped liberate Finland from Russia during World War I. Consequently, the isolated Finns already had a wartime bond with Germany. Many Finnish officers had confidence in the German military, and some hoped they could realize irredentist claims to northern Sweden and northern Norway by fighting with the Germans (Dancy 1946 pg. 517). With this occasion, Finland became the sole democratic government to ally with an Axis Power during the war – a realpolitik-driven aberration from the liberal peace theory that would sour its relations with the United States during and after the war.

However, Finland’s reticence to completely cooperate with the authoritarian Nazi regime also illustrates that it tried to temper its contingent alliance with Germany with its liberal value system. This can be seen in its refusal to completely integrate its forces with the Nazis or to decisively attack the Murmansk railroad when the Nazis asked it to do so. The Finnish government did not completely trust the German government, and it was fearful of irreparably damaging relations with the Allies and the Soviet Union after the war.

As Allied forces stormed across Europe towards Germany in 1943-1944, Finland turned on the German forces in its country to keep the Allies from attacking it. The Germans enacted a
scorched earth policy across Finland’s northern Arctic terrain as they retreated into Norway, weakening Finland further. The Soviet Union took advantage of the power vacuum to seize all of the territory it previously held in Finland during the Winter War. This included the mineral-rich territory of Petsamo that previously provided Finland’s only access to the Arctic Ocean. Additionally, the military airports and a naval port the Germans constructed during their time in Finland now gave the Soviets greater access to the Arctic than they had before (Gebhardt 1989, pg. 129). Finland ended the war sovereign and defiant, but also alone, land-locked from the Arctic Ocean, and fully aware that it must tread carefully with the Soviet behemoth at its doorstep. The war provided the Soviet Union with the economic, military, and political leverage to keep Finland within its sphere of influence after the war. However, Finland’s ability to resist complete domination by the Soviets, and its ability to maintain a modicum of control over its democratic political institutions, also kept it from becoming a completely obedient Soviet vassal.

It also took Germany’s surprise 1941 attack on the Soviets to abruptly change the Soviets’ overtly hostile attitude towards the Allies. Similar to World War I, the United States and Great Britain grudgingly aligned with the Soviet Union because they acknowledged that the twelve million men the Soviet Union had its disposal (Edwards 2002, Loc. 208) and the second front the Soviets posed for the Germans were indispensable assets in what was now a total war. The result of this realist accommodation was the acceptance of the Soviet Union into Lend-Lease agreements with the United States. When Germany, with the help of its Axis allies, blocked the Soviets from the Black Sea and threatened the closure of the USSR’s main Pacific port of Vladivostok (Edwards 2002, Loc. 1171), the Allies moved to rehabilitate World War I sea lanes between northern Europe and northwestern Soviet Union (see Chapter 3), which again were used to provide critical supplies to the Soviet Union.
Germany did not move to cut off the ports of Murmansk and Archangelsk on the Kola Peninsula more aggressively during World War II, because it wrongly believed the war with the Soviets would be quickly concluded, and it overestimated the help it would get from the Finns on the Arctic front. That being the case, Germany did not believe attacking Murmansk was worth diluting its main northern attacking force concentrated on Leningrad or its defensive forces in Norway (Ziemke 1959, pgs. 123-124, 128, 154). Instead, the Germans were content with disallowing an Anglo-American landing on the Arctic Coast and on controlling Finland’s Arctic Petsamo region (Germany’s only source of nickel during the war), instead of taking the offensive (Ziemke 1959, pgs. 158, 229).

The Soviets fought better than the Germans anticipated and maintained their hold on Murmansk and the vital supply route coming southward to Leningrad and Moscow from this critical Arctic port (Ziemke 1959, pg. 145). The supply route itself gave the Soviets a tactical advantage by allowing them to quickly move soldiers (many of which were pulled from the area’s many gulag camps that were constructed in the interwar period) to fill weaknesses in the line (Ziemke 1959). The Soviets’ overwhelming supply of manpower in the region also gave them an advantage. Thousands more Soviets were killed than Germans and Finns, and the city of Murmansk was heavily damaged by air raids, but the Soviets were unwilling to give up ground. Germany’s lack of familiarity with Arctic conditions contributed to its lack of success, as did its attempt to annihilate Leningrad instead of just capturing it (Ziemke 1959, pgs. 209, 316).

These moves exponentially increased the value the Soviet Union, and its new allies, placed on the Barents’ sea lanes and the ports of Murmansk and Archangelsk and their desire to further develop these ports. The initial German invasion destroyed the bulk of the Soviet air force’s equipment and a large amount of its industrial base. The Barents’ sea lanes were the
shortest and most direct route between the Allies and the Soviet Union and allowed the Allies to help sustain the Soviet Union when it faced defeat.

Murmansk took the bulk of supplies transported through this route as it was the only year-round ice-free port the Soviets controlled. Archangelsk was often iced in from November to May, the part of the year the sea lanes were safest because Arctic darkness decreased the convoys’ threat from German detection. The Soviets lacked icebreaker support to keep Archangelsk open year-round (Edwards 2002, Loc. 221). However, the Soviet icebreaker fleet grew larger as the war progressed with the addition of American and Canadian icebreakers that improved Archangelsk’s ability to receive Lend-Lease aid. The Soviet Northern Fleet that protected Murmansk also exploded in size during the war. American military historian James Gebhardt (1989, pg. 86) claims that, by the fall of 1944, the Soviet Northern Fleet Commander, Admiral Golovko, “now commanded a force of more than 25 submarines and almost 300 surface vessels, including a significant number of small craft manufactured in the United States and delivered to the U.S.S.R. through lend-lease. His air force numbered some 275 aircraft of all types. On the Srednii and Rybachii Peninsulas were stationed two brigades of naval infantry, along with several separate numbered battalions (approximately 15,000 ground troops).”

In short, the Murmansk Convoys served as an indispensable “lifeline” to the Soviet Union during the Germans’ debilitating invasion and increased the region’s worth to the Soviets (Carlson 1962). Although the Germans heavily damaged the Soviet Union’s Arctic ports during the war, the equipment the Soviets received to operate the ports from the Allies and the experience they gained from the war gave them a better capability to operate in the region after

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17 While this was a large improvement compared to its prewar strength, the size of the Soviet northern air force still paled in comparison to the other Soviet regional air commands (Boyd 1977, pgs. 116, 180) and reflected Germany’s decision to focus its attack on the sub-Arctic Soviet Union instead of Murmansk as well as the Soviet Union’s decision to focus its attack on Germany, instead of Finland, at the end of the war.
the war. Furthermore, protecting these Arctic ports against Germany and Finland motivated the Soviet Union to militarize the region, with Allied help, to a far greater extent than they were able or willing to do before the war – making the Kola Peninsula the most militarized part of the entire Arctic by the end of the war. Overall, the wartime experience provided the Soviet Union with a solid material framework in the Barents region upon which they could build after the war.

On the eastern side of the Soviet Arctic, rapid technological improvements in aviation made transcontinental airways possible. The Soviets built a string of airfields across northeastern Siberia to facilitate the Lend-Lease Agreement they made with the United States after the German invasion, creating the Alaska-Siberia (ALSIB) air route, which connected the two continents across the Bering Strait. Although far from the Soviet-German front, this air route was also far away from the German air and naval forces that made the Murmansk transports so hazardous (Carlson 1962, pg. 141). In fact, the Murmansk Convoys became so dangerous that Great Britain and the United States postponed their use during the summer of 1942 until Arctic darkness decreased the German threat. This made the ALSIB route (as well as newly established sea routes through the Pacific and Persian Gulf) relatively more important than the Murmansk route as the war progressed, even though these other routes were more circuitous than the Murmansk route (Van Tuyll 1989).

The ALSIB airways augmented the Arctic airbases the Soviet Union established during the interwar period (See Chapter 3). To build and sustain these airfields, the Soviets were also forced to improve the eastern portion of the Northeastern Sea Route (NSR), where a relatively small amount of Lend-Lease material was also transported. The Soviets transported approximately eight thousand critically needed American military aircraft and millions of pounds of war material along this critical lifeline (Carlson 1962) to beleaguered Soviet forces on the
Eastern Front during the remainder of the war. It also improved the Soviet Union’s ability to operate in the Arctic after the war.

The Soviets scored a diplomatic success during the war by maintaining a tenuous neutrality with Japan. This neutrality was predicated on the Soviet military successes against the Japanese before World War II (see Chapter 3), which deterred further Japanese aggression against the Soviets in Siberia (Goldman 2012). Japan’s geopolitical focus also moved further south due to the power vacuum that was created by Germany’s invasion of Western Europe. German actions in Europe put further pressure on what Louis Morton (1962, pg. 652) called the “crumbling empires of the British, French, and Dutch” and offered “tempting opportunities” to the expansionary Japanese. Japan’s and the Soviet Union’s mutual desire to avoid fighting a two-front war underlined their contingent non-aggression during the war. As a side effect, neutrality allowed the Soviets, and the Japanese, to avoid militarizing the Sea of Okhotsk and the Bering Sea during the war. This, in turn, kept the Soviets from further developing the NSR, since its scarce wartime resources were needed for its battle of survival against the Germans.

However, after Germany was defeated, the Soviets renounced their neutrality pact with Japan. With American approval at the Tehran and Yalta Conferences, the Soviet Union retook the southern half of Sakhalin Island and the Kurile Islands from the beleaguered Japanese and temporarily gained the ice-free ports of Dalien and Port Arthur in exchange (Department of State, n.d.). These events meant that the Soviet Union did not have to militarize relatively inhospitable northern Siberia to maintain access to the North Pacific, like it did in the Barents Sea, to maintain access to the North Atlantic after the war.
Similar to their contingent peace with Japan, the Soviet Union did not attempt to form deep security relationships with the United States or Great Britain, despite their wartime alliance. Russia’s early exit from World War I and the Bolshevik’s backing of an international class struggle against the United States and Great Britain set the stage for these relations, which were further harmed by the Soviets’ early alliance with Nazi Germany at the beginning of World War II as well as the Soviets’ aggressive expansion into northern Europe after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed. However, Marxist-Leninist conceptions of capitalist imperialism, Stalinist paranoia, and traditional Russian insecurity were the deeper roots of Soviet intransigence (Taubman 1982). Cloe and Monaghan (1984, pg. 149) claim that the Soviet Foreign Minister’s feeling that he needed to protect and feed himself during a 1942 Lend-Lease negotiation in Washington D.C. “underlined the suspicion Russia felt for her new capitalistic ally.”

The antagonism and distrust kept the Soviets from fully cooperating with American and British forces, especially in the Arctic theater, where it actively worked to limit American and British influence. This showed itself in many ways – one of which was the Soviets’ lack of concern for the security of their allies’ convoys to northwest Russia. Most glaringly, the Soviets did not let the Allies know that the Germans were reading British naval code, putting Anglo-American Murmansk convoys at unnecessary risk (Edwards 2002, Loc. 1895). The Soviets also did not make much of an effort to protect Allied ships from German air attack while unloading and resupplying at Murmansk and only sparingly provided naval escorts and air cover to the convoys when they got close to the Soviet coastline (Edwards 2002, Loc. 3238). Underlining the Soviets’ lack of empathy and support for their Allied suppliers, the Soviets went so far as to push
the United States’ government to court-martial American gunners that broke into cargos destined for Murmansk after their own supply of ammunition ran out (Edwards 2002, Loc. 1159).

The Soviets also actively worked to limit Allied forces’ access to Soviet territory and Soviet citizens. In the western Arctic, the Soviets refused, for a significant time, to allow the British to establish a naval hospital in Murmansk that was needed to care for wounded and sick Allied sailors who were being neglected by the Soviets (Edwards 2002, Loc. 1291). The Soviets also prohibited Murmansk citizens from associating with British and American seamen. Bernard Edwards (2002, Loc. 43) stresses, “Soviet officialdom regarded them as agents of the hated capitalist system and put every possible obstacle in their way.”

In the east, the Soviets delayed the activation of the ALSIB route that Roosevelt favored over the Murmansk route until it was determined that alternate routes could not get critical American war material to the front in sufficient time or without destruction by the Germans.18 Even then, the Soviets denied America’s offers to ferry the material across the Soviet Arctic. The Soviets utilized their own manpower to complete the transports, instead of using this manpower on the Eastern Front where it was desperately needed. The Soviets feared that the United States (and Great Britain) would gain too much knowledge about the Soviet Arctic, especially about the rudimentary conditions of its military bases, making them more vulnerable after the war.

The Soviets also likely did not want the world to find out about the gulags that were being used to construct the ALSIB airfields (Dolitsky 2007, Loc. 1759), which would damage their international reputation and soft power. Finally, the Soviets feared that association between their citizens and Americans could weaken their own hold on power since the Allies had previously been demonized in Soviet propaganda as dangerous imperialists and were now

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18 Dolitsky (2006, Loc. 430) believes that this had more to do with Stalin’s fear that doing so would provoke Japan to attack the Soviet Union than Soviet apprehension about allowing America greater access to the Soviet Arctic.
paradoxically coming to the Soviet Union’s aid. The Soviets also dealt relatively severely with American airman that were forced to ditch their aircraft in eastern Siberia after taking damage from air raids on Japan. Cloe and Monaghan (1984, pg. 134) claim that the airmen were “treated little better than prisoners of war” and “held in virtual captivity.” Additionally, the Soviets did not return the damaged bombers back to the United States and instead copied them after the war.

Ultimately, the geopolitics of World War II impressed again on the Soviets that the Arctic was vital to their survival and Great Power status. It underlined the importance of a territorial buffer, and the harshness of the Russian northern winter, which proved to be vital barriers against foreign occupation just like they were against Napoleon during the first “Patriotic War” of 1812. During World War II, the Soviets were also forced to develop their Arctic infrastructure – especially in northwest Russia. Arctic ports were enhanced and secured during the war, ensuring critical supplies made it to Soviet cities, which allowed the Soviets to outlast the devastating German sieges. Airports, ports, and railroads also sprung up, or were expanded, across the northern half of the country to receive and transport Allied supplies coming from Murmansk and across the Bering Strait. Overall, these developments gave the Soviets both the capability and willingness to grab a greater sphere of influence in the Arctic after the war was concluded.

Finally, World War II affected the Soviet Union’s Cold War relationships with Finland and Norway. Finland was nominally returned to Soviet-Russia’s sphere of influence through the Moscow Armistice of 1944. The Pyrrhic victory over Finland taught Soviet leaders that formally occupying Finland again was going to be a difficult chore. Stalin decided that Finland was more likely to pay critical reparations to the Soviet Union after World War II if it was nominally free than if it was totally subjugated (Kalijarvi 1948, pg. 221, 225). The Soviet Union did not allow...
Finland to participate in the post-war, American-run Marshall Plan, denied Finland membership in the United Nations, forced Finland to pay exorbitant reparations to the Soviet Union, and ensured that Finland was put under the administration of a nominally Allied, but actually Soviet-run, Control Commission at the termination of the war (Kalijarvi 1948, pgs. 222-223).

The Soviet-Finnish relationship that was formed by World War II became known as “Finlandization” – a term that denoted Finland’s decision to bend to Soviet demands to retain a modicum of sovereignty and self-determination after the war. In many respects, this relationship was a return to the relationship Russia had with Finland when it was a semi-autonomous Russian duchy before World War I (Dancy 1946, pg. 514). Still, Russia’s inability to totally subjugate Finland during this critical juncture allowed Finland to play an instrumental role between the West and the Soviets after the war, which weakened Soviet soft power and complicated Russia’s ability to extend its Arctic sphere of influence further westward in the decades that followed.

The Soviets’ decision to pull out of Norway’s Finnmark region at the end of the war also affected the post-war regional construction. After occupying Petsamo, the Soviets chased the Nazis as far westward as Norwegian Kirkenes in late 1944. Kirkenes was utilized as the Germans’ main supply depot for the northern front during the war and hosted up to one hundred thousand German military members at the war’s peak (Nilsen 2010). The Soviets cooperated with British naval forces and Norwegian resistance fighters during the liberation. Some prominent Soviet leaders wanted to extend Soviet occupation in Norwegian Finnmark as far west as the Tana River, and certainly had the capability to do so, but were disallowed by Stalin.

One possible explanation for this is that Stalin was content with returning Soviet Arctic holdings to what Russia controlled prior to World War I. In December 1941, he said as much to British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden, telling him that the Soviet Union should control the
Baltic States and Eastern Europe and return Soviet borders to where they were under the Tsarist era after the war (Pettersen 2015). He also told Eden that he would not oppose British military bases in the Low Countries, Denmark, or Norway after the war (Pettersen 2015), suggesting that he knew he would face possible British military resistance if he attempted to keep his own forces in Finnmark. The Germans scorched-earth policy left little the Soviets could use at the end of the war anyway (Pettersen 2014), which decreased its immediate value and probably contributed to Stalin’s decision to return Finnmark to Norway at the end of the war.

In the end, Stalin’s decision to withdraw from northern Norway allowed it to fall under the British, and then NATO’s, sphere of influence after the war. The war-weary Soviets were unwilling to push farther into the Norwegian Arctic and wanted to consolidate gains in Eastern Europe instead. The Soviet decision to peacefully withdraw from Norway meant that its relations with Norway remained relatively friendly after the war. This allowed Norway and the Soviet Union to cooperate on many issues after the war and contributed to Norway’s decision to restrain American military presence in northern Norway in the decades that followed, as will be detailed in the next chapter.

2.2 American Geopolitics

Comparable to today’s Arctic situation, the United States was one step removed from Arctic geopolitics at the beginning of World War II, because the Arctic was overwhelmingly peripheral to its overall interests. Unlike the Soviets, the United States was originally able to avoid getting involved in World War II because of its protected position in North America and because of its population’s heavily isolationist sentiment. Adhering to the Monroe Doctrine, the United States was much more interested in threats to the Americas. However, critical events during World War II forced America’s geopolitical posture to rapidly move away from South
and Central America, which was further secured within the United States’ sphere of influence during the war, northward, where the “Arctic and northern airways became the basis for establishing a strategic defense line” (Fogelson 1989, pg. 51) – first against Germany, then Japan, and eventually becoming the main line of defense against the Soviets after the war.

**North Atlantic**

America could at first neglect the North Atlantic, and the Arctic that borders it, because friendly Great Britain was physically between the United States and Germany. Due to Great Britain’s perceived material strength (especially naval) at the beginning of the war, the North Atlantic was assumed by the United States to be Great Britain’s area of responsibility. America’s reticence to get involved in this region at the beginning of World War II can be seen by its muted reaction to the Soviet invasion of Finland in 1939. Ties between Finland and the United States were warm at the time. Finland was a blossoming democracy and dutifully paid back the United States the debts it owed from World War I (Solsten and Meditz 1988).

These liberal ties, however, were not enough to stir America sentiment to physically defend Finland – even as American esteem for the Soviet Union plummeted lower during the Winter War. Finland was clearly not within the Western Hemisphere, and therefore did not fall under the protection of the Monroe Doctrine. The Soviets, as distasteful as they were to the American government, did not pose a direct threat to the United States, or its interests, by invading Finland.

The American Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, explained America’s decision to leave Finland to its own defenses. He claimed that American sympathy for Finland could not overcome America’s “traditional policy of not undertaking to interfere in political controversies across the seas, that we only speak of political conditions when they become so acute and
dangerous as to constitute a threat to the peace of the world” (qtd. in Lewallen 2010, pgs. 6-7).

In other words, Hull was afraid that coming to Finland’s aid would set a dangerous precedent that would embroil the United States in more “Old World” hostilities that did not directly affect its interests (Lewallen 2010; 13). The only thing the United States did to punish the Soviets for their aggression was to seize the relatively meager Soviet assets that were held in American banks (Dolitsky 2006, Loc. 394).

The United States also did very little to come to Norway’s or Denmark’s aid when Germany suddenly attacked and occupied these countries in early 1940. Instead, many Americans still considered the war a “European” affair and, consequently, Great Britain’s responsibility. It was only after Germany rapidly occupied France, the Low Countries, and threatened Great Britain itself that America became more interested in the North Atlantic and, by proxy, the Arctic. By then, it was apparent to the Roosevelt administration that if Germany defeated Great Britain, it could threaten America’s sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere as well.

The final straw that ended American passivity towards the North Atlantic occurred with German military success in the Mediterranean in 1940, which stretched British forces to the breaking point (Conn et al, 2000, pg. 448). The German military’s march into Western Europe and its development of U-boats, rockets, and long-range aircraft, and subsequent British military defeats, suddenly put Germany within striking distance of North America. This led the United States to mobilize its latent material power to increase its military presence in the North Atlantic. It also forced Great Britain to become willing collaborators with the United States, pleading with America to deploy its military eastward and northward in the British’s former sphere of influence to balance against Germany.
This situation meant four things for America’s posture towards the Arctic. First, the
United States government could legitimize to its own people its physical expansion northward as
being necessarily self-interested. Through expansion, the United States would establish outposts
that would protect North America’s physical security and the underpinnings of its post-
Depression economic renaissance – trade with Europe. The United States wanted to ensure that
the battles for its own territorial defense were fought on someone else’s territory (Conn et al.
2000, pgs. 1-5) – something that would become an underlying principle of American foreign
policy after World War II.

Second, the United States could legitimize its physical expansion northward
ideologically by claiming, in accordance with liberal assumptions of international relations, that
it was protecting other democratic countries with similar governmental institutions and similar
value sets against Nazi Germany’s authoritarian aggression. President Roosevelt’s famous
fireside speech on December 29, 1940 underlined the moral basis for this expansion. He claimed
that Axis forces reflected the “revival of the oldest and the worst tyranny. In that there is no
liberty, no religion, no hope. … It is not a government based upon the consent of the governed. It
is not a union of ordinary, self-respecting men and women to protect themselves and their
freedom and their dignity from oppression. It is an unholy alliance of power and pelf to dominate
and to enslave the human race” (qtd. in Zeitz 2015). He further insisted that the United States
must be the “arsenal of democracy” with the “profound conviction that the American people are
now determined to put forth a mightier effort than they have ever yet made to … meet the threat
to our democratic faith” (qtd. in Zeitz 2015). This “mightier effort” entailed securing the vital
sea routes between North America and northern Europe that skirted the Arctic Circle. Suddenly,
realist fear meant that the United States was willing to intervene in “Old Europe” to save the remaining democracies there.

Roosevelt followed up the speech by circumventing American neutrality laws and sending military aid to Great Britain without Congressional approval through sea and air routes (Zeitz 2015) via Arctic Greenland and Iceland. These routes were quickly established this far north to diminish the significant German U-boat threat that existed in the North Atlantic.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill also legitimized Great Britain’s decision to push the United States to expand its sphere of influence into the North Atlantic with democratic and cultural undertones. He claimed, "these two great organisations of the English-speaking democracies, the British Empire and the United States, will have to be somewhat mixed up together in some of their affairs for mutual and general advantage" (Churchill 1940). Similar values and political institutions made coordination between the United States and Great Britain (as well as Canada, Iceland, and Denmark) more robust and deeper than was the case between the United States and the Soviet Union at the same time.

Third, some of the countries that formerly resisted American expansion into the region most vociferously before the war were so threatened by Germany (Canada, Great Britain, Denmark, Norway, and the Soviet Union) that they now urged the much less threatening United States to fill the power vacuum (Fogelson 1989). To this point, the “mixing up” of the spheres of influence of the North Atlantic democracies Churchill highlighted would not have occurred if Germany had not been so threatening to the security of all the regions’ democratic states.

Fourth, American expansion was necessarily billed as temporary and contingent on the shared German threat to the United States and the Western European democracies with which it was forming a nascent security community. During the war, it was assumed by most Americans,
and by its new allies, that the United States would withdraw its forces from the region when the German threat was defeated. Indeed, the United States set the precedent for this withdrawal earlier by voluntarily pulling its forces from Europe after World War I. This assumption was made before the Soviet Union showed itself to be a comparable threat to many of these same countries after the war, when these wartime relationships established the basis for post-war security coordination against the Soviets.

America’s military expansion into the Atlantic Arctic during World War II was preceded by diplomatic agreements that created a legal basis for American expansion into this region. These agreements were much more transparent and multilateral than the Molotov-Ribbentrop Agreement and much longer lasting. Specifically, the 1940 Havana Agreement transitioned the Monroe Doctrine from an American vehicle for hemispheric dominance to a collective security agreement that asserted the shared intention of the United States, and its North American neighbors, to temporarily govern the North American territories of European countries that were now occupied by Germany (Library of Congress 1940). Specifically, this agreement formed the legal basis for America’s defense of Greenland (and other occupied European countries’ territories in the Western Hemisphere) during and after the war.

After Germany occupied Denmark in April 1940, Denmark’s representative in Greenland used the Havana Agreement to enact a legal agreement with the United States to defend Greenland from Germany during the war. The agreement was dubious because, under international law at the time, it was unclear who colonial territory belonged to if its home government was occupied. The United States decided to intervene in Greenland at the Danish representative’s request in order to keep a precedent from being set that would suggest that
Germany could legally assume sovereignty over other European countries’ colonial possessions in the Western Hemisphere (Dziuban 1990, pg. 150).

Defending Greenland from Germany was more than just a legal necessity of the Monroe Doctrine and the Havana Agreement, however. It was done in America’s physical self-interest and security. It was known by American scientists before World War II that Greenland was the “breeding ground for Europe’s storms” (Conn et al., 2000, pg. 448). By occupying Greenland, and keeping it from falling into German hands, the United States could better forecast weather systems in the North Atlantic and northern Europe – a large strategic advantage over Germany that later helped its Normandy invasion succeed.

More important than weather forecasting, occupying Greenland allowed the United States to secure the critical supply lines between itself and Great Britain (Conn et al. 2000, Chapter 17). Even before Germany’s occupation of Denmark in 1940, the United States Senate highlighted Greenland’s strategic position in this regard, claiming that the United States “would be able to make more adequate provision for its national defense if it were in possession of Greenland” and that if Greenland was in the possession of a “hostile power” it could use Greenland to threaten the United States (qtd. in Fogelson 1989, pg. 61). Prominent Army-Air Corps and Naval Officers agreed with the Senate, but the Roosevelt administration was unmoved by their arguments until Germany occupied Denmark in 1940 (Fogelson 1989) and Great Britain threatened to occupy Greenland to keep it from falling to Germany – a challenge to the Monroe Doctrine. Even still, the United States did not start building military bases in Greenland until after Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June of 1941. Then Greenland became an important link for the Murmansk Convoys (American Military History 1989, pg. 421).
Although it was done in America’s self-interest, America’s expansion into Greenland was also accomplished in marked contrast to the Soviet Union’s expansion into Finland during World War II. It was also representative of America’s military deployments to other polar countries afterwards. First, unlike the Soviet Union’s occupation of Finland, Greenland’s local government, and the representative of the occupied Danish government in Greenland, requested American protection (Dziuban 1990, pg. 150) – America was there as an invited protector, instead of a foreign occupier. Second, the United States promised to allow other friendly countries access to Greenland and promised to respect Danish laws and the rights of Greenland’s native population during its occupation (Hull and Kaufmann 1941). Third, instead of attempting to completely take over Greenland, the United States only established a military presence there by constructing airfields (Fogelson 1989, pg. 62) in accordance with the written agreement it made with the Danish representative in Greenland. Fourth, the United States promised to withdraw its forces from Greenland when they were no longer necessary for Greenland’s defense.

Throughout the war, the United States increased its physical presence in Greenland to prosecute the war against Germany. It built numerous manned weather stations throughout the country and constructed airfields on both of Greenland’s coasts that were used to ferry thousands of military airplanes and supplies from American factories to Great Britain and the Soviet Union. The United States also constructed a naval base in southern Greenland to protect the strategic cryolite mine mentioned in the previous chapter (Jolly 1942).

Shortly after moving into Greenland, the United States also established “direct diplomatic relations with Iceland” (U.S. Embassy in Iceland n.d.), which was in a semi-independent union with Denmark at the time. Similar to its arrangement with Greenland, German occupation of
Denmark made official ties between Iceland and Denmark problematic and was the main reason America decided to move its forces into Iceland. American officials feared that Germany could use Iceland, like Greenland, to increase the already considerable threat it posed to the critical sea and air lanes of the North Atlantic. To highlight how quickly the rapid German advancement westward affected America’s perception of Iceland, as late as 1940 Iceland was ranked sixteen of seventeen areas to be defended by the United States military (Fairchild 1990, pg. 77). By the end of 1941, tens of thousands of American soldiers were garrisoned on the island and constructing military ports and airfields.

Still, America’s move into Iceland was contingent on both the wishes of Great Britain and Iceland, illustrating the complexity of America’s expansion into the region. Great Britain only requested that America take over Iceland’s security because of its own security problems. Great Britain occupied Iceland (against Iceland’s wishes), with Canadian help, a few days after Germany invaded Denmark in early 1940 (an event that pushed the United States to move into Greenland to keep a similar thing from happening there) (Edwards 2002 Loc 261). The British constructed airfields and ports in Iceland. However, by 1941, as losses mounted in the Mediterranean and the Battle of Britain raged, Britain wanted to free up the twenty thousand soldiers it had garrisoned in Iceland to deal with these more pressing situations (Fairchild 1990, pg. 74).

Iceland also looked for alternatives to British occupation. It chafed under British occupation because it feared the British presence on the island would make it the next target for German aggression, and it was frustrated that the British were restricting its exports (Fairchild 1990, pg. 75). It was also angry that Great Britain breached its sovereignty, which it considered was unbefitting conduct for one democratic government towards another. Significantly, the
antagonism that British occupation instigated in Iceland would last into the Cold War, manifest itself in the Cod Wars of the 1970s, and lead Iceland more deeply into America’s sphere of influence afterwards. While many Icelanders also bitterly resented American military occupation because they feared it too would entice the Germans to attack (Edwards 2002, Loc. 361), they believed it was preferable to British military occupation and grudgingly made a formal request for American military protection in July of 1941 (Dziubus 1990, pg. 157).

At that time, America was nominally a neutral country and was seen as less likely to instigate a hostile German response than British occupation. Iceland also believed America’s superior material capability could deter Germany better than Britain, which was fighting for its life against Germany. By 1941, the United States was one of the most industrialized countries of the world and had rapidly mobilized an army of over one million and six hundred thousand soldiers (American Military History 1989, pg. 422). Finally, Iceland hoped that closer ties with the United States would improve its ability to establish closer economic ties with the United States during and after the war (Fairchild 1990, pg. 75).

Still, Iceland’s hesitance to accept American military forces is clear in the formal agreement the two countries made to establish the defense arrangement, and it was clear that Iceland and the United States wanted the pact to be temporary. In the agreement, America affirmed Iceland’s “full and sovereign control” of its territory was guaranteed. The United States also promised to withdraw its military forces from Iceland at the conclusion of the war, promised to pay for all of Iceland’s defense during the war, and promised to sufficiently supply Iceland’s civilian population during the war (Jonasson 1941). Furthermore, Iceland “laid special stress” that the United States supply “sufficient airplanes” to Iceland to deter German aggression (Jonasson 1941).
Even with the Icelandic and British requests to deploy military forces to Iceland, the United States was hesitant. The eastern orientation of Iceland in the North Atlantic was problematic. The geographic confines of the Monroe Doctrine were arbitrarily set at the twenty-sixth meridian in 1941 (Fairchild 1990, pg. 84), putting Iceland well east of this American foreign policy guideline. The lack of American supply ships, Iceland’s inadequate harbors, difficulty legalizing the deployment of reserve and National Guard troops, and initial trouble coordinating with the British also problematized American troop deployment decisions in Iceland (Fairchild 1990, pgs. 91-93). Ultimately, Germany’s decision to invade the Soviet Union swayed Roosevelt to relieve some of the British garrison in Iceland. At this point, he decided that the Soviet Union, now the enemy of his German enemy and therefore America’s fast friend, would be the recipient of American Lend-Lease aid that would need to flow through Iceland.

However, American involvement in Iceland was also legitimized by President Roosevelt with a very liberal argument. He stressed, “The people of Iceland hold a proud position among the democracies of the world, with a historic tradition of freedom and of individual liberty which is more than a thousand years old. It is, therefore, all the more appropriate that in response to your [the Iceland President’s] message, the Government of the United States, while undertaking this defensive measure for the preservation of the independence and security of the democracies of the New World should at the same time be afforded the privilege of cooperating in this manner with your Government in the defense of the historic democracy of Iceland” (U.S. Department of State 1943, pg. 111). In this line, the “State Department pointedly enjoined all American military personnel to pay due respect to the local institutions, to refrain scrupulously from interfering with the prerogatives of the civil authorities, and to handle through the
American consul, Mr. Kuniholm, all matters involving political affairs” (U.S. Embassy in Iceland, n.d.).

With this decision, Iceland fell into America’s sphere of influence and served as a critical lynchpin between the United States and northern Europe (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 395). From Iceland, the United States also improved its ability to conduct “neutrality patrols” in the North Atlantic, which now overlapped Germany’s naval blockade zone to Great Britain (Fairchild 1990, pg. 76). Two weeks after Pearl Harbor, the United States was formally at war against the Axis Powers and took total control of Iceland’s defense from Great Britain. America deployed nearly twenty-nine thousand men to Iceland initially, with forty-one thousand soldiers stationed there at the Atlantic War’s peak in 1943 (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 538).

America constructed multiple airfields, roads, and ports on the island to sustain the war effort. Soviet success at Stalingrad and Allied naval success against Germany in the North Atlantic at the end of 1943 allowed the United States to start honoring its pledge to remove its troops from Iceland by the end of the war. But the wartime relationship was a critical juncture that constructed a new relationship between the two countries. Since Iceland had no military of its own and had an established identity as a non-militarized state, it came to rely on its wartime relationship with the United States afterwards. It remained under America’s security umbrella even as the war wound down, and the United States continued to use the military infrastructure it built in Iceland during the Cold War.

The United States’ agreement to defend Greenland and Iceland occurred concurrently with multiple diplomatic and economic agreements with Canada and Great Britain that more firmly integrated the three countries’ security and economic interests together and formed the basis of a security community that would also extend beyond World War II across the North
Atlantic. The 1940 Ogdensburg Agreement between Canada and the United States laid the basis for the collective defense of North America, which formally and permanently moved Canada from Great Britain’s sphere of influence and under the United States’ security umbrella (Whittaker 2014).

President Roosevelt declared his shared intention with the other North and South American countries, Great Britain, and Canada to maintain the freedom of the seas of the Western Hemisphere during a highly publicized radio address in May of 1941 (Roosevelt 1941). The result of this, the “Atlantic Charter,” signed by Roosevelt and Churchill in August of 1941, more formally tied the two countries together in the North Atlantic and further ceded British regional control to the United States.

This was followed by the 1941 Bases for Destroyers agreement that effectively ceded Britain’s remaining military presence in the Western Hemisphere to the United States, so that Great Britain could focus on the existential battle with Germany for the British Isles. As a result of the agreement, the United States not only quickly established military bases in British territories in the Caribbean, but also in the self-governing sub-Arctic British colonies of Newfoundland and Labrador in North America. The United States constructed sub-Arctic airfields and ports in these territories on the basis of 99-year, rent-free leases at St. John’s, Gander, Goose Bay, Argentia, and Stephenville.

Finally, the 1941 Lend-Lease Act formally made the United States the “arsenal for democracy” that supplied Great Britain, and, paradoxically, the authoritarian Soviet Union, critical war material to defend themselves against Germany. In total, these agreements increased America’s responsibility for defending the North Atlantic air and sea routes from German
aggression and rapidly increased America’s military expansion into the North Atlantic as British influence receded.

Still, Great Britain retained enough naval strength to retain responsibility for protection of the Allied Murmansk Convoys east of Iceland and Scotland throughout the war (Edwards 2002, Loc. 1828). It was Churchill, not Roosevelt, who decided to suspend the convoys in the summer of 1942, after they suffered heavily from German attacks (Edwards 2002, Loc. 3120). Although Stalin continued to push the Allies to use the dangerous Murmansk routes afterwards, the Allies eventually substituted the bulk of the material that was planned to go through Murmansk with routes through the Persian Gulf and Pacific Ocean that proved to be much safer (see Table 1). In the end, the Murmansk Convoys reflected only a brief, temporary, and subordinate American presence in the Barents Sea - ensuring the Barents would remain under the Soviet and British sphere of influence directly after the war.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Persian Gulf (Millions of Tons)</th>
<th>Pacific (Millions of Tons)</th>
<th>Murmansk (Millions of Tons)</th>
<th>Black Sea (Millions of Tons)</th>
<th>Northern Sea Route (Millions of Tons)</th>
<th>Total of all Routes (Millions of Tons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>5.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>6.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Cumulative Material in Millions of Tons</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>9.24</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>19.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Total Material by Route During War</td>
<td>23.78%</td>
<td>47.17%</td>
<td>22.61%</td>
<td>3.88%</td>
<td>2.55%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 12: Table 1: Percentage of Cargo Moved Through Lend-Lease Routes between the United States and the Soviet Union during World War II (Source: Van Tuyll pg. 164).*

America increased its presence and responsibility much more in northern Canada than the Barents Sea during the war. Due to its continued colonial political and cultural ties with Great Britain, Canada fought with Great Britain at the beginning of World War II as a loyal member of the British Empire, sending hundreds of thousands of soldiers to Europe. Canada’s contribution to Great Britain’s war effort, in line with its contribution during World War I, reflected its lack of concern for American aggression against its territory. But, unlike World War I, its home territory was directly threatened by potential German aggression during World War II. The Havana and Bases for Destroyers Agreements freed up Canadian troops to defend Canadian territory that would have otherwise been used to garrison British dependencies in the Western Hemisphere (Dziuban 1990, pgs. 143-144) during the war, but Canada still lacked the manpower to confidently defend itself.
The Permanent Joint Board on Defense (PJBD), an institution stemming from the 1940 Ogdensburg Agreement, reflected the new geopolitical situation (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 7) and Great Britain’s declining ability and willingness to protect Canada. It also revealed Canada’s now open reliance on the United States for its physical security and American acceptance of this responsibility (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 8). Throughout World War II, the PJBD would institutionalize American-Canadian collective security in North America and establish the extent Canada would allow the United States military to establish itself in Canada for both countries’ collective defense. Through the PJBD, Canada tried to balance its dual concerns of sovereignty and security in its Arctic territory (Grant 1988). In doing so, it had an amenable partner in the United States, the result of both the maturing relationship between the countries and the greater international geopolitical responsibilities the United States assumed during the war.

The PJBD was not constructed out of thin air but was “similar in composition and function to several other Canadian-US agencies already in existence” (Dziuban 1990, pgs. 26-27), including the 1909 International Joint Commission that successfully and peacefully resolved border disputes and increased the trust and confidence between the two countries. As such, the PJBD had overwhelming public support in both Canada and the United States (Dziuban 1990, pg. 25) and reflected the growing security integration between the two countries. Indeed, thousands of Americans volunteered to fight with Canada before the United States entered the war, reflecting the now openly warm feelings and ties between the citizens of the two similar countries (Dziuban 1990, pgs. 241-242). In addition to the PJBD, the war motivated Canada to send service attachés to Washington for the first time (Dziuban 1990, pg. 71, 76), influenced the countries to elevate their diplomatic missions in each other’s countries to embassy status, and
propelled the countries to develop, with British cooperation, a joint defense plan for the continent (Plan ABC-22).

The word “Permanent” in the PJBD underlines that the collective defense agreement was more than an alliance of convenience and was designed to extend after the war (Dziuban 1990, pg. 26). Significantly, and against realist assumptions, the United States agreed to give the Canadians an equal say and vote within the PJBD - despite the tremendous difference in the material wealth of the two countries. Each problem presented before the PJBD was discussed until general agreement was met and disagreements more often occurred along service lines than national lines (Dziuban 1990, pg. 41). This eased the sovereignty concerns of elite Canadians who resented being overlooked in the triangular relationship that previously existed between the United States, Canada, and Great Britain (Dziuban 1990, Chapter 3).

Often, Canada demanded it be given the leading role in defending Canadian territory (Dziuban 1990, pg. 97), especially in the Arctic, even as it relied on the United States to fund and build the infrastructure to support it. As the United States became more involved in the war, it was more than happy to give this responsibility to the Canadians so that it could focus on other regions (Dziuban 1990, pg. 177). As such, the 1943 Convoy Conference gave Canada command over combined air and sea operations north of New York (Dziuban 1990, pgs. 125-126). Significantly, this was the only independent zone controlled by Canada during the war and was the basis for the same zone of control that Canada later commanded under NATO after the war (Milner 1999, pg. 123). This decision also signified increased Canadian military strength. By the end of World War II, Canada had the third largest navy in the world (Milner 1999, pg. 157) and was able to defend the North Atlantic without as much external help as it needed before. Canada also insisted that it take over Arctic weather stations that were built by America during the war to
support the air routes that were being constructed to connect the United States, through the Canadian Arctic, to Greenland and Iceland (Dziuban 1990, pg. 190).

Canada also actively worked to restrict the scope of American war activity in the sub-Arctic Labrador and Newfoundland provinces (Dziuban 1990, pg. 178), fearing that these territories would want to annex with the United States after the war. The 1941 Bases for Destroyer Deal with the United States highlighted that Great Britain was no longer willing or able to defend these territories during World War II (Collins 2011). Labrador and Newfoundland did not have a robust security infrastructure and had become an economic liability for Great Britain now that it was weighed down with war debt and reliant on the United States (Neary 1986). Per its agreement with Great Britain, America rapidly moved into Newfoundland and Labrador, constructing airbases and ports to defend the territories from the Germans and using them to transport material, and eventually soldiers, from North America to Europe and back after the war. The United States shared many of these facilities with Canadians, who used their own relatively meager material resources to increase their respective military presence in the territories to somewhat offset the American presence (Collins 2011).

With America’s moves into Newfoundland and Labrador, the economic fortune of the people in these territories greatly improved. The United States invested millions of dollars into the territories’ infrastructure and hundreds of thousands of American citizens were based in, or transited through, the territories during the war. Many American soldiers and ex-patriots from New England had a similar culture to the territories’ citizens and spent their money in the territories; thousands of them took Newfoundland and Labrador women for wives (Earle 1998, pgs. 403-404). Americans were generally held in high esteem by the territories’ citizens during the war (Neary 1986, pgs. 517-518). Consequently, many of the territories’ citizens looked
favorably on annexation with the United States as the war progressed. However, in line with its previous lackadaisical efforts to obtain territory in Canada, the United States showed little appetite for annexing Newfoundland or Labrador (Dziuban 1990, pg. 181). As the German threat receded, the United States decreased its military strength in Newfoundland from ten thousand soldiers at its peak to under five thousand soldiers towards the end of the war (Dziuban 1990, pg. 175). Significantly, Canada did not decrease the size of its military forces in the provinces.

Canada was much more interested in annexing the formerly British territories than the United States, because it feared the United States could use the territories to threaten it if bilateral relations deteriorated and because it already had strong economic and political links with the territories through their common connection with Great Britain. Despite the material imbalance, Canada maintained its influence in the territories and mitigated American influence. America was content to allow Canada to restrain its expansion into Newfoundland and Labrador. This is exemplified by its decision to give Canada command of the Newfoundland antisubmarine patrols in 1943 (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 551).

The United States appeared to recognize the economic, political, and social attachment Canada had to the territories. In the end, Canada’s “competitive-cooperation” (Neary 1986, pg. 518) with the United States in the territories was ultimately rewarded after the war when the territories annexed with Canada. This eventuality denied America sovereignty over these territories. In doing so, it absolved the United States from ultimate responsibility for defense of the eastern approaches to the North American Arctic and put a further damper on America’s willingness to act more assertively in the region in the decades that followed.

America’s willingness to get involved in the Scandinavian Arctic during the war was also filled with ambiguity. American influence waned the further east the countries were from the
United States. As was the case with Greenland and Iceland, the strong geographic guiding principles of the Monroe Doctrine, the presence of Great Britain, and these countries’ own distinct foreign policies affected America’s level of involvement. In the next few paragraphs, I discuss how America’s relationship with each Scandinavian country evolved during the war and then discuss how these relationships helped define America’s posture towards the Arctic in the decades that followed.

As was previously mentioned, democratic Norway was occupied early in the war after Great Britain failed to satisfactorily come to its aid. Norway’s government-in-exile was situated in Great Britain during the war and had only limited contact with the American military. This meant that its ties with Great Britain were stronger than they were with the United States when the war ended. Still, America acquired access to the Norwegian Arctic islands of Jan Mayen during the war. It built communication stations, navigational aids, and weather stations on the islands to aid Allied convoys through the North Atlantic. Similar to its agreements with Greenland and Iceland, use of these islands was temporary and contingent on limitations that allowed Norway to maintain political control over the territories. American soldiers on the islands were subordinated to Norwegian military command, the United States promised to leave after the end of hostilities, and the United States promised to give its facilities to the Norwegians free of charge after the war (FRUS Volume 5 1945, pgs. 100-104).

As the war wound down, Norway got caught in the growing rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union vocalized its concern about America’s continued military presence in the Jan Mayen islands and looked to gain access to the Spitsbergen and Jan Mayen archipelagos after the war to offset America’s new wartime military bases in Greenland and Iceland (FRUS Volume 5 1945 pg. 97). Norway looked to keep both countries minimally
happy and maintain sovereignty over its Arctic islands. It subtly moved to evict the Americans from Jan Mayen. The United States willingly went along with the eviction since its military did not believe the islands were all that strategic (FRUS Volume 5 1945 pg. 108) and because it had promised to do so. Even still, the United States dissuaded the Norwegians from giving the Soviet Union military access to Jan Mayen or the Spitzbergen archipelago (FRUS Volume 5 1945 pg. 108) – something the Norwegians were reticent to do themselves anyway. By the end of the war, Norway was settling into a role as an Arctic buffer state between the United States and the Soviet Union, although its wartime affiliation with Great Britain, its democratic institutions, and its location in the North Atlantic meant that it continued to lean noticeably to the West which would later contribute to its decision to join NATO.

The United States had even less influence over Sweden than it did over Norway during the war. Sweden remained neutral throughout the war. Like the other Scandinavian countries, the physical distance between Sweden and the United States complicated any potential that the two states would collaborate based on their shared liberal and democratic values. Sweden did not command any Arctic coastline like Finland or Norway and so its potential occupation by Germany did not threaten the sea lanes between North America and Europe like control of these other two countries’ northern coastlines did. Sweden’s decision to provide Germany with strategic minerals and troop transit, especially to German-occupied Denmark and Norway, spoilt the association somewhat during the war (FRUS Volume 5, Documents 554-556) and contributed to the lack of coordination between the two countries after the war. Sweden’s ability to maintain its long-standing and fruitful neutrality during the war increased its citizens’ conviction that neutrality was the best foreign policy for the country, making neutrality a key component of the national identity that is detailed in the next chapter. At the end of the war,
Sweden remained a heavily armed neutral country and continued to see itself as an instrumental buffer state between Great Powers.

Tragically, U.S.-Finnish relations deteriorated throughout the war, which effectively pushed Finland into the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence after the war. This was the case despite Finland’s democratic government, its warm pre-war relations with the United States, and its attempts to appease the United States during the war. As previously discussed, America’s decision not to militarily aid Finland during the Soviet invasion in 1939 put a damper on the relationship. The relationship further soured when Finland collaborated with Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union from 1941 to 1944. Great Britain went as far as declaring war against Finland for this. The United States did not go that far, but it also had little sympathy for Finland’s unfortunate position between Germany and the Soviet Union. As previously mentioned, Finland attempted to walk the line between Germany and the Allies. Even though it depended on Germany for food and security, it refrained from cutting off the Soviet Union’s supply lines south of Murmansk, partly because the United States asked it to (Wuorinen 1963, Loc. 2230). It also eventually turned on the German forces on its own territory in 1944 - suffering greatly from Nazi scorched-earth policies across Lapland during Germany’s retreat.

The American Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, explicitly expressed American official disdain for Finland’s partnership with Germany from 1941-1943. He claimed, “Without strengthening Finland’s own future security, these [Finnish- military operations {against the Soviets}] have in fact constituted a definite threat to the United States. Therefore, it must be made absolutely clear that unless her activity in this direction ceases immediately, Finland must lose the friendly support of the United States in those future difficulties which of necessity will result from such a decision (qtd. in Wuorinen 1963, Loc. 2618). This American threat became a
reality when the Soviet Union and the war-ravaged Finns negotiated the conclusion to their war in 1944. America supported the Soviet’s harsh terms to punish the Finns for aiding the Germans and to reward the Soviets for suffering so much for the Allies’ cause on the Eastern Front (Solsten and Meditz 1988).

Effectively, the course of the war caused the United States to cede Finland to the Soviet sphere of influence – any sympathy the United States had for a fellow democracy stuck in a tragic situation was overwhelmed by its attempt to appease the Soviet Union and repay it for the high price it paid during World War II. Finland was one of many Central European nations sacrificed to Great Power politics at the end of the war as the Iron Curtain descended over it.

North Pacific

The United States was even more loath to assertively move into the North Pacific than it was the North Atlantic region when World War II started in Europe. Japan was emerging as an expansionary threat, especially after it removed itself in 1934 from the stipulations of the 1922 Naval Treaty that limited its naval strength, invaded China in 1937, and allied with Germany and Italy in 1940. The more immediate threat the Germans posed to America’s more populous and economically important Atlantic seaboard, and to Brazil, contributed to America’s relative lack of concern for Japan or the North Pacific (Conn and Fairchild 1989, pg. 392; Dziuban 1990, pg. 199). America’s perception of the region was forced to change as the war progressed.

America’s initial neglect for the North Pacific can be seen by the tremendously small size of its military force in Alaska as Japan expanded into the South Pacific and China in September of 1939. At that time, the only American army forces in Alaska were two rifle companies garrisoned at Chilkoot Barracks near the southern Alaskan port of Skagway. According to the official American military history of the war, this garrison was the “relic of the Gold Rush” and
“neither the size nor the location of this token force made it particularly useful for carrying out the Army's responsibility for defending the Alaskan mainland and the Aleutians as far westward as Unalaska Island” (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 223). Its only artillery piece was a Russian-era cannon that was being used as a flower pot! (Klein et al. 1987, pg. 2-7). Similarly, “the Navy radio station at Dutch Harbor was the only active Navy presence in Alaska” as late as 1940 (Klein et al. 1987, pgs. 2-4 to 2-5). Alaska’s Territorial Governor, Ernest Gruening, warned before the war, "a handful of enemy parachutists could capture Alaska overnight" (quoted in Klein et al. 1987, pg. 2-7).

Greater priorities elsewhere, lingering isolationist sentiment, Depression era economic problems, and Alaska’s difficult climate and terrain meant that military build-up was relatively slow and expensive (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 250). Naval construction in the Aleutians and southern Alaska began belatedly in September of 1939 (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 224). The Army Defense Command acknowledged that airpower was the best way to defend Alaska as the Japanese threat increased and Alaska’s isolated communities became reliant on supply from air. Still, Alaska was the last of America’s overseas territories to receive airplanes before the war. The mostly obsolescent airplanes did not arrive until the middle of 1941 because deployments were made to the Philippines instead (Conn et al. 2000, pgs. 247-248). This showed how little Alaska was valued by American policy makers. In essence, Alaska’s defense had to overcome the United States Army’s “long term conviction” that austere and isolated Alaska just wasn’t that important (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 225).

That conviction was finally overcome when Germany signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union in 1940 and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact with Japan in early 1941. Suddenly, although Japanese-Soviet relations were still strained, a joint Soviet-Japanese

Germany’s ill-fated attack on the Soviets in June 1941 changed the geopolitics of the North Pacific again, however. The Soviet Union was now forced to focus all of its military efforts on Germany. This meant that Japan no longer feared a second front in the North Pacific against the Soviets as much as it did before and could focus on the United States (Conn et al. 2000 242-243). The United States also no longer feared the Soviets as much as before and could focus on the Japanese.

Consequently, American defense construction plans moved away from the Bering Strait and focused on Alaska’s southern coastline where Japan was most likely to attack instead. Plans for northern airfields to meet the potential Soviet threat, including one at Point Barrow, were nixed for airfields in the Aleutians (Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pg. 40). Naval bases were built on the Alaskan panhandle and in the eastern Aleutians, and major air fields were constructed at the pre-war planned sites of Anchorage and Fairbanks (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 229-230). During the course of the war, America’s northernmost Alaskan base at Fairbanks became a critical linchpin in the ALSIB route and established itself as the center for America’s cold-weather material testing and development – a mission it continues to have today, which has significantly improved the American military’s ability to operate in polar regions (Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pgs. 143-148).

By September 1941, over twenty-one thousand American soldiers were stationed in Alaska (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 238). After Pearl Harbor, Japanese expansionary efforts made
Alaska appear even more vulnerable. As Joyce et al. (1987, pg. 2-27) suggest, "With the stunning successes to the south, it seemed to be only a question of time before the Japanese attacked Alaska.” American planners feared that Alaska could then be used as a stepping stone to attack the western United States. This caused the United States to speed up its lackluster efforts to defend Alaska to deny the Japanese potential bases “from which air or naval operations [against the United States] could be conducted" (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 227).

America’s decision to balance with the Soviet Union and send Lend-Lease material to them after the Germans attacked added another reason for America to develop Alaska’s infrastructure and increase its regional military presence. By the time the American military base in Nome was completed in 1941, the USSR was no longer considered a threat (Klein et al. 1987, pg. 2-23). Instead, the Nome base functioned as the American terminus of the Northwest Air Route that was established to connect North America to the Soviet portion of the ALSIB (Twichell 1992). The Alaska Highway (ALCAN) was constructed to support the Northwest Staging Route and to supply Alaska by land if Japan successfully blockaded it from the sea. After the rapid and expensive completion of the ALCAN and ALSIB in 1943, Alaska was suddenly connected to the continental United States not just by sea, but also by land and air.

The contingency of the war also motivated Canada to overcome its hesitancy to cooperate with the United States in the North Pacific (See Chapter 3). Thirty thousand American soldiers and contractors “invaded” the sparsely populated Canadian Northwest to construct the ALCAN from 1942 to 1943 (Dziuban 1990, pg. 199; Twichell 1992). America also spent millions of dollars to establish a spur from the ALCAN to an oilfield that was concurrently rejuvenated at Norman Wells to fuel the growing American military presence in Alaska (Twichell 1992).
Just as in the North Atlantic, the Canadians attempted to walk the thin line between ensuring their own security through collective defense with the United States, while maintaining sovereignty over thinly populated northern territory that was now the temporary home of thousands of American soldiers and contractors. Canadian political and military leaders expressed concern that the infrastructure America was building was not solely for fighting the war but was opportunistically designed to increase American leverage over northern Canada after the war.

Canada still feared the United States would attempt to annex Northwest Canada after the war as it half-heartedly tried to do after the Alaskan Purchase a century before. While most Americans were oblivious to Canadian concern, many Canadians chafed when American soldiers jokingly referred to the ALCAN construction crews as an “Occupation Force” (Twichell 1992, pgs. 289-292). Geopolitical insecurity with the United States similarly motivated Great Britain to press Canada to assert itself more fully in the region during the war (Nordman 1985). Wartime cooperation and increasing trust could not overcome Canadian and British realist fears that their materially powerful ally would take advantage of its position when the war wound down. Consequently, Canada sent a Major General to supervise the ALCAN construction to assert Canadian sovereignty over it (Twichell 1992, pg. 292). Canada also demanded to operate Northwest Air Route staging bases that were constructed by America as soon as they possibly could and promised to pay for a substantial amount of the infrastructure that America constructed in Northwest Canada after the war to assure its sovereignty over the region (Dziuban 1990, pgs. 205-215).

Canada also agreed to bolster the insignificant American forces in Alaska at the beginning of the war in case Japan attacked (Dziuban 1990, pg. 366), including three squadrons
of much needed aircraft (Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pg. 49). The Canadian forces available were small, however, and the United States was unwilling to leave the defense of its territory to another country for long (Dziuban 1990, pg. 109). It took Japan’s June 1942 occupation of the western Aleutian Islands of Kiska and Attu, and its balloon bombing raids on Alaska and the West Coast of the United States (Dziuban 1990, pg. 200) to solidify the two countries’ cooperation in the North Pacific. By the end of the Aleutian Campaign, Canadian forces were fighting interchangeably with American forces (Conn et al. 2000 273, 296; (Dziuban 1990, pg. 261). This deep cooperation and integration formed the basis for the two countries’ post-war collective security arrangement.

In addition to deepening the cooperation between the United States and Canada, the Japanese Aleutian Campaign spurred the United States to vastly improve its capability to operate in northern latitudes. According to the official American military account of the war, the Japanese hoped that their presence in the Aleutians could “obstruct military collaboration” between the United States and the Soviet Union. The audacious American aircraft carrier-launched “Doolittle Raid” in April of 1942 also made Japan wrongly assume that America had secret airbases in the Western Aleutians that were within reach of Tokyo (Klein et al. 1987, pg. 2-30). By attacking the Aleutians, the Japanese wanted to deny America’s ability to make more bomber raids on Japan (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 259). More importantly, the Japanese wanted to attack the Aleutians to divert America’s attention from the more strategic Midway Islands that Japan attacked simultaneously with the Aleutians.

The United States, for its part, feared that the Japanese Aleutian Campaign could be part of a bigger Japanese movement to occupy Kamchatka and Pacific Siberia. This would affect America’s ability to re-supply the Soviet Union and put the American West Coast within reach
of Japanese aircraft. Consequently, the United States sent reinforcements to Nome – the furthest northern Alaskan outpost the United States would militarize during the war (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 264). By August of 1942, more than seventy-five thousand American troops were stationed in Alaska (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 265) and many new naval and army bases were constructed in Alaska to prosecute the battle for the Aleutians and to move Lend-Lease supplies to the Soviet Union.

Even though American military planners knew in advance that Japan intended to attack the Aleutians, the relative insignificance of the Alaskan islands was borne out by the American military’s ultimate decision to leave them relatively undefended. Instead, according to Klein et al. (1987, pg. 2-32), the Americans “decided to make only a token attempt in the Northern Pacific, concentrating their forces around Midway in hopes of inflicting on Yamamoto the kind of damage he had envisioned inflicting on them.” The only naval presence the United States sustained was at Alaska’s southern islands of Kodiak, Dutch Harbor, and Sitka (Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pg. 57). The United States temporarily improved its defense of western Alaska shortly after the Japanese Aleutian operation to check any potential Japanese move to invade Siberia or western Alaska.

In the end, America’s decision to prioritize Midway over Alaska succeeded wildly and changed the tide of the war. Victory at Midway also made the North Pacific less important to the United States than otherwise would have been the case. It decreased Japan’s potential ability to threaten the western United States from the north and decreased its ability to blockade Alaska sea ports and conduct air raids on Alaskan targets. The ten thousand Japanese soldiers stranded in the occupied Aleutians found it difficult to operate in its difficult weather and terrain. Now that the Japanese navy was on the defensive, it was difficult for the Japanese to even re-supply
the Aleutian occupation force. Japan’s decision not to interdict American Lend-Lease convoys to Vladivostok as long as they were under a Soviet flag also decreased its potential threat to American interests in the North Pacific. Klein et al. (1987, pg. 2-37) claims “the atmosphere of hysterics” around the threat to Alaska died down by July of 1942.

Consequently, American military leaders made the decision to focus on attacking Japanese forces from the South Pacific instead of dislodging the Japanese occupation force in the Aleutians. Brig. Gen. Laurence S. Kuter, Deputy Chief of the Army-Air Staff, underlined the rationale for this decision. He “considered the Aleutian situation of little consequence and Alaska a minor theater of operations that should be kept strictly on the defensive with no further Army air reinforcements” (qtd. in Conn et al. 2000, pg. 265).

In line with this decision, the United States stopped building up forces in the North Pacific and massed them in the South Pacific instead (Conn et al. 2000, pg. 265). As America slowly pushed Japan out of China and the South Pacific through the rest of 1942 and 1943, it bombarded the Japanese Aleutian force by air and by sea from already constructed air and naval bases in the eastern Aleutian Islands. The American decision to finally retake Attu and Kiska in May 1943 was more psychological than strategic with Klein et al. (1987, pg. 2-35) believing "The [Aleutian] problem was more a matter of public relations than a strategic dilemma.” Army and navy commanders were constantly turned down when they requested more material and manpower and were told they were to maintain a defensive posture instead of an offensive posture in Alaska (Klein et al. 1987, pg. 2-16).

After pushing the Japanese out of the Aleutians, the United States’ interest in Alaska diminished further. The number of soldiers garrisoned in the territory dropped from close to one hundred and fifty thousand in 1943 to approximately fifty thousand at the end of 1944 and only
nineteen thousand by 1946 (Klein et al. 1987, pg. 2-58, 2-60). Some bombing raids were conducted from the western Aleutian Islands against the Kurile Islands to tie down thousands of Japanese soldiers and hundreds of Japanese aircraft who were forced to defend against a now improbable American invasion force from the north as the war wound down. Nonetheless, many of the American soldiers that remained in Alaska after the larger force pulled back felt like they had been forgotten by their country and had a hard time surviving the monotony, desolation, and harsh weather in their isolated Alaskan outposts (Hays 2004). Construction projects that were already funded were harder to turn off and continued until the end of the war even as existing bases were being shut down (Klein et al. 1987, pgs. 2-54, 2-56, 2-58). Cloe and Monaghan (1984, pg. 140) claim that “within two years, most of the Aleutians were deserted.”

Soviet actions also decreased America’s willingness to sustain its military presence in Alaska as the war progressed. The most prominent way the Soviets restrained the United States was by denying American requests to establish bases in eastern Siberia that could be used to attack Japan. The Soviets feared that approving America’s request could incite Japan to attack the Soviet Union when it was already fighting for its survival against Germany (Dolitsky 2007 Loc. 361). The Soviets also distrusted America and believed they would have a hard time pushing out American forces from their territory after the war. As Klein et al. (1987, pg. 2-27) suggests, "The US was to remain frustrated throughout the war, since without mainland bases in Siberia, the logistics of opening a northern front with Japan made it prohibitive."

Second, the Soviets refused American offers to ferry airplanes and supplies on the Soviet portion of the ALSIB. Instead, the Soviets demanded that its pilots operate out of American airbases at Fairbanks, Nome, and Galena in Alaska (Dolitsky 2007, pg. Loc. 491). The Soviets did not trust the Americans and speculated they would spy on the Soviet Union if allowed to
ferry planes and supplies on the ALSIB (Twichell 1992, pg. 279). Paradoxically, the Soviets took advantage of their American hosts. Dolitsky suggests that the Soviet personnel sent to Alaska were ideologically drilled to maintain loyalty to the Soviet Union and largely maintained a professional separation from the Americans with whom they worked (Dolitsky 2007, Loc. 503). Political officers were included within the Soviet military presence at American bases to ensure fraternization did not occur (Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pg. 151). Twichell suggests Soviet agents in Alaska transported strategic material and military secrets surreptitiously gathered in the United States on Lend-Lease aircraft bound for the Soviet Union (Twichell 1992, pg. 287). It was also suspected that the Soviets stockpiled Lend-Lease material transported on the ALSIB for post-war use against the Allies (some of which was possibly used against the United States during the Korean War) (Dolitsky 2007, Loc. 589).

In contrast to Soviet suspicion of the United States, the extreme sacrifice the Soviets made during the war effectively improved America’s poor opinion of the Soviet Union and contributed to influential beliefs within the Roosevelt administration that there was a renewed convergence between the two countries during the war (Taubman 1982). The American Vice President’s visit to Kolyma in 1944 was illustrative of American optimism. Anne Applebaum (2003, pgs. 441-442) suggests that Vice President Wallace was overly effusive of Soviet economic achievements in the region. Wallace asserted that the Soviet Union’s ability to build such a large urban area on the Arctic tundra was reflective of America’s own experience on its Western frontier. He suggested that America and the Soviet Union were the only two Great Powers on the world stage that were not bothered by the feudal ties that were tearing apart “old” Europe. In doing so, Wallace tapped into many of America’s earlier pre-Soviet conceptions of Russia as a kindred country (see Chapter 1 and 2) and overlooked the fact that most of Kolyma’s
achievements were accomplished with prison labor and American Lend-Lease material that was misdirected to its camps’ administrators (Applebaum 2003, pg. 443). Truman’s contingent replacement of Roosevelt, after his death, lent a slightly more realistic opinion and relationship with the Soviet Union as the war wound down, but did not completely eclipse the hope that the Americans could build on World War II cooperation to put its relationship with the Soviets on a better footing after the war (Taubman 1982).

Overall, the geopolitics of World War II increased America’s presence and responsibility in the Arctic. Greenland, Iceland, Canada, and to a much lesser extent, Norway, now fell under America’s security umbrella. Japan’s attack on the Aleutians forced the United States to defend Alaska for the first time. These new responsibilities forced the United States to militarize and build out infrastructure into the Arctic for the first time. The catch, however, was that American presence in its new Arctic allies’ territory was largely dependent on a shared adversary, like Nazi Germany. Despite the liberal ties between the United States and its allies, the allies were understandably concerned by America’s overwhelming relative material strength and fearful of losing their sovereignty in scarcely populated Arctic territory. The United States, itself, was still wary of mobilizing resources to expand its sphere of influence into this geopolitical periphery when it now had many other international commitments with which to contend.

For the Soviet Union, the Arctic was still much more geopolitically important than it was to the United States. Its ability to force Finland under its sphere of influence at the end of the war, with American condonation, was illustrative of this. Consequently, the Soviets were much more focused and willing to expand into the Arctic than the United States at the end of the war, despite America’s greater material wealth and newfound access to the region.

3. Economics
3.1 American Economics

The size of America’s Arctic economy increased greatly during World War II. It revolved almost completely around supporting the war effort and the bill was footed to a great extent by America’s allies. Private American companies helped build the ALCAN Highway, the Northwest Staging Route, the Northeast Staging Route, the CANOL oil pipeline, and multiple airfields in the Aleutians and interior Alaska. At the beginning of the war, the American aircraft industry was also dependent on cryolite coming from Greenland. All of these developments linked the Arctic more intricately with the American economy than at any time since the Klondike Gold Rush.

By the end of the war, Alaska’s population had also rapidly expanded, and its infrastructure had improved. Notably, the development of airports substituted for roads and provided nodes for communities to develop around. The economy became dual-pronged. On the one hand, it continued to be centered on resource extraction, just as it had since the Alaska Purchase. On the other hand, a service economy developed to support the new military installations. Cloe and Monaghan (1984, pg. 27) argue that the arrival of the military “radically” altered the Alaskan economy and that “defense spending became the mainstay of Alaska’s economy for the next twenty years or so.” The increased population and improved economy set the basis for a renewed statehood bid, which would improve the Alaskan economy further by giving Alaska legislative votes for federal funding (as will be detailed to a greater extent in the next chapter).

Despite these improvements, there were still some very strong factors that kept the Arctic from truly becoming critical to the country’s overall economy. The biggest factor was still the high cost of doing business in the Arctic. The United States partially got around the high costs of
doing business in Alaska and northern Canada during the war by utilizing thousands of
conscripted soldiers and sailors to do the grunt labor – somewhat similar to the Soviet’s use of
indentured gulag labor in its Arctic at the same time. The ALCAN Highway, for example, was
largely constructed by black conscripted service members from southern states who were not
deemed suitable for fighting (Twichell 1992).

The low pay the soldiers received contrasted sharply with the high pay American civilian
contractors working in Canada and Alaska received at the same time. High pay was necessary to
incentivize this free labor to voluntarily work in harsh and austere northern localities. The
difference in pay caused rifts between the soldiers and civilian workers. The soldiers often
complained that the civilians were not doing their share for the war effort because the former got
paid much less than the latter, even though they often did the same job (Hays 2004, Chapter 10).
This dynamic made it apparent that it would be difficult for America to keep up these
development efforts after the war. The American military itself estimated that it cost five times
as much money to maintain installations in the north as it did for similar installations in the
continental United States, even with the artificially cheap labor it employed (Klein et al. 1987,
pg. 2-59).

The high cost of transporting resources to and from northern territory also continued to
limit the attractiveness of the commodities that were extracted there. The demise of two high-
profile resource extraction operations during World War II bear this out. The first was the
southern Greenland cryolite mine at Ivigtut. The expense of getting enough of the cryolite to
factories in North America spurred American aluminum manufacturers to develop a synthetic
alternative during the war (Jolly 1942). By 1942, the synthetic alternative was being produced in
enough bulk to make the Greenland mine superfluous to the aircraft manufacturers (Dziuban 1990, pg. 152).

The second was the Canadian Oil (CANOL) pipeline and refinery system. The Japanese threat to shipping in the North Pacific and the rapid American troop build-up in Alaska made this development look promising at the beginning of the war, especially when it was far from certain that the United States Navy could protect the sea lanes to Alaska. The Canadian subsidiary to Exxon, Imperial Oil, was contracted to run the system near Norman Wells, but assumed no financial risks. Instead, the United States government assumed the risk (Twichell 1992, pgs. 162-163). By 1943, the project had attracted the attention of Senator Harry Truman, who was charged with congressional oversight of the cost of America’s war efforts. His Commission looked to curb fraud, waste, and abuse of taxpayer money. He highlighted the vast amount of money spent on the project and the very limited return on investment (Twichell 1992, pgs. 265-269). The sunk political and economic investment that the American military had already made in CANOL meant that it survived the Truman Commission, but the refinery shut down in April 1945 when the war in the North Pacific theater wound down (Twichell 1992, pgs. 269-272). By this time, American oil companies had acquired much larger and easier-to-exploit oil concessions in the United States, Venezuela, and the Middle East (Painter 2012) that made CANOL oil prohibitively expensive by comparison.

The difficult permafrost topography also worked against greater construction. While the ALCAN was established because of the necessity of war, many other roads, railroads, pipelines, and buildings that were also considered during the height of the Japanese threat were not

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19The American press served a similar and complementary role to the Truman Commission. After the Aleutian Campaign was concluded, the massive port built near Juneau in 1942 to support the war effort was no longer useful. The New York Times called the port a “white elephant” which embarrassed the American military enough that it sent German POWs to tear the newly built port facility down before the war was even over (Kiffer 2015).
constructed. One of the most prominent of these ideas, the extension of the ALCAN Highway to Nome, was deemed impractical because the permafrost on which the road would be constructed made the project too expensive and too difficult to construct and maintain (Twichell 1992, pg. 204).

Despite their overwhelming wartime cooperation, America’s allies also added significant transaction costs to America’s northern development during the war. These transaction costs were imposed on the United States by its allies to dilute American presence and to protect their sovereignty. To that point, Canada made its cooperation on the construction of the ALCAN Highway and the Northwest Air Staging route contingent on the use of a significant proportion of Canadian labor. The ensuing labor disputes slowed down construction and cut down efficiency, but ensured Canada retained ownership of the road and airports after the war.

The Canadians also influenced the placement of the ALCAN away from America’s Pacific Coast population centers, so that thinly populated Northwest Canada would not be overwhelmed by Americans after the war. Canada demanded that the ALCAN be established alongside the skeleton of airports that one of its companies, Yukon Southern Air, was already operating, knowing that this route would give Yukon Southern an economic advantage after the war, while also favoring Canadian Pacific Railroad, which had tracks in proximity to the proposed route (Twichell 1992, pgs. 93-106). Canadian nationalism also extended to the operation of the navigation and communication aids along the incipient Northwest Staging Route that was constructed to connect American airplane factories to the ALSIB. Northwest Airlines, an American company, was initially contracted to run these aids at six airports along the route because of its familiarization with aviation operations in cold weather places in the continental United States. The Canadians feared this arrangement would continue to exist after the war and
pushed the United States to “militarize” Northwest’s operations so that Canada could take over the operations more easily after the war when the United States military evacuated from the country (Carlson 1962, Chapter 16).

The United States abided by Canada’s wishes because it valued Canada’s cooperation to the war effort and it respected Canada’s desire to maintain its sovereignty. This was the case despite the fact that the United States paid for and constructed most of Canada’s northern infrastructure during the war. As the Canadian Prime Minister readily admitted at the opening of the ALCAN, "Canada provided the soil; the United States provided the toil" (Twichell 1992, pg. 218). By the end of the war, all of the investment the United States made in northern Canada belonged to Canada and not the United States.

As the war wound down, American protectionism over coastal waters also ended up restricting its ability to access the economic resources of the Arctic Ocean. Even as America was busy setting up multinational economic institutions to order the world after the war, it was also preparing the Truman Proclamation, which firmly declared America’s intention to claim jurisdiction over the resources in the waters and seabed off its coasts. As detailed in the previous chapter, the precedent for this critical juncture was set when America first claimed extended jurisdiction over salmon fisheries in the Bering Sea in the late 1930s.

As Ann Hollick (1981, pg. 31) points out, the Department of the Interior (DOI) gained more bureaucratic authority during the war. Its chief, Harold Ickes, used this authority to push America’s claim to jurisdiction over coastal resources which the DOI would then administer, further expanding its bureaucratic authority. President Roosevelt, who increased the bureaucratic power of the executive branch throughout his presidency, supported this move. Hollick (1981, pgs. 35-36) suggests this move was also an outgrowth of the Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt’s
desire to protect America’s coastal resources from other maritime powers. She also claims that Roosevelt downplayed how this unilateral move could lead to reciprocation from other countries, even though Navy and State Department officials warned of the possibility. After Roosevelt’s death, Truman signed the edict that the Roosevelt administration had designed and was ready to implement prior to his death. Now that America was the world’s supreme naval power, it paradoxically limited its ability to project power outwards and to exploit resources in faraway oceans it now had the capability to exploit. Indeed, Canada, the Soviet Union, Norway, and Iceland created or expanded their own coastal exclusive economic zones (EEZs) after the war in accordance with the American example. This would limit the American Navy’s and merchant ship’s ability to legally navigate through these Arctic coastal waters and exploit their resources afterwards.

Ultimately, World War II geopolitics increased America’s economic interest and presence in the Arctic. Notably, Alaska was finally connected terrestrially to the United States by the ALCAN Highway, and air routes were established from the United States to both the North Pacific and the North Atlantic. Still, economic considerations borne from an economy that was still dominated by market forces, and the extra transaction costs that ensued from the economic nationalism of its wartime allies, kept the United States from developing the Arctic more than it did or even from maintaining control over a large amount of the northern infrastructure it paid for and constructed during the war. Even though Alaska’s population swelled during the war, it was still physically isolated because Canada retained control of the airports and roads between the United States and Alaska. Many of the military bases that were constructed in Alaska during the war were shut down as the war wound down. A large proportion of the supporting civilian
service sector migrated away from Alaska with these bases, and many that stayed became unemployed.

At the end of the war, it was increasingly clear the United States lacked the willingness to keep up its development in northern latitudes despite the impressive sunk costs and investment it had made in the region during the war. Without wartime necessity, soldiers no longer felt obliged to develop the north as a part of their duty, the American government was not willing to pay civilian contractors the high wages they demanded to work in northern localities, and the American military was unwilling to pay for the high upkeep cost of northern facilities.

3.2 Soviet Economics

The events of World War II magnified the Soviet Union’s willingness and capability to develop infrastructure and to extract resources in its Arctic territory. The willingness stemmed from two factors – one external and one internal. Externally, the Soviets were forced to replace material that was taken or destroyed by the Germans in some of its most productive regions during the war. Additionally, the Soviets needed northern natural resources to pay for critical war material it received from its allies during the war to fight the Germans. Internally, the Soviet Union’s largely autarkic and centralized economic system, and its authoritarian political system, continued to give the Soviet Union the willingness and the capability to develop its northern economy. These domestic economic controls made Soviet leaders immune to the forces that constrained America’s economic development in the north at the same time. The first part of this section discusses how German actions affected the Soviet’s moves to develop northern industry. The second part discusses how the Soviet economic and political system, especially the Soviet Union’s use of slave labor, continued to allow the Soviet Union to develop its northern economy during the war.
The German invasion devastated the Soviet Union’s most productive industrial regions. According to historian Kim Priemel (2015, pg. 36), German-occupied Ukraine contributed sixty percent of the Soviet Union’s soft coal, over sixty percent of the Soviet Union’s iron ore, greater than one third of the Soviet Union’s manganese, two thirds of Soviet Union’s pig iron and over half of the Soviet steel production prior to the war. Germany also attacked the Soviet Union’s largest source of hydrocarbon supplies, located in the Caucasus, to keep them from powering the Soviet military and industry. These supplies accounted for over eighty percent of the Soviets’ overall oil resources and as much as ninety percent of its oil refining capacity before the war (Van Tuyll 1989, pg. 56; Toprani 2016, pg. 829). The Soviets eventually repulsed this attack, due to Hitler’s strategically dubious decision to divide his forces and attack Stalingrad as well as the oilfields (Toprani 2016). Still, many southern Soviet oilfields were destroyed. Some were by the Soviets themselves as they attempted to keep the Germans from using them in 1942. Others were destroyed by the Germans as they retreated from the Caucasus when the Soviets broke out of Stalingrad in 1943. Anand Toprani (2016, pgs. 850-851) believes that the Soviets lost up to fifteen percent of their total oil production from the German attack on the Caucasus and stresses that even though the German invasion failed it “still managed to halt production in Maikop and Grozny, reduced output in Baku, and hindered transportation through the temporary closure of the Volga.” The results of this attack can be seen in the Soviets’ decreased hydrocarbon production during the war. In 1940, the Soviets produced thirty-one million tons of oil, but only twenty-two million tons in 1946 (Goldman 2008, pg. 33).

The German invasion forced the Soviets to replace these critical materials to sustain their war effort. They moved as much of their industry and skilled labor as possible east of the Ural Mountains, including into the Siberian Arctic, so that it was out of reach of the invading German
forces (Boyd 1977 Chapter 12). They also looked further northward into the Volga-Ural district to replace the strategic resources the Germans kept from the Soviets. They expanded hydrocarbon production in the Ukhta region of the Komi Republic to replace the oil and gas production that was lost from the Caucasus (Goldman 2008, pg. 34). The loss of the Donbass coal fields also forced the Soviets to speed up coal production in the Vorkuta region of the Komi Republic (Noble 2015, Loc. 1527).

Not only did the Soviets move their industry eastward and northward as they retreated, they destroyed much that was remaining in Ukraine and the Caucasus to keep it from falling into German hands (Priemel 2015, pg. 39). Similarly, the Germans also took as much with them as they could when they retreated westward from Ukraine and the Caucasus in 1943. The successive scorched-earth policies of the Soviets, and then the Germans, meant that the Soviets had very little existing infrastructure to re-industrialize Ukraine and the Caucasus after the war.

On the other hand, Germany strategically overlooked targeting industry in northern and central Russia during the war (Boyd 1977, Chapter 12). German leaders were overly optimistic that they could quickly make the Soviet’s surrender and overly confident that gaining control of Ukrainian and Caucasian resources would be enough to sustain the German military during the war (Priemel 2015, pgs. 36-37). As such, the main thrust of Soviet industry and resource extraction moved noticeably eastward and northward throughout the war. Although costly, the move was successful, and many segments of Soviet industry were producing quantities of goods in 1945 that were on par with what they were in 1940, helping the Soviets turn the tide of war against the Germans by 1943 (Van Tuyll 1989).

The German invasion also made the Soviet Union more reliant on trade, which promoted northern resource extraction operations. The Soviets could not replace the tremendous amount of
military equipment and war material the Germans confiscated or destroyed during the first months after the initial German invasion. The United States feared that the Soviet economy was not strong enough to sustain the Soviet military against the Germans in these critical months and attempted to replenish the Soviets, so that they could meet the dire German military threat they faced.

However, American neutrality complicated how it could help the Soviet Union before it formally entered the war after Pearl Harbor. The Roosevelt Administration decided to trade American goods the Soviets needed to survive in return for strategic raw materials from the Soviets. One such resource, gold, came overwhelmingly from Kolyma mines in the Soviet northeast Arctic and served as collateral for the ten-million-dollar loan advance the United States gave the Soviets in 1940 (Jones 1969, pg. 52). After Pearl Harbor, the United States formally allied with the Soviet Union and demanded less onerous terms for trade that relieved the demand for Kolyma gold and other strategic minerals coming from the Soviet north. These minerals were now diverted to the Soviet’s own industrialization effort.

Soviet annexation of the Finnish Petsamo region in 1944 also provided a valuable new source of Arctic minerals. This area had been fought over between the Germans, Soviets, and Finns from 1940-1943 and helped satisfy the Soviet Union’s erratic demands for nickel when the Soviets occupied the area in 1943 (Bray 1994, pg. 190). The Soviets negotiated with their allies in 1944 to buy Petsamo’s main mining company from the Canadian-British-American company, INCO, at a reduced rate of twenty million dollars (Bray 1994, pg. 190). In doing so, the Soviets acquired the most advanced nickel mining technology and equipment of the time and mineral deposits they continue to exploit, including copper that was found nearby (Bray 1994, pg. 191). This served as the foundation for the Russian nickel industry (Bray 1994, pg. 191),
supplementing the burgeoning nickel extraction operations already being accomplished by the
gulag and exile camps of Norilsk.

In addition to the demand for northern resources, the Soviets also had a ready supply of
labor to extract northern resources. The northern labor supply was aided by the expansion of
prison and exile labor that occurred during the war. Even though the main dumping place for
exiles continued to be Kazakhstan (Martin 2001, pg. 314), prison and exile labor was the crux of
the Soviet economic expansion into the Arctic, just as it was before the war (See Chapter 3).
Many political prisoners were given longer terms summarily after the German invasion began
(Applebaum 2003, pg. 413) to keep them in the northern camps where they
were needed to extract resources. One such group was the nine hundred thousand Soviet prisoners held in gulag camps in western Russia that were evacuated by the Soviet secret police to new prisons in the Russian east and north after the German invasion (Applebaum 2003, pg. 419).

These Soviet prisoners were supplemented by millions of prisoners of war that were rounded up during the war. Between 1941 and 1945, it is estimated that the Soviets took in a total of over four million prisoners (Applebaum 2003, pg. 433). After invading Poland, the Soviets held over two hundred thousand Poles in captivity; thousands of others were executed. Hundreds of thousands of citizens of the Baltic States, Ukraine, and Moldova suffered the same fate as the Poles (Martin 2001, pgs. 321-325). When the tide of the war against the Germans changed in 1943, hundreds of thousands of Axis prisoners were also sent to Soviet prison camps. Thousands were worked to death or starved. Hundreds of thousands more were rounded up shortly after the war concluded and sent to northern gulags to, ironically, establish Soviet dominance, i.e. to “Russify” the peripheral regions of the Soviet Union and to reduce the internal
security threat emanating from the Soviet Union’s new territories and satellites (Applebaum 2003, pgs. 432-433; Martin 2001).

Even native Soviets suspected of colluding with the German invaders like the “Vlasovites” of the Russian Free Army (Martin 2001, pg. 330) and Soviet Prisoners of War liberated from German prisons (Noble 2015), Soviet minority groups like the nine thousand Karelian Finns of Leningrad, and the hundreds of thousands of Caucasians perceived to be susceptible to collusion with the Germans (Applebaum 2003, pg. 426) were sent to the camps. So many different nationalities were sent to Vorkuta that it gained the moniker of “capital of the world” by some of the camp’s inmates (Balmforth 2013). One such inmate, American John Noble, was rounded up in Germany at the end of the war and spent nine years of forced labor in Vorkuta after the war (Noble 2015). He quoted another prisoner who set up the initial camp complex as saying, “There was nothing up there then [in the 1930s], just the freezing open tundra. They left us the truck, gasoline, a few guards and some food…only the Russians could have such nerve” (2015, Loc. 1535). After the war was over, Noble called Vorkuta a veritable “League of Nations” and documented the many notable Communists from Soviet satellite states that were now installed in Vorkuta (2015, Loc. 1443). He suggests (2015 Loc. 1535) that the Vorkuta mine complex expanded to over five hundred thousand workers, many of them foreign, by the end of the war.

Historian Anne Applebaum explains how gulag prison and exile labor during World War II was used to connect the Russian Arctic more extensively with European Russia by rail, road, and river transportation improvements. Arctic resource centers like Vorkuta and Ukhta exploded and fueled the Soviet Union’s industrialization efforts. Norilsk became home to the largest heavy-metal smelting complex in the world (Sharapova and Richardson 2007, pgs. 54-55). The
Dalstroï-operated gold mines in the Kolyma region were used by the Soviet regime to trade for crucial foreign currency and machinery. Slave labor connected these resource extraction centers to the burgeoning Russian Arctic river transport system by building railroads and ports - largely by hand. Applebaum (2003, pg. 423) suggests that “apart from their punitive function, the deportations that occurred during the war fit neatly into Stalin’s grand plan to populate the northern regions of Russia…and appeared to be permanent.” John Noble suggests that slaves were used in lieu of machinery because of the Soviet regime’s constant fear of “wrecking” and its fear that machinery would give individual workers too much power to sabotage Soviet extraction operations (2015, Loc. 1310). Relying on manual labor greatly reduced this risk, as inefficient as it was, and rationalized the large numbers of people deposited in the Soviet north to extract resources. The fact that many of the laborers were not ethnic Russians or had been charged with treason against the Soviet state further influenced the Soviet regime’s decision to punish its Arctic population with debilitating manual labor (Martin 2001, pg. 327), instead of utilizing more efficient machine-driven operations.

Applebaum writes, “Today, the managers of Gazprom, another new Soviet company, inhabit modern buildings on the same leafy streets” in Ukhta that gulag prisoners formerly designed and constructed during World War II (Applebaum 2003, pg. 78). Similarly, many of the northern airfields that the Soviets constructed to handle ALSIB Lend-Lease supplies were constructed by gulag labor employed by the powerful national Soviet trust company, Dalstroï (Dolitsky 2007, Locs. 1761-1763). Gulag labor was especially suited to doing dangerous work. In 1944, gulag labor mined all of the Soviet Union’s radioactive uranium (Applebaum 2003, pg. 438). Many Volga Germans transited through the camps near Kotlas in the Archangelsk region
and established railroads, roads, and bridges that allowed the Soviets to extract and transport lumber down the Dvina River Valley (Dubrovina 1993).

The gulag labor was extremely harsh. There was barely enough food to feed the Soviet Army and Soviet citizens during the war, which left even less for the servile northern labor force. More than two million of the twenty million people in the gulag died during World War II (Applebaum 2003, pgs. 415-416). Sharapova and Richardson (2007, pg. 54) estimate that of the five hundred thousand prisoners that transited through Norilsk between 1935 and 1956, over one hundred thousand of them died, many during the war. Similar casualty rates were likely suffered in Vorkuta, Ukhta, Kolyma, and other northern camps and resource extraction centers. Most of the prisoners that survived were stranded in the region after the war and suffered from malnutrition and debilitating injuries, some of which were self-imposed, so that the prisoners would no longer have to suffer through the harsh labor and climate (Noble 2015). Even after the prisoners served their sentences, the overwhelming majority, including the non-Soviets, were forced to stay on in their new Arctic locales and were employed as “free labor” living only marginally better than when they were prisoners. Essentially, the millions of deportees to the Soviet Arctic were now “state-owned serfs” (Martin 2001, pg. 330).

The Soviet Union paradoxically became even more reliant on Arctic resources and slave labor to sustain its economy and its material strength as the war progressed. It focused on developing and extracting these resources in austere and inhospitable places instead of developing other sectors of its economy where money and labor could have been better used. The high economic cost of developing the Arctic economy was hidden by the Soviet Union’s planned economy, the use of prison labor, and wartime necessity. In the Soviet Union, there was
no equivalent to the Truman Commission or a Governor Gruening to highlight the economic absurdity of the high sunk costs being invested in the region even as the war wound down.

In the Soviet Union, there was also no equivalent to America’s mobile labor. Soviet exile and gulag labor deposited in the Arctic during World War II remained there after the war, while the American soldiers and civilian contractors who built up the northern regions of North America during the war largely returned to their homes in the southern states after the war. Overall, the Soviet economy was much more dependent on resource extraction and the Arctic than was the case of the United States after the war, and the Soviets were much more willing to coerce its people to colonize northern territory than was the United States. Consequently, the Soviet Union’s presence in the Arctic was much more permanent than the American presence at the end of the war, and its economy was much more dependent on the Arctic than was the American economy.

4. Identity

4.1 Soviet Identity

Although not as influential as geopolitics or economics, the significance of the Arctic to the Russian national psyche further increased as a result of World War II and gave the Soviets a greater willingness to expand into the Arctic afterwards. This ideational pull came largely from the defense of Murmansk that was lionized by Stalin and subsequent Russian and Soviet leaders, including Leonid Brezhnev and Vladimir Putin, after the war. While not associated directly with the Arctic, the assist that winter and the harsh Russian climate gave to Soviet defenders in Leningrad, Moscow, and Stalingrad also contributed to the existing national perception that Russians had a unique ability to withstand harshly frigid environments against foreign enemies (See Chapter 2). This victory over the ice and snow and foreign aggressors contributed to a
growing sense that Russia was the premier northern country in the world and that the tough Russian people were the natural conquerors and inhabitants of the High North. The Soviet governments’ ability to centrally control information and memorialize the conflict contributed to the further development of this national heroic narrative of the Arctic (Aas 2012, pg. 236).

The mythology of Murmansk was pushed by Soviet leadership after World War II, but they did this in a nuanced way, at first, because they did not want to give the Allies any credit for the Soviet victory (Van Tuyll 1989). By 1974, memories of Allied aid to Murmansk were successfully diluted by Soviet propaganda, and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev used the defense of Murmansk to memorialize heroic Soviet efforts during World War II. He built the second largest statue in Russia to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the war there. Named Alyosha, it is a massive and luminous figure of a Soviet soldier, illuminated at night, accompanied by an eternal flame standing watch over the port and accompanied by an unknown soldier buried at its base and air defense artillery. It symbolically underlines the region’s centrality to Russian security and the sacrifice Soviets paid for this security.

In 1985, the official myth-making of Murmansk was furthered when it was designated as one of the Soviet Union’s twelve “Hero Cities” on the war’s 40th anniversary. Murmansk was put in with the likes of other legendary Soviet cities like Leningrad and Stalingrad that also tragically held out against German aggression and were almost completely destroyed by the war. Many significant war memorials were also built in the Litsa River Valley, 70 kilometers to the west of Murmansk, which was the longest serving frontline of the war between the Soviet Union and Germany. The Soviets suffered over ninety-thousand of the more than twenty million Soviet overall fatalities during the war in this valley. It has alternatively been called the “Valley of Death,” the “Valley of Fame,” the “Valley of Glory,” and the “Valley of Honor” (Aas 2012, pgs.
by the Soviet government and its attendant national media. This memorialization was used to legitimize Soviet regional militarization during the Cold War and to unite the Soviet people under Communist leadership after Stalin’s death (Aas 2012, pg. 228). Soviet citizens were told that they could never let such an attack happen to Russia again. Striking memorials to World War II were also built in the Russian Arctic settlements of Dikson, Litsa, Kandalksha, and Archangelsk after the war (Nilsen, n.d.), forming a centrally controlled and integrated national memory policy that tied the country to the region and the region to the heroic events of World War II (Aas 2012).

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, increased Russian nationalism has resulted in a return to memorializing World War II. Again, the Russian government and national media has attempted to underline the arduous defense of Russia’s north as a key to Soviet victory and Russian security. This tactic is partly a reflection of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in which Russia lost other territory that was highly significant during World War II. In all, six “hero cities” in both Ukraine and Belarus were lost with the demise of the Soviet Union. Russian President Dmitri Medvedev replaced these “hero cities” with “cities of military glory.” Three “cities of military glory” were selected in the Russian Arctic Northwest. The previous “hero city” of Murmansk was supplemented with the selection of nearby Polyarny, where the Northern Fleet was ported during World War II, and Archangelsk, which served as an important alternate port for the Murmansk convoys (Aas 2012, pg. 234).

More recently, Russian President Vladimir Putin has taken on a renewed effort to tie the Arctic to Russian identity through memories of World War II. This has been done to tie into resurgent Russian nationalism, much of which is tied to the Great Power status Russia enjoyed when it held sway over the Soviet Union and to bolster Putin’s attempts to revive Russia’s
northern resource extraction operations and the development of the Northern Sea Route. Over the last five years, he has awarded hundreds of medals to surviving Allied Murmansk convoy members that were neglected by their own countries. This tact provided Russia with a propaganda victory over the British, in particular, who would not allow its former sailors to receive the Russian award until public outcry made it change its policies in 2015 (Bullough 2013). In doing so, the medals have underlined the central place the Arctic is to both Russia and its foreign rivals as a result of World War II.

Putin created a new impressive memorial in Archangelsk in 2016 to celebrate the Murmansk Convoys on the seventy-fifth anniversary of World War II to further cement domestic patriotic sentiments towards the Arctic and to deflect international criticism of Russia. Reuters journalist Dmitry Madorsky (2016) suggests that, “commemorations of Russians’ wartime sacrifices” like the new memorial at Archangelsk, “reinforce national pride and loyalty to Putin at home” and counter what Russia “sees as vilification in the West” for its aggression in Georgia, Crimea, and elsewhere. This claim is supported by Vadim Medvedkov (The Arctic, 2016), Chairman of the Pomor Federation of the Archangelsk Region, who commented at the unveiling of the Archangelsk memorial that it “brings together three countries: Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Despite the current political tensions, we acted together during the Great Patriotic War and worked towards a shared goal.”

Overwhelmingly, centrally directed state memorialization of World War II continues to be used to highlight the Arctic’s important role to Russia. The Russian government continues to build upon previous Soviet efforts during World War II to establish the Arctic as a symbolically and uniquely important place for Russia. Selected memories of heroic Russian Arctic efforts during World War II continue to be propagated by Russian state media to its own populace. This
regional chauvinism contributes to the Russian populace’s support for present Russian
government efforts to re-militarize and expand resource extraction operations in the region.

4.2 American Identity

In stark contrast to Russia, the United States has largely forgotten about its contribution
to the Arctic during World War II, and the region’s significance to the national psyche remains
marginal at best. Even the sub-Arctic American efforts to remove Japan from the Aleutians
Islands is now called the “Forgotten War” by American historians. Despite the fact that the
Aleutian campaign was the largest military operation on American territory during the war and
was the first time American territory was occupied by a foreign force since the War of 1812, it
was “considered a sideshow to the more high-profile battles in the South Pacific” (Andrews
2017; Van Orden 2014) by most Americans. As such, victory in the Aleutians, and the northern
engineering feats accomplished on the northern tundra, only temporarily lifted American war
morale and were quickly forgotten by even its military leaders after the war (MacGarrigle 2003).

One factor that played into this national amnesia was that most of the wartime efforts in
Alaska were heavily censored due to concerns for military security and did not reach the general
American public (Twichell 1992). Furthermore, many of the Americans who were garrisoned in
Alaska and other Arctic locales during the war felt as if they had missed the real war and instead
had been punished by being deployed on the war’s desolate northern periphery (Hays 2004).
This feeling was exacerbated since the United States Army sent subversives to Alaska as
punishment as the war wound down (Klein et al. 1987, pg. 2-57). Not many of these soldiers
agreed to stay in Alaska after the war and obviously did not “sell” the virtues of Alaska to their
fellow Americans on their return home.
Similarly, the epic and rapid construction of the ALCAN Highway during the war temporarily buoyed American national morale, but its transfer to Canada after the war decreased its significance to the national psyche (Twichell 1992). Even American contributions to the ALSIB and Murmansk Convoys have been relatively neglected in the American consciousness, despite the sacrifice of lives and material that they entailed. Representative of this feeling, America did not send a high-level government representative to Archangelsk, like Britain did, to celebrate the 2016 memorial of the Murmansk Convoys.

To illustrate the lack of impact the war had on America’s consciousness as a northern country, it was not until 2006 that a memorial to American and Russian ALSIB efforts was erected in Fairbanks, Alaska. The ribbon-cutting event was attended by American Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov and was used to support the short-lived U.S.-Russia cooperation against global terrorism that occurred at the beginning of the twenty-first century (see Figure 3). The memorial was conceived by the Russian-American expatriate son of a Soviet military officer, Alexander Dolitsky. Much of Dolitsky’s professional work as an anthropologist has illuminated Russia’s deep roots and continued influence on Alaskan social life and culture (Alaska-Siberia Research Center, n.d.). In this respect, it is significant that Dolitsky has done more to shape memories of American efforts with the ALSIB than non-Russian natives have.

While the difference between the United States and Russian Arctic identity can be explained by geopolitics and economics, the United States’ de-centralized control of information and relatively open political system also has contributed to its lack of Arctic chauvinism. The noted Norwegian Arctic scholar, Steiner Aas (2012), suggests that these competitive domestic institutional structures have also muddied similarly structured Norway and its Arctic narrative
from World War II. His argument that disparate groups such as organized labor, political parties, and even NATO have tried to appropriate and diminish World War II memories of Norway’s efforts in the Arctic in different ways is comparable to how information competition has conflicted the United States’ Arctic memories from World War II.

Like Norway, this has allowed many competing interest groups, including the governments of Norway (see Meloni 2017, for example), Russia (Dolitsky 2006), and Canada (Twichell 1992), to dilute the significance of America’s Arctic efforts during World War II. This has contributed to America’s concept of itself as a marginal Arctic player. There is no symbolic American Arctic comparison to Russia’s image of heroic World War II “Murmansk” during World War II and no successfully sustained American government effort to create one. Despite America’s successful efforts to win victory over Germany and Japan in the Arctic during World War II, the region remains a peripheral location to the American consciousness and identity. As such, the events of World War II have had little effect on America’s willingness to assert a larger presence in the Arctic after World War II ended or even today.

5. Environment and Native Rights

5.1 Soviet Environmentalism and Native Rights

Low politics’ issues like the environment and native rights tend to lose their salience when there is an existential threat to a country. But environmental concerns held little sway for the Tsarist regimes or Bolsheviks even before World War II (See Chapters 1-3). As previously mentioned in this chapter, the Soviet Union further expanded its efforts to exploit the mineral and timber wealth of the Arctic during World War II. Now that the country was fighting a total war, these Arctic resources were essential to feed the Soviet war machine. The Arctic environment was harmed in the process (Noble 2015), but the Soviets did not care. They
continued to work from the mindset that the Arctic needed to be conquered, and environmental concern was not allowed to be a barrier to this conquest.

For natives, the war brought a measure of relief. Before the war, multiple policy changes were implemented to “Russify” the north, but the Soviet government was so focused on the war effort that these efforts declined during the war. Natives were not forced to enlist into the Red Army, although many did and were killed or injured (Vakhtin 1992, pg. 53). Despite the official reprieve, the continued influx of ethnic Russians and Europeans into the Russian Arctic to extract its resources, with the concurrent outflow of natives to fight, further diluted northern native population concentrations. This further weakened their ability to organize a resistance to subsequent Russification efforts or to contest Soviet sovereignty over its Arctic territory after the war.

5. American Environmentalism and Native Rights

Similar to the Soviet Union, low politics took a back seat during World War II in the United States. Fighting a total war decreased the environmental and native lobbies’ ability to restrain American physical presence in Alaska or contest the American government sovereign control over territory. Construction boomed, and Alaska’s population doubled with the influx of soldiers and builders. Alaska’s wilderness was further pushed back to support the war effort. But this expansion stopped short of the Alaskan Arctic. Nome and Fairbanks, the northernmost major settlements and resource extraction centers before the war, were still the northernmost sites after the war. Wilderness still dominated in most of western, interior, and northern Alaska. Wartime activity, however, damaged the environment of southern Alaska, the Aleutians, and the Pribilofs. There was so much damage caused by the war that an American government commission established that it would take “24,260 person-days of direct labor at a total cost of approximately
Wilderness advocates, many deployed as servicemen to Alaska by the war, abhorred the environmental damage to Alaska. The damage motivated them to push their environmentalist ethos to the best of their ability, even during the war. For example, “Sea Otter Jones” organized a group of soldiers to protect Aleutian sea otters during his garrison duty – something he continued to do as a United States Fish and Wildlife Officer after the war, when many of his military compatriots went home. Historian Douglas Brinkley suggests that Jones did more than anybody else to make the sea otter a protected species after the war and helped create the three hundred thousand-acre Izembek National Wildlife Refuge (2011, pgs. 428-431). Brinkley also suggested that many military veterans needed the healing power of the wilderness after the bloodletting of World War II, which pushed them to promote wilderness preservation in Alaska after the war ended (Brinkley 2011, pg. 481).

Prominent Americans also continued their preservation efforts in Alaska during the war. Walt Disney created a patch for the Alaska Defense Command that had a fur seal on it as its mascot and produced a documentary of the fur seals to protest seal harvesting that continued in the Pribilofs during the war (Brinkley 2011, pg. 343, 344-345). The first Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ira Gabrielson, pushed to establish Alaskan Wildlife Refuges during the war (Brinkley 2011, pg. 344). President Roosevelt nominated William Douglas to the Supreme Court of the United States in 1939 (Brinkley 2011, pg. 319), where he tirelessly worked to preserve Alaskan wilderness in its primitive state for the rest of his life.

It is clear that the environmental movement that existed before the war in Alaska endured throughout the war, even as the wilderness in southern Alaska and the Aleutians was necessarily
pushed back and America’s physical presence in the region necessarily increased. It is further clear that this environmental movement restrained any wartime impetus to attempt a conquest of the Arctic, like the Soviets continued to undertake during and after the war.

The wartime experience also weakened native rule in parts of Alaska. This was especially the case in southern Alaska, where native rule was already most compromised. The influx of American soldiers and contractors further diluted their populations (Hunsinger and Sandberg 2013, pg. 5). The Aleuts, who were forcibly removed from their homes to protect them from Japanese attack, were threatened the most. The Aleuts had already largely assimilated to a wage economy before the war through their role in commercial seal hunts and the fur trade that dated back to the time when Russia ruled over Alaska (United States Congressional Commission 2000, pgs. 317-359). During their internment in southeastern Alaska, they were overwhelmingly neglected by the American government. Some found permanent new jobs in their new locales and stayed. Many others died, especially elders who provided continuity to the Aleuts’ traditional way of life. Others had their houses vandalized and their belongings taken by military service members while they were away.

Most Pribilof men were strong-armed into hunting for fur seals in the summer of 1942 and 1943, despite the continued Japanese threat to the Aleutian Islands, in order to provide critical revenue for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. When the Aleuts returned home permanently after the war, subsistence living was even more difficult because bored military members had over-hunted and over-fished during their stay in the Aleutians. American guilt and Aleut solidarity that occurred because of the World War II experience has allowed the Aleuts to establish more autonomy and protect their traditional way of life as American politics have progressed in the following decades. As the report by the United States Congressional Commission
Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians suggests, the Aleuts “have never forgotten” their wartime ordeal (2000, pg. 317).

For other Alaskan native groups, the war experience was not as galvanizing, but still furthered their ability to contest American sovereignty over their traditional lands after the war. Most American natives were not subjected to actual combat, so they were better able to maintain their organizational integrity and culture throughout the war than their Soviet counterparts. They were also forced to join institutions during the war that forced them to organize within the American political system and gave them a vehicle to assert their own interests and protect their own traditional lands after the war.

For example, many natives were enlisted into the Alaska Territorial Guard, the precursor to the Alaska National Guard, during the war. Within this organization, they protected their own villages and terrain around the ALSIB route and aided downed airmen. Another example is that of Muktuk Marston. Klein et al. (1987, pg. 44) claim that Marston, an Alaskan “Lawrence of Arabia,” indirectly established the basis for northern native political organization by establishing armories in native villages that functioned as community centers and by advocating for native rights at a time when it was not socially “fashionable” in the general American society.

In aggregate, the Alaska natives maintained their tribal identity and organization during the war even as they became further integrated into American political institutions. These developments, and America’s relatively open and progressive political system, allowed the natives to contest the American government’s sovereignty over their traditional lands after the war and to assert their own parochial interests. Ultimately, a more knowledgeable and more organized native lobby increased the transaction costs non-native American citizens would have
to pay to settle in the Arctic. In the future, the American government would have to negotiate with the natives when it wanted to increase its presence in the region.

6. Path Dependence

Both countries spread their sphere of influence into the High North because of the geopolitics and contingencies of the war. The United States gained protective custody of Iceland and Greenland and established military bases and transportation infrastructure in northern Canada and Alaska that improved its ability to operate in the Arctic afterwards. This created an interesting and complex relational construction between the United States and its newfound allies. The wartime alliance was supported by statesmen on all sides who highlighted that shared democratic values united and deepened their relationship with the United States. That being the case, the allies welcomed the United States as a protector. But America’s allies also feared America’s power to dilute their sovereignty over their northern territory. Despite the liberal and benevolent sentiments of the United States, the large difference in material strength between the United States and these allies made the allies rationally fearful. As highlighted in this chapter, the allies attempted to minimize American presence to that which would provide them enough security to deter attack from Germany and attempted to shape their asymmetric relationship with the United States by institutionally and legally restraining the United States afterwards.

The United States also attempted to mitigate its allies’ rational fears on its own (Ikenberry 2001). It expressed its desire to respect its allies’ sovereignty and codified this in its wartime agreements with these countries – agreements that served as the basis for post-war security agreements between the countries. It also promised to remove its soldiers from these countries when they were no longer needed. This necessarily meant that the scope of American physical presence in these countries after the war was contingent on 1) the perceived external
threat to them, 2) the goodwill of the Americans to abide by their promises after the war, and 3) the continued good relationship between the United States and its allies. With the threat posed by Nazi Germany and Japan gone, it was unclear if the United States or its northern allies would support continued American presence after the war. However, the benign hegemonic relationship that was institutionalized by the war had its own inertia that continued into the Cold War when the Soviet Union emerged as a threat that replaced Nazi Germany.

This construction was the basis for America’s contingent and ambiguous approach to the Arctic after the war. This construction meant that while the United States had the capability to dominate the Arctic (and other regions) after the war, it lacked the willingness. Instead, the relationship meant that the United States would work with its allies to externally balance against future regional shared threats – the Soviet Union looming on the horizon – so that the United States could focus on more pressing security concerns in other locales.

The two aberrations from America’s creation of hierarchical expansionary relationships with democratic Arctic states during the war was with Sweden and Finland. As was previously chronicled in this chapter, Finland tried desperately before, during, and at the end of the war to form a deeper relationship with the United States and to gain some kind of protection from the United States. There was sympathy within the United States for Finland, especially during its Winter War with the Soviet Union. However, a deeper relationship between the two countries proved impossible because of the way the war and its alliances developed. American isolation, followed by America’s contingent alliance with the Soviet Union and Finland’s contingent alliance with Germany, negated the kind of relationship with Finland that the United States developed with Canada, Iceland, Denmark, and Norway. America surrendered democratic Finland to the Soviet’s sphere of influence after the war as 1) to provide a debt of gratitude to the
Soviet Union for the extreme suffering it endured during the war, 2) to punish Finland because it fought with Germany during the war, and 3) because it was clear that the Soviet Union would forcefully resist any attempts to weaken its hold on Finland after the war.

Democratic Sweden’s experience differed from Finland during the war which greatly affected its foreign policy and relationship with the United States during and after the war as well. Sweden came out of the war unencumbered by a dependent security relationship with the United States, a cooperative relationship with other Scandinavian countries, or a coerced relationship with the Soviet Union. Instead, its geographic position and neutrality made Sweden a natural buffer between the Soviet Union and the West after the war – its shared democratic values with the West did not greatly affect Sweden’s role during the war or after it. Instead, its role as a neutral country was solidified.

The Soviet Union also expanded its sphere of influence in the Arctic because of the war. In contrast to the United States, this expansion was much more authoritative, much less ambiguous, and much more dependent on material strength. In short, it was the result of a very realist foreign policy. The Soviet Union firmly rejected forming the kind of relationships that the United States created with its northern allies during the war. It expanded into northern Finland, as well as the sub-Arctic Baltic States and Poland, on the basis of material strength. It is clear that these states would not have agreed on their post-war relationships with the Soviet Union without extreme coercion. Unlike the United States, there was no common values or common external threats that bound these countries to the Soviet Union after the war.

Similarly, the Soviet Union stringently avoided building the kind of relationship with the United States during the war that the United States created with its other Arctic allies. The lack of shared values and trust between the countries meant that the Soviet Union was afraid to give
the United States more access to the Russian Arctic. When the shared threat of Nazi Germany was vanquished, so was the tenuous Arctic cooperation between the countries. The Soviets were intent on ensuring that there would be no reprise of World War I, when its American allies had to be physically pushed out of Murmansk and Siberia (See Chapter 2). In the end, the Soviet Union’s Arctic sphere of influence after World War II extended almost as far as it was capable of pushing it and was solidified in place by asymmetric treaties like the 1944 Moscow Armistice between itself and Finland at the end of the war.

The capability of both the United States and the Soviet Union to act in the Arctic increased appreciably during the war. This created the basis for both countries to exert a larger sphere of influence in the region after the war. However, Soviet experiences during the war were greater in scope and more permanent. This provided it a greater amount of northern military resources and a more tested doctrine to work from after the war.

Specifically, the tragic experiences of the Winter War against Finland forced it to improve its cold weather tactics and equipment. These improved tactics and equipment were further refined during the Continuation War against Finland and the Petsamo-Kirkenes operation against Germany. The Petsamo-Kirkenes operation was the largest battle ever fought above the Arctic Circle. This operation served as a model for the Soviet military, who used it afterwards to improve its performance in subsequent potential military engagements in the High North (Gebhardt 1989, pg. xiii).

In contrast, American military historian James Gebhardt highlights that, “No equivalent military operation [to the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation] exists in the American military experience” (Gebhardt 1989, pg. xiii). As such, the Americans were never forced to adequately study or create doctrine on how to operate in the unique Arctic environment. Gebhardt suggests
(1989, pg. xiv) that this caused American post-war strategists to wrongly “dwell on the impact of cold, ice, and snow on military operations, largely ignoring the fact that arctic regions are not always cold” and did not address the “difficulties of conducting operations on arctic terrain in the summer, when topography, soil type, and light conditions, not low temperatures and snow, affect the employment of military forces.” America’s relative lack of familiarity and military resources in the Arctic, as well as its contingent relationship with its Arctic allies, contributed to its post-war decision to contain the Soviet Union in the Arctic versus attempting to control the Arctic on its own.

World War II economics was another contributing factor to the differing approaches the United States and the Soviet Union took to the Arctic after the war. As was chronicled in this chapter, the Soviet economy became more dependent on resources from the Arctic and on the Arctic transportation structure it developed during the war. The dependency was built on the Soviet government’s willingness and ability to coercively move laborers into the Arctic and create concentrated urban industrial centers in the Arctic wilderness that were initially developed during the interwar period and had roots dating back to the Tsarist era. Dependence on the Arctic economy during the war motivated the Soviet Union to build a more robust regional military presence to protect it. These efforts were further supported by the Soviet government’s continued attempts to create a heroic national narrative around the Arctic.

America’s economic expansion into the Arctic greatly differed from the Soviet Union during the war. It was largely contingent on supporting military efforts - not on extracting resources or refining them. As such, after the war concluded, there was little to be defended other than the military installations themselves. Also, in contrast to the Soviet Union, there was little appetite in the American government to continue to use high-priced contract labor or conscripted
military labor to continue developing the Arctic and sub-Arctic after the war – especially in other countries. Soldiers were released from duty, and civilian contracts were not renewed. Although Alaska’s economy and population were buoyed by the war, and its transportation infrastructure was greatly improved, its economic fortunes retreated after the war, when market forces were allowed to replace the more centrally controlled wartime economic system.

Overall, changes in the international and domestic situations of the United States and the Soviet Union meant that both countries were more willing and capable of exerting a sphere of influence in the Arctic than they were before the war. But, despite its overall material deficiency compared to the United States, the Soviet Union was more willing and capable of doing so than the United States.
Chapter 5: From World War II to the OPEC Oil Embargo (1945-1973)

1. Introduction

The world-changing events of World War II were followed shortly by the world-changing events of the Cold War. Most importantly, as was documented in the previous chapter, the inability of the United States and the Soviet Union to develop a more trusting relationship during World War II now made these two states the primary competitors for control over the bipolar post-war world. This meant that the United States and the Soviet Union now faced each other across the icy waters of the Arctic Ocean and the short distance across the Bering Strait. Consequently, this chapter focuses overwhelmingly on how the geopolitical situation of the early Cold War affected both countries’ willingness and capability to operate in the Arctic and expand their respective spheres of influence into the region.

In particular, I trace how the varying scope of American military presence, established in particular Arctic states during World War II, created the basis for early Cold War cooperation between these states and the United States after the war. In doing so, I show the complexity of the bilateral relationships and explain why the United States was comfortable gradually giving up its military presence in some of these countries to these allies even as the Soviet threat in the Arctic increased.

I also document how the military technology that was first created during World War II was further developed after the war to give both countries the capability to operate above, below, and through the Arctic like they never had before. In doing so, I highlight how the differing domestic and international institutions affected how the two countries adapted to this
technology. I explain how the United States used technology to set up a passive early warning system in the Arctic in tandem with its NATO allies, and after a rapid build-up, moved most of its forces out of the Arctic when the range of its missiles and airplanes allowed it to deploy these forces from the continental United States instead. In contrast, I show that because its authoritarian government and planned economy hid the risk and cost of operating in the Arctic, because it lacked Arctic allies, and because it still lacked access to the world’s oceans elsewhere, the Soviets did not withdraw its forces from the Arctic to the degree the United States did as the range of its own weapons improved.

Likewise, although less important than geopolitics, I trace how Soviet domestic economic institutions continued to promote Arctic development in a way that America’s market institutions and mobile labor could not emulate. I show how the Soviet planned economy, forced labor, and a reliance on raw materials (all concentrated relics of former Russian tsarist and Soviet Leninist-Marxist institutions documented in previous chapters) pushed the Soviets to continue its already unrivalled economic development in the Arctic. I also demonstrate that the historically concentrated political power of the Soviet political system unrelentingly disregarded native and environmental concerns during this expansion and that the Soviets continued their state promotion of the Arctic as a national domain, as their predecessors had, to cultivate a deep-seated national attachment to the region.

In contrast, I show that Americans still lacked a national attachment to the Arctic. The Canadian attachment to the Arctic that appropriated the North American Arctic as Canadian and made the United States an Arctic “other” was part of this. Alaska, despite its establishment as the forty-ninth state in 1959 and its position as a strategic bulwark against the Soviets, remained a peripheral place in the national consciousness due to its physical
isolation from the continental United States and the government’s inability and unwillingness to cultivate a national attachment to the region.

I also show how environmentalists and native groups improved their organization during this timeframe and how they used the progressive shift in the American political system to effectively minimize development in Alaska. Specifically, I show how these groups strengthened from earlier beginnings and how they operated in America’s relatively open political system to stop ambitious federal plans to open up northern Alaska and complicated the newly formed state of Alaska’s attempts to augment its tax base by gaining control of resource rich territory from the federal government after statehood. In doing so, I show that these groups magnified the ongoing and complex debate about what Alaska and the Arctic should become to America – a semi-sovereign native enclave, an environmental refuge, or a honeypot of scarce resources that should be extracted to improve the country’s material strength. In doing so, I argue that these groups significantly weakened America’s willingness to improve its capability in the Arctic and expand its presence there, especially when compared to the contemporaneous efforts of the Soviet Union.

2. Geopolitics

After World War II, the Arctic moved from a geopolitical flank to a prime theater of competition between the two emerging world superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Both countries developed missiles, submarines, and nuclear-laden bombers that squared off across the Arctic Ocean which presented the shortest distance between the two competitors. This provided both countries a greater willingness and capability to expand their respective spheres of influence into the region. However, despite its material superiority over
the Soviet Union, the United States did not forcefully push its claim as much as the Soviet
Union did, which represented it relative lack of willingness to do so.

Overall, America’s contingent and temporary post-war military expansion into the Arctic
region contrasted with contemporaneous Soviet militarization. The United States came to treat
the region as a fence and a thoroughfare for continentally based planes and rockets. The
Soviet Union came to see the Arctic as a critical bastion over which it needed to project
power. Consequently, it built up a much more permanent and less contingent Arctic presence
than did the United States during this critical juncture.

2.1 American Geopolitics

The United States entered the post-Cold War world as the most materially powerful
country in the world. It did not suffer the casualties and economic destruction of the European
Great Powers, especially the Soviet Union. The Soviets emerged from the war with an
economy only one-third the size of America’s (Lundestad 1986, pg. 264). Realism would
suggest that the United States would fill the post-war power vacuum, while the Soviet Union,
as the weaker power, would attempt to protect itself by increasing its internal strength and
finding allies to balance against the United States (Waltz 2010). Against realist thinking,
however, the United States did not assertively press its material advantage in the Arctic. And
the United States, not the Soviet Union, was the country that assembled allies to externally
balance against the competing superpower threat in the Arctic.

As I will show, this interesting development was the result of the warm relationships
and learning that occurred between the United States and its Arctic neighbors during World
War II. It was also the result of the threatening behavior of the Soviet Union (Walt 1987)
which pushed these Arctic countries, to differing extents, to maintain the position under
America’s security umbrella they first attained during World War II to deter the Soviets after World War II.

I also argue that World War II changed America’s perceived role in the world. During World War II, the United States came to realize that isolation no longer worked and that its physical security now relied on a more interventionist and internationalist foreign policy. Japan’s ability to attack Pearl Harbor and occupy the outer Aleutian Islands, and Germany’s near victory over Great Britain, contributed to this belief and motivated the United States to abandon its pre-war isolationism. Even still, America did not move to meet the Soviet threat until 1947, when the cooperation and convergence that the Roosevelt administration had hoped to achieve with the Soviets during World War II came to an end when the Soviet Union did not give up the satellite states they occupied in Eastern Europe (Taubman 1982). After the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948, Truman claimed that “we are faced with the exactly same situation with which Britain and France were faced in 1938-39” (qtd. in Taubman 1982, pg. 168). This perception underlined the learning which justified America’s greater interventionism in the decades that followed.

The transition to an interventionist foreign policy was also motivated by a renewed belief in American exceptionalism. Influential American leaders now believed American ideals were ripe for export to “Old World” European countries. According to Lundestad (1986, pg. 265), “Now the United States had become so strong that it could not only remain uncontaminated by the evils of the Old World, but could also spread the American gospel to the rest of the world” – a gospel of democratic political institutions and market-dominated economies. The 1947 Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan were early outgrowths of this
transition and reflected America’s desire to retain the relationships it established with polar countries after the war.

However, America was also pulled into northern Europe and Canada by these allies. This was largely because these war-weary countries also saw the Soviet Union as a real threat to their security shortly after World War II and did not have the material strength to meet the Soviets alone. Soviet militarization, the Soviet-directed Czechoslovak and Hungarian coup d’états in 1947 and 1948, the Soviet blockade of Berlin in 1948-1949, the Soviet explosion of a nuclear bomb in 1948, continued Soviet pressure on Finland, and rumors that the Soviet Union wanted to similarly “Finlandize” Norway all contributed to this perception (Pettyjohn 2012, pg. 61). Critically, the lingering American forces that remained in foreign polar countries after World War II facilitated continued ties between these countries and the United States after the war (Osgood 1968). As Lundestad (1986) describes it, the United States came to rule over an “Empire by Invitation” that included the Arctic after World War II.

In another continuance from World War II, America’s Arctic allies balanced the security and economic prosperity America provided them with their desire to retain sovereignty over their territory. Any change in American presence on their territory threatened to provoke a counter-reaction from the Soviets, disrupt the fragile post-war regional balance of power, and unduly threaten these countries’ sovereignty. In the end, the presence America’s Arctic allies allowed the United States on their territory at the beginning of the Cold War correlated closely with the presence America had during World War II and only gradually changed with new developments that subtly affected bilateral relationships the countries shared with the United States during the early years of the Cold War.
The United States, for its part, attempted to get its northern allies to take on a greater burden of their own defense so that it could focus on other regions that became important as the Cold War progressed. As the bipolar world situation stabilized and America’s relative economic power diminished, it slowly and willingly ceded many of the military installations it so expensively constructed in the Arctic to its sovereign hosts. This paradoxically gave its allies the capability to expand their own sphere of influence in the Arctic and to restrain the United States.

The following paragraphs break down America’s early Cold War efforts in Alaska and with each one of its allies, case by case. In doing so, I show how much America’s early Cold War Arctic efforts were directed by the relationships it built during World War II and its continued reluctance to use its material strength to dominate the region.

2.1.1. Alaska

After Japan was soundly defeated during World War II, the United States began to demobilize the sizable military force it deployed to Alaska during the war in a tradition that went back to the Revolutionary War. Thousands of soldiers left Alaska after their commitment was up, and hundreds of installations were abandoned (see Chapter 4). According to one Air Force historian in 1946, “some units were so undermanned that three weekends a month were required to be used as duty days” to keep Alaska’s remaining airbases functioning after the war ended (qtd. in Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pg., 159).

It took the Soviet Union’s aggressive expansion into Eastern Europe in the late 1940s to push the United States government to increase military spending and to develop a “Polar Concept” that refocused its efforts on Alaska and the Arctic in 1948. With the Polar Concept, American military leaders quickly recognized that the “shortest, most direct, and least
defended route between U.S. bases and Soviet targets” was over the Arctic (Farquhar 2014, pg. 36). American military leaders also recognized that the Soviet Union’s most direct route to attack the United States, and American allies in northern Europe and northern Asia, was through Arctic skies (Farquhar 2014, pgs. 36, 41) As such, Alaska’s strategic geopolitical position increased in value.

Shortly thereafter, long-range reconnaissance aircraft, first developed during World War II, were deployed to Alaska to develop polar air routes, improve cold weather flying techniques and equipment, and establish high-latitude navigation procedures. The flights also kept tabs on the Soviet militarization that was occurring on the other side of the Bering Strait. These planes occasionally took fire from Soviet fighter aircraft in the Bering Strait and a few were even shot down as they attempted to determine the nature of Soviet hydrogen bomb tests that were being conducted on Wrangel Island, which is only five hundred nautical miles from Nome (Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pg. 192).

Concern for containing Soviet communism made Alaska one of America’s largest priorities for military investment in the “frantic fifties” (Hummel 2005, pg. 47). At this time, Alaska became a transit point for supplying America’s war effort to the Korean Peninsula and became the outer defensive perimeter against Soviet bombers. Alaska’s large open spaces, which resembled much of Russia, were also used to train American military forces for a potential invasion of the Soviet Union (Hummel 2005, pg. 49).

Representative of America’s sudden pivot to Alaska was the number of soldiers stationed in the territory. This number increased from nineteen thousand soldiers during the post-war demobilization in 1946 to a Cold War-high of fifty thousand soldiers during the height of the Korean War in the mid-1950s. However, by the end of the Korean War, only
thirty-four thousand military members were stationed in Alaska, with eighty percent of them in the Anchorage and Fairbanks areas (Hummel 2005, pgs. 51-53). The most significant difference between the Cold War influx of military personnel into Alaska and the one during World War II was that many of the soldiers were now accompanied by their families. This decision reflected the semi-permanent aspect of America’s containment strategy against the Soviet Union in Alaska and America’s transition from short-serving citizen soldiers to professional soldiers.

The military also invested in transportation infrastructure that reflected its decision to concentrate its military forces in the sub-Arctic settlements of Anchorage and Fairbanks during this critical juncture. Anchorage and Fairbanks were chosen partly because they were already established as military nodes during World War II. More than fifty-one hundred miles of roads were constructed to connect these nodes after the war. This more than doubled the number of miles of roads that existed in all of Alaska before the war (Hummel 2005, pg. 60). The military also upgraded the railroad between Anchorage and Fairbanks but were unable to get funding to connect the railroad with the lower forty-eight states (Hummel 2005, pg. 60). This reflected the limits the United States and Canada were willing to invest in order to connect Alaska with southern population centers to support continental defense. Instead, four southern Alaskan ports, including Anchorage, were rehabilitated and expanded to receive the vast amounts of military supplies sent to re-militarize Alaska (Hummel 2005, pg. 61).

Notably, Eielson AFB (near Fairbanks), previously used as an auxiliary airfield to Ladd Field during World War II, was expanded to receive large transport and bomber aircraft in the late 1940s. This made it the longest runway in North America at the time and reflected America’s newfound commitment to Alaskan defense (Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pg. 160).
Like the bases in Anchorage and Fairbanks, the much smaller military outposts in the Alaska “bush” and the Aleutian Islands that were used to contain the Soviet threat were mostly built on the vestiges of World War II installations. Few new roads were used to connect these outposts with Anchorage or Fairbanks, however, due to the high cost and difficulty of doing so. Instead, World War II-era airports were transferred over to civilian government agencies and used to supply them (Hummel 2005, pg. 62).

The Alaskan Communication System (ACS), built on the vestiges of the Klondike-era WAMCAT system (see Chapter 2) and communications networks established shortly after the Klondike Gold Rush, also improved the connections these far-flung military installations had with each other and with air defense headquarters in the continental United States (Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pg. 172). The ACS’s initial construction cost was a staggering one hundred and forty million dollars (Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pg. 172) and at its height was composed of forty-seven sites and over seven hundred miles of communications’ line and microwave systems (Hummel 2005, pg. 62). However, this system would have been even more expensive if the WAMCAT and World War II systems had not preceded it.

The United States also heavily invested in Arctic research, so it could better operate in the Arctic cold. The Naval Arctic Research Laboratory was established on Alaska’s North Slope to facilitate war-fighting in the Arctic (Hummel 2005, pg. 63). It was the northern-most military-related installation on American soil during the Cold War. Its functions were supplemented by large amounts of Department of Defense funding for the University of Alaska-Fairbanks (Hummel 2005, pg. 66) and research the military conducted at its own northern bases and on temporary camps on ice floes in the Arctic Ocean.
Despite the initial investment, the relative expensiveness of forward-operating bases and increased vulnerability to Soviet invasion by the late 1950s decreased America’s willingness to sustain them.\textsuperscript{20} Furthermore, the development of intercontinental missiles, long range bombers, and air refueling meant that strategic bombing operations that were planned to be conducted from Alaskan bases could now be conducted from the continental United States (Hummel 2005, pg. 50; Meilinger 2014). In fact, the rapid technological change and ever-evolving plan for dealing with the Soviets meant that many of the military installations that were built in Alaska before the 1960s were obsolete before they were opened and abandoned before they were completed (Hummel 2005, pg. 50). Bomber forces were re-deployed to the continental United States, and air interceptor forces deployed to Alaska were reduced from a high of six squadrons at their peak to two by the 1960s. Eventually, Alaska relied on a rotational deployment of fighter aircraft permanently stationed at bases in the continental United States to protect Alaska’s airspace during the 1960s (Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pgs. 191-193).

Significantly, unlike the Soviet Union, America refrained from building bases north of the Polar Circle, except for the minimally manned distant early warning (DEW line) radar stations. These DEW stations served as a trip wire, instead of a forward presence, and were representative of America’s unwillingness to project power outward into the Arctic region, but instead to use the region’s vast space to provide warning against a potential Soviet attack against targets in the contiguous United States.

America’s unwillingness to exert a larger presence in Arctic waters was also reflected in the lack of naval capability stationed in Alaska during the early phase of the Cold War. The

\textsuperscript{20} One American military expert (Boyd 1968, pg. 101) conservatively estimated in 1968 that construction costs in interior Alaska were four times what they were in more temperate climates.
Naval Station on the island of Adak was the one permanent base the Navy retained after World War II. Its function was anti-submarine warfare (ASW). Only ASW aircraft were housed on the base – no ships. Instead of permanent naval bases, a string of small Coast Guard stations, equipped with a few cutters and helicopters, were established in the southern part of Alaska, and the Aleutian Islands, to provide search-and-rescue support and enforce fishing regulations in the Bering Sea.

The American attack and missile submarines that were intermittently introduced under the Arctic ice during the Cold War were permanently based in the lower forty-eight states, and in Great Britain – locations that were less climatically harsh and more economical to operate than bases in Alaska. While not a permanent and visible presence, the submarines did give America an ephemeral existence in the Arctic basin after improvements with satellites and long-range communication in the late 1950s and 1960s enabled them to navigate throughout most of the Arctic Ocean (Ostreng 1982; pgs. 132-133).

Strikingly, the nuclear-powered USS Nautilus’ 1958 under-ice crossing of the Arctic Ocean symbolically displayed America’s new capability to operate in these heretofore virgin waters. It regained some of America’s prestige that was lost after Sputnik’s launch in 1957 and provided a temporary advantage over the Soviets under the Arctic ice.

Willie Lyon, who established the United States Navy’s Arctic Submarine Laboratory, stressed that the ice that had protected Russia for centuries could now be used to hide American submarines and threaten the Soviet Union (Leary 1999). Unlike his Soviet counterparts, he was unable to persuade the naval commanders for whom he worked to permanently deploy submarines to the Arctic, though. Mechanical problems that sunk the USS Thresher in the 1960s, and a reticence to deal with the danger of under-ice operations,
severely hampered America’s willingness to exploit its temporary advantage over the Soviets. One naval commander unequivocally stated in 1966 that, “There is no significant advantage to SSBN under-ice deployment. Target coverage of heavily populated, industrially significant regions of the USSR is not improved over that provided by present operating areas” (qtd in Leary 1999, pg. 231). He further asserted that American subs were not vulnerable enough to "accept the greater operational difficulties posed by such [under-ice] deployments.” Particularly, the presence of ice made it much more dangerous to surface if the submarine suffered mechanical difficulty and also made it more difficult to communicate, navigate, and employ weapons than in the open water in which the Navy preferred to work (Leary 1999, pg. 232). Consequently, the United States did not develop tactics for under-ice submarine warfare and did not design submarines specifically for the Arctic environment.

Similar to the submarines, the fleet of seven icebreakers the United States belatedly built at the end of World War II and leased to the Soviet Union to facilitate the transport of Lend-Lease material during World War II was based in Seattle, Washington, instead of Alaska, after the war. These icebreakers were used to survey the Arctic Ocean and conduct Arctic research and provided the United States a seasonal surface presence during the Arctic summer. During the winter, the icebreakers deployed to Antarctica. American polar experts decried that the United States invested too much money and research in Antarctica relative to the Arctic, but this did not persuade the American government to pay more attention to or devote more capabilities to the Arctic (Kolb 1964).

The United States also used the icebreakers to undertake freedom of navigation exercises on the Northern Sea Route (NSR) that bordered the Soviet Union’s northern coastline. In the end, the voyages were unsuccessful. As Richard Petrow (1967, pg. 352), a
journalist that accompanied the *USS Northwind*’s ill-fated attempt to transit the Northern Sea Route in 1965, later reported, America’s problems in Vietnam made it unwilling to provoke the Soviet Union too much and resulted in an overabundance of caution from the State Department that kept the *Northwind* from sailing as far east down the Northern Sea Route as its crew would have liked. Persistent Soviet military harassment and difficulty navigating through difficult ice conditions also were significant obstacles that kept the voyage from successfully transiting the NSR (Petrow 1967). Ultimately, the *Northwind*’s failure to traverse the Northern Sea Route set a powerful precedent. Afterwards, the United States did not attempt other freedom of navigation operations through the NSR and was not willing to match the size and capability of the Soviet Union’s growing icebreaker fleet.

Overall, the American military presence in Alaska, and the Arctic Ocean, increased and then decreased again during the early phases of the Cold War as technology changed, America’s commitments abroad increased, and a fragile détente developed between the United States and the USSR. The relative cost and difficulty of operating in Alaska kept the United States from more aggressively militarizing it, especially in places it had not previously developed during World War II.

2.1.2 United States - Canada

Many of the precedents of the American-Canadian relationship that were constructed during World War II cemented themselves in the post-war era. One of these precedents was Canadian-American security interdependence. Another was Canada’s decisive actions to limit American presence in the Arctic to that which it believed was necessary to provide sufficient collective security for the two countries. A third was America’s willingness to fund and
construct security infrastructure in Canada’s north and then hand that infrastructure over to Canada when Canada could physically handle the responsibility of operating it.

Significantly, while the United States kept military bases in Greenland, Iceland, Great Britain, Italy, Germany, France, Japan, and many other places after World War II, it moved to relinquish many of the bases it built in Canada before the war was even concluded. Directly after World War II, the evacuation picked up pace and Canada inherited or paid for many military installations that America had constructed at such a high cost during the war (Lloyd 1970, pg. 719 and Chapter 4). America’s desire to unload costly northern responsibilities, America’s continued respect for Canadian sovereignty, and Canada’s strident attempts to solidify control over its lightly occupied Arctic territory led to this exodus. This time period was brief, but critical. It foreshadowed how the bilateral Arctic relationship would play out during the Cold War.

By 1948, the threat of Soviet nuclear bombers attacking the United States from over the Arctic Ocean meant that Canada was now the "ham in the sandwich" or the "Belgium of the atomic age" as Canadian historian Joseph Jockel (2010, pg. 2013) colorfully notes. Canada, like the United States, viewed the Soviet Union as an existential threat to its security as well as the post-war liberal international order that was being constructed. This shared perception of threat, fresh memories of wartime cooperation, and the bilateral security institutions that were established during World War II led Canada to decisively ally itself with the United States against the Soviet Union. This steadfast alliance was reflected in Canada’s charter membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). While the military alliance with the United States was strong, many Canadians also continued to be wary of American strength and intentions, however. As Canadian historian David Bercuson (1990, pg.
puts it, the dilemma for Canada was “how could Canada help protect the continent against the Soviet Union – a job Ottawa agreed needed doing – while, at the same time, it protected the Canadian north against the United States?”

The answer to this question was to rely on established diplomatic and legal channels like the Permanent Joint Board of Defense (PJBD), and newly established ones like the Advisory Committee on Post-Hostility Problems and the Canadian-American Military Cooperation Committee, to gradually appropriate and control installations the United States built on Canadian territory. The second answer was to rely on the “New World” precedents that now underlined the bilateral relationship. As Bercuson (1990, pg. 154) asserts, early Cold War Arctic cooperation between Canada and the United States “was a good compromise, but it was only the latest in a long series of such compromises worked out over the previous nine years” (Bercuson 1990, pg. 157).

The first post-war binational Arctic initiative between the United States and Canada was the High Arctic Weather Station system (HAWS, later named the Joint Arctic Weather Stations [JAWS]). Interestingly, the United States was abandoning many of the Canadian Arctic weather stations it constructed during World War II (Smith 2009, pg. 2) when the rapid emergence of the Soviet threat caused it to reverse course. Canada initially restrained American efforts to build these stations even though they would have aided burgeoning transpolar and international commercial aviation that would have benefitted both countries (Johnson 1990, pg. 33). As Danish Arctic historian Matthias Heymann (2016, pg. 82) asserts, “Canadian leaders were concerned not simply with the installation of some weather stations, but with US ships sailing through what had previously been considered sovereign Canadian waterways and undertaking missions considered the domain of ruling states.” Canada did not
want to allow a precedent that would legitimize greater American presence in its northern territory or the adjacent Northwest Passage in the years that followed.

The development of Soviet transcontinental bombers, capable of carrying nuclear weapons, changed the Canadian calculus. Security concerns overruled sovereignty concerns, and it was now willing to allow the United States temporarily back into its northern territory, just as it had during World War II. The HAWS provided a tactical geopolitical advantage to Canadian and American military commanders by providing critical meteorological information that allowed them to discern the nature of Soviet military operations and to guide intercept aircraft to meet potential Soviet bombers before they could reach American and Canadian population centers far south of the Arctic. It later helped guide American intercontinental missiles.

Constructing and supporting the HAWS sites was too expensive for Canada to undertake in the post-war environment, so it acquiesced to assertive American requests to build the weather stations and allowed Americans to return to stations they recently abandoned after the war. American embassy personnel in Canada went so far as to suggest that the United States could construct the new Arctic weather stations on their own, without Canadian support (Heymann 2016, pg. 86). In the end, the United States did construct the weather stations alone, but reflective of its respect for Canada’s sovereignty it also agreed to follow Canadian laws, respect Canadian sovereignty, and hand over control of the stations to Canada when Canada trained the requisite personnel to run them. The United States also agreed to limit the scope of the airfields that were built to supply the weather stations so that they could not be used by fighter or bomber aircraft that might provoke Soviet aggression or
be occupied by the Soviets and used to attack more important Canadian targets further south (Lloyd 1959, pg. 44).

Canadian-American collaboration during World War II made the HAWS system easier to accomplish than otherwise would have been the case. J. Peter Johnson (1990, pgs. 21-22), a Canadian engineer who participated in the “Alert” weather station construction, states that the weather stations were conceived and dependent on surveys, techniques, and equipment developed by America and Canada during World War II. They were also dependent on American-Canadian commercial and security cooperation that developed during World War II. Furthermore, America’s World War II expansion into Greenland also facilitated the HAWS. The Thule, Greenland weather station that the United States built in 1946 served as the main logistical hub for Alert’s construction, and its information was networked with information from the Canadian and Alaskan weather stations to provide NATO forces comprehensive Arctic and North Atlantic forecasts.

America’s willingness to forego command of the stations, even though it paid for their expensive construction, underlined America’s continued respect and acknowledgment of Canada’s vociferously articulated sovereignty concerns and the enduring ability of the PJBD, and other existing binational institutions, to effect bilateral compromise. Canadian historian Gordon Smith (2009, pg. 59) claims, “Canada-American relations at all levels connected with the JAWS program had been extremely harmonious and there had been no serious policy differences.” Furthermore, he asserts (2009, pg. 63), “It must be said that the Americans showed throughout a remarkable tolerance of the requirements the Canadians imposed upon them, even when some of these must have seemed rather picayune, and they demonstrated a genuine willingness to observe Canadian regulations and generally accept Canadian
proprietorship. There were a few lapses in matters of this kind but on the whole they do not appear to have been very serious.”

The HAWS experience also highlighted America’s desire to defer responsibility in the Canadian Arctic when Canada was capable of handling the load themselves. Canada took over the stations’ re-supply in the late 1950s when it finally accumulated the financial means, equipment, and personnel to do so (Heymann 2016, pg. 87; Smith 2008, pgs. 51-52). The United States withdrew totally from the weather stations during the early 1970s détente period between itself and the Soviet Union, leaving the Canadians solely in charge of them thereafter. The Americans could relinquish its role in the HAWS, confident that Canada would continue to provide its essential weather information to the United States and NATO forces that worked together to balance against the shared Soviet adversaries across the Arctic.

The second bilateral Cold War initiative that developed between the United States and Canada in the Arctic was the Distant Early Warning (DEW) system. This system was constructed in the mid-1950s when the Soviet nuclear-bomber threat to North America appeared. The system was first comprised of over fifty radar and communications stations that were rapidly constructed in a three-thousand-mile line on the sixty-ninth parallel from Alaska to Greenland (Western Electric 1960). The DEW system initially gave the United States and Canada a four-hour warning of potential Soviet nuclear bomber attacks coming over the Arctic Ocean (Campbell 2017, pg. 113). This tripwire shrunk to less than fifteen minutes with the advent of Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles in the early 1960s – a technological innovation that decreased its defensive utility. Even so, it remained the cornerstone of North America’s early warning system throughout the Cold War and composed the bulk of the American military’s physical presence in the Arctic.
Similar to events during World War II, Canada felt that it could not reject America’s request to build the DEW stations because it was under the collective security obligations of the Ogdensburg agreement, and it realized America was convinced the system was “essential for the security of North America” (Canadian Minister of Defense Brooke Claxton qtd. in Lajeunesse 2007, pg. 53). America’s previous demonstration of respect for Canada’s Arctic sovereignty during World War II eased Canada’s sovereignty concerns (Lajeunesse 2007, pg. 53), which were again piqued by the impending invasion of thousands of American citizens into previously unoccupied territory during the construction of the DEW sites (Tynan 1979, pg. 412).

In the pattern of the HAWS, and World War II collaboration before that, the United States agreed to accept the large financial costs of constructing the sites and initially supplied and manned them (Ferguson 1956, pg. 443; Lloyd 1959, pg. 45; Lajeunesse 2007, pg. 54). Canada was unwilling to make a meaningful contribution to the multi-billion-dollar project because it was already spending half of its government budget on defense (ten percent of the country’s total GDP) and suffering from a post-war economic recession (Lajeunesse 2007, pg. 55). Canada also lacked the requisite manpower and expertise to operate the sites. The initial construction team was composed of over twenty-five thousand people (over one and a half million people worked on DEW line products in total) and according to its main contractor, Western Electric (1960), the provision of the initial construction teams was greater than the Berlin Airlift, which made it “the greatest airlift operation in history” and the greatest peacetime military operation in the Arctic. In all, America transported almost a half million tons of supplies to erect the sites in virgin and harsh Arctic territory (Lajeunesse 2007, pg. 58). Canada successfully offset concerns it was not doing its part for collective North
American air defense by constructing the much cheaper Mid-Canada radar line without American help, although this radar line had dubious military value (Lajeunesse 2007, pg. 56). Despite the material investment the United States made, Canada successfully extracted numerous concessions from America when it agreed to allow the United States to build the sites: 1) It mandated that the United States employ Canadian contractors during the DEW site construction. According to the main contractor, Western Electric (1960), Canadian companies received close to two hundred million dollars of purchase orders in conjunction with the DEW site construction, and the United States utilized Canadian air carriers to the maximum extent possible to build and support the system; 2) It ensured Americans followed Canadian law and customs’ regulations during DEW operations; 3) It confirmed that Canada would be allowed to command and operate the DEW sites on its soil when it could do so; 4) It resolved that any national disagreements that came up regarding the continued existence of the DEW sites would be decided by the PJBD, where Canada had equal representation with the United States; 5) It stipulated that the United States could only use the DEW sites’ associated airstrips to support the system, unless otherwise allowed by the Canadian government, which kept them from being used by American fighter or bomber aircraft (Exchange of Notes Between Canada and the United States, 1955). As Canadian political scientist R.J. Sutherland summarized, the agreement ensured “Canada received what the United States had up to that time assiduously endeavoured to avoid, namely, an explicit recognition of Canada’s claims to the exercise of sovereignty in the far North” (qtd. in Lajeunesse 2007, pg. 58). Although, in truth, the United States had not significantly challenged Canadian sovereignty claims in the far North since the Klondike Gold Rush (Tynan 1979; Bercuson 1990, pg. 154).
Canada also successfully placed the bilateral DEW-line arrangement with the United States within the multilateral context of NATO, which strengthened international recognition of Canada’s northern sovereignty despite America’s relative material strength and its temporarily overwhelming presence in the territory (Lajeunesse 2007, pg. 55). By the end of the 1960s, Canada had trained the necessary manpower and took over operational command and supply of the DEW sites on their territory. Once Canadian control of the sites was established, the air strips associated with the stations gave Canada ready access to large swaths of previously unoccupied Arctic territory. The sites gave Canada a needed example of occupation and control over the terra nullius land – two elements that also strengthened Canada’s international legal claims to Arctic sovereignty (Lajeunesse 2007, pg. 58).

In hindsight, the DEW and HAWS sites were American “gifts” to Canada that perpetuated America’s post-World War II policy of voluntarily ceding presence and a potentially larger sphere of influence in the Arctic to its northern allies. Canada, who in all respects should have been an unequal partner in the DEW-line negotiations due to its relative lack of material power, came away from the deal with more recognition of its Arctic sovereignty than it ever had before. As a bonus, it was enriched by the American largesse and technology transfer that resulted from the projects.

A third initiative that tied the DEW line and the HAWS together was the establishment of the integrated North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). Jockel (2010, pg. 1020) suggests NORAD was the product of continued Canadian and American cooperation in the PJBD. The creation of NORAD increased American responsibility for Canadian air defense (Conant 1962) and allowed the American military aircraft access to the skies over Canada even if its access to Canadian air bases was still
restricted. In exchange, Canada was given the number two operational rank within NORAD, which provided Canada a level of awareness and control over Arctic airspace it otherwise did not have the material strength to defend. Shared command of NORAD also provided Canada with significant influence and knowledge of American continental defense plans that allowed it to restrain subsequent American proposals to expand operations in the Canadian Arctic before they got started.

While overwhelmingly cooperative, it is instructive to acknowledge other specific restrictions the Canadians successfully placed on the United States that mitigated the American military’s potential presence in the Canadian Arctic. Most glaringly, the United States wanted to establish "interceptor rockets and fighter bases along the Arctic coast of Canada" early in the Cold War but Canada turned down the offer (Eyre 1987, pg. 294). Instead, Canada successfully argued for what Canadian historian Kenneth Eyre calls a “scorched ice” strategy of strategic depth. This strategy 1) kept Canada from becoming a target of Soviet conventional forces who potentially could invade and use the proposed military bases to occupy northern Canada, 2) limited American military presence in largely unoccupied Canadian Arctic territory, and 3) limited the high cost of supporting these proposed bases (Eyre 1987, pgs. 295-296). This strategy explains why Canadian HAWS and DEW sites remained informational nodes and did not metastasize into more established forward echelon American military bases like they did in Greenland and Iceland.

Canada also turned down American offers to collaborate on continental missile defense in the 1960s (Jockel 2010, pg. 1013). Like America’s earlier proposed Arctic airbases, Canada did not want to pay for missile defense or to allow an influx of Americans into its northern territory that it did not feel was necessary for its defense (Jockel 2010, pgs.
Canadians, like many Americans, also doubted the practicality of the anti-missile proposal and feared it could derail the fragile deterrence regime that existed between NATO and the Soviet Union. The mission went to the American military’s Northern Command (NORTHCOM) instead of the bilateral NORAD. Unlike air defense, the United States did not need Canadian participation to detect incoming missiles since its Ballistic Missile Early Warning Radars (BMEWS) could provide effective surveillance of all of North America with already established radars in Alaska, Greenland, and Great Britain by the end of the 1960s. This kept the United States from pushing Canada harder. This early decision set the precedent for Canada’s later decisions to refrain from cooperating with America’s anti-ballistic missile initiatives at the end of the Cold War (McDonough 2012). In turn, it weakened Canada’s defense integration with the United States and minimized America’s presence in Canada’s north in the decades that followed.

Canada also restricted America’s ability to expand its military presence in sub-Arctic Labrador and Newfoundland. As chronicled in Chapter 4, America’s World War II relationship with Canada meant that the United States did not raise an objection to Newfoundland’s and Labrador’s decision to voluntarily join with Canada in 1949. The United States did not even assertively court Newfoundland’s and Labrador’s citizens to persuade them to annex with the United States. One reason for America’s lack of assertiveness was that it had traditionally respected Canada’s “sovereignty and territorial integrity” (Blake 1993, pg. 185) and the right of free people to choose their government. Another reason was that Canada allowed the United States to retain its World War II military bases in the new provinces for a time after the war. These bases served as logistics and command hubs for America’s construction endeavors in Greenland and northern Canada when the Cold War began. The
bases also supported American nuclear bombers on their polar missions, housed fighter-interceptor aircraft to defend against Soviet bombers coming over the Arctic Ocean and supported American anti-submarine patrols in the North Atlantic (High 2017).

However, in Canada, the bases were “approached as an inherited problem that needed to be contained,” so it “sought to minimize base expansion or even accelerate their closure” (High 2017, pg. 51). Canada successfully renegotiated the leases for the bases in a way that limited America’s freedom of action at the bases. It worked through the PJBD to amend the ninety-nine-year leases that gave the United States access to the bases during World War II (the Bases for Destroyers deal with Great Britain) and refused to sign more than twenty-year leases for the bases. As Canada knew, American law prohibited building permanent structures on foreign bases unless a lease of at least twenty years was made with the host country, so this restriction ensured the United States would not expand its presence in the bases without further negotiation with Canada (Bercuson 1989; Blake 1993). Goose Bay was the one base that escaped this clause because the United States believed it critically protected the northern approach to densely populated Canadian and American cities on the eastern seaboard and it was the only base the Americans controlled at the beginning of the Cold War, from which American bombers could attack the Soviet Union and return without stopping (Blake 1993, pg. 186). Canada’s resistance to America’s Newfoundland and Labrador bases grew with America’s decision to keep Canada out of the Cuban Missile Crisis negotiations in 1962.

The United States’ own interests eventually led it to voluntarily withdraw from the Newfoundland and Labrador bases. Its policy towards the Soviet Union, already in transition during the mid-1960s, changed from air defense to nuclear deterrence with the advent of the missile race between the two countries. Its geopolitical focus also moved from the Arctic
towards containing Communist expansion in Southeast Asia (Pettyjohn 2012, pg. 72), Europe, and Central America. Furthermore, the invention of air-refueling and long-range bombers made the Newfoundland and Labrador airfields less critical than they were before.

Overall, America’s military presence in northern Canada was now largely perceived as an extraneous expense and an unnecessary thorn in Canada’s side despite the large sunk costs that were already invested in the bases. By 1970, the United States handed over all of its bases in Labrador and Newfoundland to Canada, except for Argentia Naval Station, which was greatly downsized (High 2017). The American decision to retrench from Labrador and Newfoundland lengthened America’s logistics chain to the eastern portion of the North American Arctic and ceded relatively greater regional control of the Arctic to Canada.

N.D. Bankes (1987) suggests that Canada’s early Cold War relationship with the United States secured its previously tenuous terrestrial sovereignty in the Arctic and emboldened it to expand its sovereignty efforts into the Northwest Passage in the decades that followed. This situation decidedly was not reflective of the material balance between the two countries, which, according to realist thought, should have given the United States more control than it actually had. It did reflect the level of interdependence between the two countries (Keohane and Nye 1977) but was not completely reflective of neo-liberal cooperation either because America’s huge relative material advantage decisively shaped Canada’s defensive behavior towards the United States. Prominent Canadians still felt threatened by the United States despite America’s cooperation with Canada during the previous two World Wars, as is illustrated by Canadian Prime Minister William Mackenzie King’s late-1940’s worry that America’s “long range policy was to absorb Canada” (qtd. in Bercuson 1990, pg. 155). Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, less trenchantly, but
famously, remarked later in the 1950s that “living next to [the United States] in some ways is like sleeping with an elephant; no matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt” (qtd. in Thompson and Randall 2002, pg. 250). Canada continued to work to restrain the “beast,” especially in the Arctic where America’s material potential to overwhelm Canada was most apparent. Canada was further motivated to defend its northern territory from undue American influence because being a northern nation was one of the few things that differentiated it with the United States.

The United States, for its part, followed precedent and allowed itself to be restrained. It understood Canada’s worries, it respected Canada’s sovereignty, and it attempted to alleviate Canada’s concerns while still dealing with the security threat posed by the Soviet Union over and through the Canadian Arctic. The American participants in the PJBD highlighted this awareness in 1948. They asserted, “Bearing in mind that the Canadians are extraordinarily sensitive about their sovereignty and independence and that they live, so to speak, under the constant shadow of the ‘Colossus to the South’ such Canadian apprehensions have been inevitable. It has therefore behooved the United States to act with the utmost circumspection and restraint…On the whole, the U.S. record….is good” (qtd. in Bercuson 1990, pg. 165). This assessment could have been given in 1942, 1963, or 2018 and held as much weight.  

Ultimately, Canada’s early Cold War relationship with the United States was based on World War II precedents that restricted America’s freedom to act unilaterally in the Canadian Arctic. However, Canada’s relationship with the United States also improved America’s international soft power, allowed the United States to divest a portion of the high costs of

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21 For a contrary opinion see Grant 1988.
operating in the expensive Arctic environment, and allowed the United States to focus on other geopolitical hot spots that became as pressing as the Arctic as the Cold War progressed. In the end, the relationship between the United States and Canada in the Arctic continued to be acceptable to both sides and precedent continued to guide both countries’ behavior towards each other.

2.1.3 United States – Greenland

Early in the Cold War, there were many parallels between Denmark’s relationship with the United States and Canada’s relationship with the United States: 1) Like Canada, the American-Danish relationship in Greenland was shaped by the relationship and the bilateral institutions that developed during World War II. 2) Like Canada, Denmark wanted to regain the sovereignty it gave up in Greenland to the United States during World War II. 3) Like Canada, Denmark had to balance the new Soviet threat with the threat the United States posed to its sovereignty in thinly populated Greenland. 4) Like Canada, Denmark was able to extract legal guarantees from the United States that would safeguard its sovereignty over Greenland despite the influx of American forces into the territory. 5) Like Canada, the Danes were more acceptable of a continued American presence in Greenland than otherwise may have been the case because of the multilateral aegis of the newly established NATO alliance.

However, three defining differences between Canada’s and Denmark’s relationship with the United States explain why Denmark allowed the United States much greater and lasting access to Greenland than Canada did to northern Canada. First, the Danes were much more worried about Soviet invasion than was Canada. The recently ended German occupation traumatized Denmark and made it rethink its former policy of neutrality – which failed it miserably during World War II (Wivel 2014). Denmark was also materially weakened more
than was Canada during the war, and it did not have any oceans protecting it from the Soviet Union like Canada did, making it more vulnerable to Soviet occupation. Experts suggest that the Soviet coup in Czechoslovakia in 1947 (Taagholt and Hansen 2001, pg. 28), and the 1948 Treaty of Mutual Peace and Friendship the Soviet Union coerced Finland into signing (Aalders 1989, pg. 72), were the critical events that pushed Denmark into the American-led NATO alliance as a charter member in the late 1940s and motivated Denmark to renew the defense agreement with the United States that allowed the United States to keep its relatively free hand to provide for the defense of Greenland.

Second, Norway, a country of reference for Denmark because of the countries’ shared history and culture, influenced Denmark to more fully align with the United States by doing so itself (Tonra 2001). Finally, Denmark’s acceptance of American Marshall Plan Aid largely influenced Denmark’s decision to allow the United States to stay on in Greenland. Denmark became dependent on American aid to rejuvenate its depressed post-war economy. This gave the United States leverage over Denmark as it did other recipients of Marshall Aid. The United States, at times, subtly threatened to withdraw the aid if Denmark did not cooperate sufficiently with NATO (Aalders 1989, pgs. 56-57).

In the end, Greenland became a critical factor in the countries’ bilateral relationship. Taagholt and Hansen (2001, pg. 39) explain that Denmark used the “Greenland Card” after World War II to ensure its own security in the new Cold War geopolitical situation that threatened it. The Greenland Card was an implicit agreement where Denmark traded American military presence in Greenland for American guarantees that it would defend Denmark proper from the Soviet Union. In essence, Denmark’s decision to allow the United States to continue to act freely in Greenland meant that the United States owed it in future
negotiations – a tit-for-tat cooperative relationship (Petersen 1998, pg. 23; Axelrod 1984). The fact that the United States already had military forces in Greenland, and that American military forces had acted relatively benignly toward its inhabitants until this point, made this accommodation more palatable than otherwise would have been the case for Denmark. It also did not provoke the Soviets because it did not change the status quo.

The third reason the Danes were comfortable with giving up a large degree of control in Greenland to the United States was that Greenland did not intrinsically mean that much to the Danes (especially when compared to the Canada’s attachment to northern Canada). Due to its non-contiguity and the relative lack of ethnic Danes living in Greenland – approximately six hundred in 1946 (Nelson 1991), Denmark had historically looked upon the territory as expendable and part of North America, not Europe. This perception is reflected in the Danes’ willingness to seriously listen to America’s previous offers to purchase Greenland in the decades before World War II. As Danish historian Nikolaj Petersen (2008, pg. 89) attests, “in 1953 Denmark could adopt a policy of no foreign troops on Danish territory under present circumstances without anyone pointing to the fact that Greenland with its US defense areas was also Danish territory.” Denmark’s relative receptivity to American presence in Greenland, in conjunction with Canada’s relative resistance to American presence on its own northern territory, contributed to America’s decision to expand its presence in Greenland, instead of northern Canada, at the beginning of the Cold War.

As American State Department official John Hickerson intimated, most Americans did not expect much resistance from the Danes regarding Greenland. He asserted that, at the beginning of the Cold War, American “money is plentiful now, that Greenland is completely worthless to Denmark [and] that the control of Greenland is indispensable to the safety of the
United States” (qtd. in Nelson 1991). The Assistant Chief of the American State Department’s Northern European Affairs Division similarly suggested, “in the final analysis, there are few people in Denmark who have any real interest in Greenland, economic, political, or financial” (qtd. in Nelson 1991). Still, Denmark valued ownership of Greenland enough to retain de jure sovereignty over it during this critical juncture. It rebuffed the American Secretary of State’s informal offer to buy Greenland outright for one hundred million dollars in 1946 (Petersen 1998, pg. 5) or to trade strategic portions of Greenland’s territory for territory on Alaska’s North Slope (Nelson 1991) – a noteworthy event because of the later oil bonanza that came out of the North Slope.

Selling Greenland to the United States would have been a financial boon for war-ravaged Denmark. Still, Denmark’s shrinking empire contributed to its intransigence. Since 1864, it had given up almost half of its European territory to Prussia, given up the Danish West Indies to the United States during World War I, allowed Iceland to gain independence during World War II, and was losing control of the Faroe Islands, whose inhabitants assertively sought self-determination after World War II. Losing Greenland was seen as the proverbial “island too far” for the Danes in this context (Branwen 2018).

As the Danish Prime Minister relayed in a 1948 national radio broadcast, he did not contemplate selling Greenland because he felt it would diminish national pride. The Danes changed Greenland’s status from a colony to a county in 1951 to increase the national connection to Greenland and to relieve the anti-colonial sentiment that was nascent. The more decisive reason for refusing to sell Greenland, however, was that retaining Greenland gave Denmark a long-term card to play in its asymmetric attempt to gain influence with the United States and to maintain security and autonomy of Denmark proper in the new tense Cold War
geopolitical setting. In this implicit deal, Denmark allowed the United States to continue, and even expand, the military presence it first developed in Greenland during World War II. The United States found this agreeable enough to forsake strong-arm tactics during negotiations with Denmark over America’s status in Greenland (Petersen 1998, pg. 24) and did not make future offers to acquire Greenland outright after 1946.

The unique bilateral construct is clarified by examining the 1951 Greenland Defense Agreement between Denmark and the United States. The agreement was really just an update of the bilateral Defense Agreement that was signed between the two countries in 1941 (see Chapter 4). It was spurred by North Korea’s invasion of South Korea – an event that pushed wary Denmark further under America’s security umbrella (Pettyjohn 2012, pg. 81). The agreement continued to allow the American military almost unfettered military access to Greenland in exchange for America’s renewed treaty promises to respect de jure Danish sovereignty over Greenland. In essence, the agreement meant Greenland remained squarely in the United States’ sphere of influence even as Denmark retained legal sovereignty over the territory. The United States benefitted from the deal by retaining access to Greenland while not expending funds to purchase and administer the territory outright.

There were three key differentiators with the earlier plan, however: 1) The new plan stipulated that the Danes would have a liaison officer stationed at all American defense areas in Greenland. 2) The new plan stipulated that Greenland would be officially under NATO, not American control (Taagholt and Hansen 2001, pg. 29). 3) The new plan stipulated that command of Gronnedal Naval Base in southern Greenland would be handed from the Americans to the Danes (Petersen 1998, pg. 8). A Danish naval officer was given nominal responsibility for Greenland’s defense within NATO during peacetime but would fall under
American command in time of war, since Denmark did not have the capability to defend Greenland. These arrangements allowed the Danes to better monitor American activity in Greenland than they could during World War II, allowed them to conceal the extent of American presence in Greenland to both their domestic constituents and the international community by framing it within a multilateral context, and allowed them to retain the appearance of control over Greenland despite America’s overwhelming military presence on the island. Under this agreement, American military presence in Greenland expanded, but this expansion was contingent on external threats that legitimized this presence and Danish acceptance of American military forces. The following paragraphs briefly canvas America’s early Cold War military presence in Greenland and the events that led to America’s retrenchment from the island in the 1960s.

As per its actions in Canada, America’s early post-war intentions in Greenland were to support burgeoning polar aviation, both for commercial and security reasons. That being said, the United States wanted to unload many of its expensive World War II-era military installations in Greenland, just as it tried to do in Canada. It shut down all of its installations on the east coast of Greenland and even evacuated Sondre Stromfjord airbase in 1950 (Taagholt and Hansen 2001, pgs. 28-29). Denmark wanted to take over the stations to bolster its own sovereignty over Greenland. However, even more so than Canada, it did not have the funds, personnel, or willingness to do so.

Similar to the HAWS agreement made with Canada, the United States supported the weather stations it continued to operate in Greenland after World War II but agreed to hand them over to Denmark when it could demonstrate it was capable of operating them (Heymann 2016, pg. 89). By the 1950s, Denmark was able to take over most of the American weather
stations despite the large expense this imposed on the still economically weak country.

Heymann (2016, pg. 92) asserts, “By overstating their control over the weather stations and stressing their civilian character, Canada and Denmark avoided the fates of other small states during the Cold War.” But the United States used its control over weather stations in Greenland to expand its military presence much more than it did in Canada.

According to Heymann (2016, pg. 90), the strategic tension that rapidly developed between the United States and the Soviet Union changed America’s perception of Greenland’s weather stations from being a “nuisance” to a strategic vanguard for new military bases. The American military’s Joint Meteorological Committee acknowledged as early as 1947 that "any decrease of United States' participation in the Greenland weather service is to our disadvantage from a military point of view" and urged that “all practicable measures should be taken to prevent such decrease" in light of the Soviet Union’s increased military capability and expansionary activity (qtd. in Heymann 2016, pg. 90). In line with this reasoning, the United States received permission from Denmark to construct a new weather site at Thule, in northwestern Greenland (Heymann 2016, pgs. 78-79). Thule’s groundbreaking quickly metastasized into America’s largest Arctic military base – something Canada effectively disallowed America from doing on its own soil.

Thule’s change from a weather station to a full-fledged, expansive, Strategic Air Command (SAC) base in the summer of 1951 underlined America’s ability to mobilize its material resources in the Arctic in the post-war era even as it fought a large conventional war on the Korean Peninsula. It also displayed the large freedom Denmark gave America in Greenland. Thule eventually housed over ten thousand American airmen, squadrons of bomber, fighter, tanker, and reconnaissance aircraft, and a comprehensive anti-aircraft missile
system. To make room for the American expansion, a local Inuit village was moved. The base rapidly became a critical cog in America’s Polar Concept strategy and was used to deter a Soviet attack on North America by credibly threatening retaliatory strikes.

Thule was important because the United States’ military had concerns that its other airbases in Canada, Great Britain, and North Africa might not be available to it in case of actual war with the Soviet Union. As Danish scholar Nikolaj Petersen (2011, pg. 91) attests, until the intercontinental-range B-52 bomber was produced in large enough numbers, Thule was critical for refueling B-36 and B-47 for potential polar bomber attacks on strategic targets in the northwest Soviet Union. Even after the B-52 force was fully constituted, Thule remained a critical emergency airfield for American bomber, reconnaissance, and tanker aircraft that deployed daily over Greenland (Taagholt and Hansen 2001, pg. 33) and housed critical early warning radar sites (Olesen 2011, pgs. 120-121).

Denmark also allowed the United States’ military to build an emergency airfield on the north coast of Greenland, called “Nord” that Denmark then operated (Petersen 2008, pg. 76), and to re-establish itself at Sondre Stromfjord (aka Sondrestrom) to support Thule’s construction and operations. By that time, Scandinavian Airlines (SAS), a private-public aviation consortium created by Denmark, Norway, and Finland, had established operations at Sondrestrom. So, the United States military was forced to share the runway with SAS – something that likely would not have happened if the United States had not voluntarily earlier abandoned Sondrestrom in 1950.

Sondrestrom was also used to support the four DEW stations that were constructed on the Greenlandic ice shelf in 1960. The Greenland DEW sites were networked with the previously constructed sites in northern Canada and Alaska and also served as critical military
communication nodes (along with Iceland and the Faroe Islands) (Taagholt and Hansen 2001, pg. 35). Unlike the DEW sites in Canada, the United States operated and supplied the Greenland sites until the end of the Cold War. Denmark showed little interest in the sites like Canada did, which reflected its relative lack of attachment to Greenland and its lack of willingness to bear the high costs of operating and sustaining the sites.

The introduction of Soviet intercontinental missiles in the 1950s both increased and decreased American strategic interest in Greenland. Soviet missiles motivated the United States to develop the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS) in the late 1950s. Thule was chosen as the main location of the three BMEWS sites that were constructed. BMEWS alerted American bomber and missile forces so they could react in time to provide a credible second-strike capability to deter a potential Soviet nuclear strike (Taagholt and Hansen 2001, pg. 36). The BMEWS site was defended by nuclear tipped anti-aircraft missiles at Thule from 1958-1965 (Olesen 2011, pg. 120). The United States also attempted to develop a strategic nuclear missile battery under the Greenlandic ice sheet near Thule as a further deterrence to the Soviet missile threat - naming it Camp Century. America successfully camouflaged this gambit by claiming Camp Century was being used solely for scientific research. However, America retreated from Camp Century, and the associated Ice Worm nuclear missile boondoggle, after it realized that the ambitious project was geo-physically, politically, and economically untenable (Petersen 2008).

In contrast, Soviet missiles, and the growing war in Vietnam, pushed the United States to prioritize nuclear deterrence measures over air defense in the circumpolar north (Pettyjohn 2012, pgs. 75-76). This made the DEW sites in Greenland, and the air bases that supported them, less of a priority to the United States than they were just a decade earlier. The bases
were no longer critical stepping stones from North America to Europe or from North America over the pole to the Soviet Union. By 1968, Thule’s population quickly decreased to three thousand personnel, and many of its units were demobilized as the Vietnam War accelerated (Martin-Nielsen 2013, pg. 65).

By the end of the 1960s, American military and political leaders calculated that the costly risks of nuclear bomber sorties in the Arctic began to outweigh their deterrence value against the Soviets and its focus moved to containing Communism in Southeast Asia. This further diminished America’s interest in Greenland’s airfields. In 1966, a B-52 crash over Spain caused the United States to reduce the number of daily nuclear-bomber launches from twelve to four and the United States prohibited daily flights over heavily-populated southern Europe. Nuclear-laden bomber sorties over Greenland continued because there was a much smaller risk of a crash hitting population centers on the ground there. Denmark also did not officially pressure the United States to quit the sorties like Spain did. This all changed when a B-52 crashed at Thule in 1968 as it attempted to make an emergency landing at the airfield. The B-52 dumped its nuclear payload irretrievably under the ice in the nearby bay (Olesen 2011, pgs. 122-123).

This critical juncture “marked a turning point in Danish ambiguity towards nuclear weapons in Greenland” (Taagholt and Hansen 2001, pg. 43). It also increased Danish resistance to future American military operations in Greenland. Until the crash, the Danish government had tacitly approved America’s nuclear operations in Greenland, which it could deny knowing about because America did not advertise where and when it conducted nuclear operations (Olesen 2011; Petersen 2008). The crash occurred less than two days before Danish parliamentary elections which magnified its effect on Denmark’s decision-making.
The Danish public was outraged, which prompted the incoming Danish government to reevaluate the 1951 Greenland Defense Agreement it had with the United States. The United States was surprised by the Danish reaction because it marked a change in Denmark’s approach to Greenland, but America also did not want the sudden diplomatic crisis to ruin the bilateral relations between the countries (Olesen 2011, pg. 140).

The subsequent amendment to the 1951 Agreement specifically disallowed American nuclear overflight of Greenland and the stockpiling of American nuclear weapons in Greenland. It is important to note that Denmark had prohibited the presence of nuclear weapons in Denmark proper since 1957 to decrease the possibility it would be targeted by the Soviet Union (Olesen 2011, pg. 129). It was not as worried about Greenland until the B-52 crash enlightened the Danish public to what was going on there.

As Danish historian Thorsten Olesen (2011, pg. 117) suggests, Denmark’s success in the nuclear negotiations with its superpower neighbor highlighted the leverage small Denmark gained against the United States and its newfound ability and willingness to prize its localized concerns over America’s global concerns in Greenland after the crash. This leverage symbolized both America’s declining focus on Greenland as well as its willingness to step back from the territory to ease Denmark’s sovereignty and nuclear concerns. The new agreement put Denmark in line with Norway, Sweden, and Finland’s non-nuclear “Nordic Balance” policies that were being developed during this timeframe. In the end, Olesen (2011, pg. 143) asserts that there was a “multilayered complex of structural, technological, legal, political, and personal impulses and developments, sparked by an adscititious (sic) event (the B-52 accident), [that] led to the signing of the supplement to the 1951 agreement.”
By the end of the 1960s, the American military had invested billions of dollars into Greenland to build up its infrastructure, but now only used Greenland for early warning and communications’ purposes and greatly curtailed its physical presence in Greenland from its early 1960s peak. Even still, the United States maintained two firmly established air bases at Thule and Sondrestrom and four DEW sites across the middle of the island. While it retained ultimate responsibility for Greenland’s defense, changes in military technology, increasing economic concerns, increased Danish resistance, and growing geopolitical concerns in Southeast Asia contributed to America’s voluntary retreat from Greenland. Greenland’s main role in American strategy was transitioned from being a locale for American power-projection northward at the beginning of the Cold War to a peripheral tripwire for North American continental defense during the 1970s détente between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Similar to its relationship with Canada, America could afford to pull back from Greenland since it was confident its interests in Greenland were largely aligned with Denmark’s and that it would be allowed to expand its military presence in Greenland again if necessary. The de jure sovereignty the United States had promised Denmark over Greenland in 1941 transitioned slowly back to de facto sovereignty when the new defense plan was established in the early 1960s and American forces evacuated from Greenland. Paradoxically, the World War II and Cold War military installations the United States slowly handed over to Denmark in Greenland gave Denmark a greater presence and control in Greenland than it would have had if the United States had never been involved in Greenland.

2.1.4 United States – Iceland

After World War II, the United States had a tenser relationship with Iceland than it did with either Canada or Denmark. According to Gerald Shepherd, the British Minister to
Iceland (1945, qtd. in Ingimundarson 2012, pg. 198), Icelanders were “narrowly nationalistic, smugly self-satisfied, intensely selfish, and incredibly obstinate” because of the thousand years of isolation they enjoyed prior to World War II – a history that shaped how they acted towards other countries and reflected the strained ties between Great Britain and Iceland that would force the United States to mediate their relationship later in the Cold War. Nationalism increased when Iceland successfully gained full independence from Denmark in 1944. It did not want to threaten this hard-won sovereignty by allowing foreign presence on its soil (Ingimundarson 1999, pg. 83). Post-war sovereignty and neutrality were seen as inextricably connected by Icelanders (Gunnarsson 1990, pg. 142).

Icelanders braced under American military presence only a little less than they did with the British presence that preceded it (Chapter 4) and did not want to become a target of Soviet aggression by hosting American forces. Unlike in Greenland and northern Canada, American presence in Iceland threatened the entire country’s sovereignty because the island, and its population, is so small. The strong Socialist party in Iceland that swayed Iceland towards the Soviet Union in the early Cold War years also made Iceland more resistant to continued American military presence than otherwise may have been the case after World War II. The left-leaning party gained prominence in the country due to Iceland’s affection for the Soviet Union’s anti-Nazi efforts during World War II and the party’s success at co-opting Iceland’s politically important trade union movement (Ingimundarson 1999, pg. 83). The 1946 bilateral Keflavik Agreement between the United States and Iceland reflected Icelandic intransigence. In it, Iceland rejected America’s proposed ninety-nine-year lease for the Keflavik airfield and instead demanded that the United States evacuate the forty-five thousand
American soldiers left in Iceland after World War II within nine months (Pettyjohn 2012, pgs. 64-65).

However, World War II also taught Iceland another lesson. According to Icelandic historian Valur Ingimundarson (2012, pg. 207), “Judging by their wartime experience, the Icelanders knew that there was a distinct possibility that the United States would capture Iceland in war – with or without their consent.” They had no military to defend themselves, and the American military was already installed in Iceland. This made it almost impossible for Iceland to forcefully evict the Americans on their own and it was uncertain if another country would move in to fill the vacuum created if the Americans were pushed out.

For its part, the United States wanted to station troops in Iceland to protect the increasingly important North Atlantic air and sea lanes between North America and Europe from the Soviets in the late 1940s. Primarily, America wanted to use Iceland as a “stationary aircraft carrier” to interdict Soviet bombers and submarines stationed on the Kola Peninsula and to plug the shallow ocean channels of the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) Gap (Benediktsson 2011). Like its approach to Greenland, the United States also wanted to use Iceland’s airfields to attack the Soviet Union if its airbases in Great Britain were destroyed or if Great Britain decided not to allow the United States to use these bases in a time of war (Ingimundarson 2012, pg. 210). American planners believed that if Iceland fell to the Soviets, the Soviets could fatally disrupt America’s ability to resupply NATO forces in Western Europe and that the Soviets would make the Norwegian Sea a “mare nostrum” (Sparring 1972, pgs. 402-403). Despite these strategic pulls, the United States agreed to remove its permanent forces from Iceland. Like its relationship with Canada and Denmark, this displayed America’s ultimate respect for Iceland’s sovereignty and self-determination.
At the same time, America increased its standing with Iceland by being the first country to recognize Iceland as a wholly independent country after the war – in line with its international efforts to support decolonization and democratic governments internationally. This buttressed the good reputation America already gained in sectors of Iceland’s population for fueling the impressive economic boom Iceland enjoyed during World War II. This economic growth caused Iceland to go from being one of northern Europe’s poorest countries in 1939 to one of the world’s richest by 1945 (Ingimundarson 1999, pg. 83; Ingimundarson 2012, pg. 203). The United States followed up these moral victories by making Iceland the largest per capita recipient of Marshall Plan aid during Iceland’s economic downturn from 1947-1948 (Ingimundarson 1999, pg. 102). In the critical juncture of the 1950s, after the Marshall Program ran its course, revenue from the American base at Keflavik constituted a full ten percent of Iceland’s GDP and over fifteen percent of its foreign revenue (Ingimundarson 1999, pg. 90). Consequently, Iceland’s leadership did not see the United States in the same threatening manner that it previously viewed Great Britain. This allowed the United States to successfully make a deal with the Icelandic government to utilize Keflavik airport as a critical gas stop to resupply its forces in Germany, even after Iceland forced the United States to remove its garrison in Iceland (Ingimundarson 2012, pg. 205).

The Soviet coup d’état in Czechoslovakia and the Berlin blockade were critical junctures that pushed Iceland further under America’s security umbrella as the Cold War progressed. Iceland had no military because of a centuries-old tradition of unarmed neutrality. From the sixteenth century until World War II, the oceans surrounding it, and its relative poverty and lack of natural resources, had successfully protected it from invasion (Sparring 1972, pgs. 398-399). Militarization was an “alien concept” (Gunnarsson 1990, pg. 146) that
uniquely made it difficult for Iceland to develop a capability to defend itself, even in the more threatening geopolitical situation into which it was now thrust. Even its involuntary occupation by Great Britain and the United States during World War II did not cause it to change course because of the relatively benign nature of these occupations. Consequently, Iceland felt uniquely vulnerable to possible Soviet aggression and looked for an external balancer to help it deter possible Soviet aggression.

The United States used influence from Denmark, Norway, and Great Britain, to further push Iceland to become a founding member of NATO in 1949. In doing so, Iceland ended its centuries-long policy of neutrality, although neutrality remained a strong party platform of the Icelandic Socialist, Progressives, and Social Democrats parties thereafter (Ingimundarson 1999, pgs. 82-83). The decision to join NATO resulted in a riot outside the Icelandic Parliament that reflected the strong misgivings elements of Icelandic society had about falling under America’s security umbrella.

The Korean War further increased Icelandic fears of the USSR and weakened its resistance to holding a garrison American force on its territory (Ingimundarson 2012, pg. 210). In 1950, Iceland’s president suddenly suspected the large Soviet fishing fleet off its north coast was also a potential invasion fleet. The Soviet fishing fleet, which was increasing rapidly at the time, was also an economic threat to Iceland since over twenty percent of Iceland’s income and eighty percent of its export revenue came from the fishing industry (Sparring 1972, pg. 395). With this potential threat in mind, Iceland’s Prime Minister solicited the return of American forces to Iceland (Ingimundarson 2012, pg. 211). Iceland formally signed the bilateral 1951 Defense Agreement with the United States – a contract that
institutionalized the United States’ role as Iceland’s military protector like it was in Greenland and like it had been in Iceland during World War II.

The agreement with Iceland was much more restricted than it was with Greenland which reflected Iceland’s acute sovereignty concerns. Initially, Iceland agreed to host almost four thousand American military service members on its territory on a temporary basis, but the American military deployment to Iceland ended up lasting even after the Cold War ended (Ingimundarson 2012, pg. 213). As a result of the agreement, the American-constructed Keflavik airfield was formally re-leased to the United States and hosted the American Icelandic Defense Force (IDF). Naval Air Station (NAS) Keflavik, as the Keflavik airfield eventually was called, quickly became a key American outpost in the North Atlantic, hosting a joint military force of air inceptors, anti-submarine forces, and radar and sonar equipment that was used to detect Soviet submarines, bombers, and missiles coming from the Soviet Arctic.

The Soviets, themselves, briefly gained influence in Iceland in the early 1950s due to the “Cod Wars” between Iceland and Great Britain. The Soviets bartered raw materials for Icelandic fish, which temporarily improved its standing with Iceland and led to a leftward swing in Iceland’s domestic politics which was already supported by Iceland’s traditional communitarian values (Ingimundarson 1999, pg. 88). But the Soviet inroads into Iceland were successfully checked by Iceland’s overwhelming economic dependency on the United States, Iceland’s strong ties with Norway and Denmark, who strongly pushed Iceland to retain its security ties with the United States, and threats from NATO countries to discontinue loans to Iceland if it left NATO and accepted loans from the Soviet Union (Ingimundarson 1999, pgs. 89-93). Furthermore, the Soviets’ harsh response to the 1956 Hungarian uprising diminished
the USSR’s favorability in Iceland and again pushed Iceland back towards the United States (Ingimundarson 1999, pg. 94).

Through this critical period, Iceland was successfully welded into America’s sphere of influence, which solidified America’s presence along the Arctic Circle. This slowly altered Iceland’s identity as a neutral state to a non-armed NATO alliance member and a friend of the United States. As Icelandic historian Valur Ingimundarson (1999, pg. 103) asserts, “The net result was the reaffirmation of Iceland's alignment with the West and the reduction in Soviet influence in a strategically vital region.” However, Iceland’s continued identity as a non-militarized state and its strong sense of nationalism also caused the Icelandic government to restrain American presence in Iceland. Per the Defense Agreement it made with the United States, American bases in Iceland could not be used for “offensive” operations (Ingimundarson 1999, pg. 86), a clause that kept the United States from using Iceland to support bomber missions. The defense agreement also prohibited American nuclear weapons from being stored on Icelandic territory and substantially restricted American service members’ ability to fraternize with Icelandic citizens (Gunnarsson 1990, pg. 146).

Significantly, the United States never strong-armed Iceland with threats of military force as the Soviets did in their own sphere of influence. Contrary to realist assumptions, Iceland retained a strong negotiating position that allowed it to extract large concessions from the United States throughout the Cold War. Iceland did not attempt to establish its own internal capabilities to replace American forces as Canada and Denmark did and realists would assume they would do. Instead, Iceland became more comfortable with the large American presence on the island because the presence had not “caused the problems that many [Icelanders] had initially feared” (Gunnarsson 1990, pg. 143). The two countries
developed a strong relationship built on cooperation that was first established during World War II. As Icelandic scholar Gunnar Gunnarsson purports (1990, pg. 148), the comfortable relationship cemented during this critical era meant that Iceland did not move to abrogate its security agreement with the United States, rescind its membership from NATO, or align more with Europe even after the Soviet threat to it decreased at the end of the Cold War. In fact, the beneficial relationship established during this critical juncture meant that Iceland paradoxically pressured the United States to remain in Iceland even after the Cold War ended.

2.1.5 United States – Norway

As Norwegian historian Olav Riste asserts, Norway’s prevailing feeling after World War II “was one of disillusionment with the Western powers, and deep suspicion of the aims of Soviet policy in the north” (Riste 2012, pg. 165). Its expected and traditional protectors, Britain and Sweden, had failed to protect Norway from Germany (Riste 2012). Furthermore, Sweden’s continued refusal to step away from its strict isolationism (a decision that itself was rooted in history) (Brundtland 1966), and the Soviet Union’s expressed dissatisfaction with the formation of a comprehensive Nordic block, increased Norway’s anxiety as the Soviet Union’s military might on its border increased (Holst 1972, pg. 134). These experiences and the new tense geopolitical situation soured Norway’s pre-war embrace of neutrality and motivated it to look for a new security guarantor as the Cold War developed. Great Britain pushed Norway to align with the United States after it became clear it still could not protect Norway in its weakened state after World War II (Aalders 1989, pg. 89).

As American Foreign Service Officer Richard Kerry (1963, pg. 860) asserts, “World War II taught Norway that she was dependent on international organization for her security,” and it was quickly clear that the incipient United Nations, like the League of Nations before it,
was not up to the task.\textsuperscript{22} This trepidation is reflected in Norway’s post-war reconstruction plan, which stated, “It is difficult to imagine that Norway should have to defend itself against assault without having allies, and it is necessary to realize that Norway with her limited military and economic resources could not alone resist for any length of time against superior military power. But Norway’s armed forces must be able to hold on alone until we get effective assistance from those who may become our allies” (Norway Military Construction Plan qtd. in Riste 2012, pg. 165).

Although this policy did not identify the Soviet Union as Norway’s biggest threat, this indeed was the case. Although Norway was warmed by the Soviet Union’s voluntary withdrawal from its northern territory at the end of World War II (see Chapter 4), it still did not trust the Soviet Union. It was alarmed by the Soviet Union’s assertive requests to house military forces in the Svalbard archipelago and in the Norwegian Finnmark territory after World War II ended. It was also alarmed by the Soviet Union’s militarization in the Barents and Baltic regions, the pressure the Soviets were putting on Finland, and Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe after World War II.

In 1948, Norwegian Defense Minister Gudmund Harlem claimed that Stalin and Molotov “scared Norway into NATO” (qtd. in Brundtland 1966, pg. 45) – a decision that essentially pushed Norway to balance with the United States and fall under America’s security umbrella. Norway’s acceptance of much-needed American Marshall Plan aid also pushed it from being the neutral “bridge-builder” between the East and the West it initially wanted to be to a wary formal alliance with the United States (Pharo 1976).

\textsuperscript{22} Richard Kerry is father of the more recent Secretary of State, John Kerry.
The similar liberal political and economic institutions Norway shared with the United States made the two countries’ cooperation understandable within a liberal framework. This relationship was also promoted by the Norwegian exile government’s tenuous cooperation with the United States during World War II. But Norway’s swing towards the United States after the war was much more restrained than America’s contemporaneous security cooperation with Canada, Iceland, and Denmark which reflected the limited interaction it had with the United States during World War II. Notably, Norway successfully kept American forces out of Norway throughout the Cold War and limited the size and amount of NATO military exercises that were conducted in Norway (Kerry 1963, pg. 861).

Under a realist framework, this should not have been the case. Norway was the only NATO country that shared a land border with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The Soviets made this border region, the Kola Peninsula, one of the most militarized places on the earth in the decades after World War II (Luzin et al. 1994; Holst 1971, pgs. 139-141). Norway could not match the Soviet military force on its own (Holst 1972, pgs. 4-5) and should have “bandwagoned” more thoroughly with the United States to defend against the Soviets than it did. Instead, Norway denied American requests to garrison military forces and nuclear weapons on its soil and prohibited NATO from conducting military operations in the Finnmark region that bordered the Soviet Union. It relied, as a risky alternative, on American and NATO promises to reinforce it in case it was attacked to deter the Soviets.

Ultimately, Norway’s decision to deny American military presence on its territory had more to do with its historical relationships with the United States and Russia than anything else. Unlike America’s other NATO circumpolar allies, Norway did not experience a large American presence on its soil during World War II. While it came to trust the United States
because of its role in liberating Europe, it still had much more difficulty justifying an influx of American military forces on its soil after World War II than was the case for America’s other Arctic allies who became accustomed to American presence on their soil during the war.

Perhaps more importantly, Norway recognized the Soviet Union would feel uniquely threatened if Norway allowed the American military to expand into Norway (Holst 1971, pg. 139). This was partly because of proximity. American forces in Norway would be right on the Soviet doorstep with no territorial buffer separating the two hostile superpower forces from each other. The United States could then use Norway as a “stepping-stone” to invade the Soviet Union as Germany did during World War II (Brundtland 1966, pg. 32). There was also little precedent for having American military forces garrisoned in Norway. Allowing them to do so now would disrupt the status quo, which could be highly dangerous to a small country on the periphery of the superpowers, as was underlined by America’s threats against Cuba during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

Consequently, Norway attempted to cooperate with the United States enough to ensure that the United States would come to its aid if the Soviet Union attacked it but not enough to provoke the Soviet Union to attack. Norway allowed small amounts of NATO forces (Brundtland 1966, pg. 48) to periodically conduct war games on its territory, participated in NATO early warning operations, set up supply depots (Kerry 1963, pg. 865), and allowed the United States to establish a communication and navigation system in northern Norway that assisted American submarine missions against the Soviets (Lodgaard and Gleditsch 1977, pgs. 214-218). At the same time, it restrained the United States so that it could signal to the USSR its benign intentions (Tamnes 1991).
The 1960 downing of an American U-2 spy plane that was scheduled to land in northern Norway after its reconnaissance mission across the Soviet Union was completed was a contingent event that re-emphasized the tenuous position Norway held between the two superpowers and further restrained Norway’s willingness to host American forces on its territory. Afterwards, Norway become more critical of many of America’s foreign policy initiatives internationally and further restricted American operations in Norway (Kerry 1963, pgs. 865-868). The United States, for its part, seemed to understand Norway’s difficult position. It was content that Norway had not fallen under the Soviet’s sphere of influence after World War II. It did not strong-arm Norway to accept American forces or actively work to influence Norway’s foreign policy (Brundtland 1966, pg. 31) – it did not even demand that Norway allow Americans to man the weather outposts they operated in the Norwegian Jan Mayen Islands during World War II. It did, however, push Norway to defend itself more robustly to meet the shared Soviet threat (Moores 2002, pg. 35).

The United States also allowed Great Britain to nominally retain the security responsibility it had for Norway during World War II under the new NATO construct. This was more acceptable to the Norwegians than being commanded by Americans because of the historical ties between Norway and Great Britain. While the British military was relatively much weaker than it was prior to World War II, it continued to accept this responsibility, confident it was backed up by American reinforcements and weapons if necessary (Aalders 1989, pg. 61). In line with this historical continuity, NATO’s Allied Forces Northern Europe (AFNORTH) was established in Norway in 1951 and was commanded by a British admiral or general thereafter. Paradoxically, Britain’s World War II adversary in Norway, Germany, was made the deputy commander of AFNORTH after Germany joined NATO in 1955. While the
United States was given responsibility for regional air defense over northern Norway, the British, not Americans, formed the bulk of NATO forces that participated in most of the military exercises in Norway during the early stages of the Cold War (Brundtland 1966, pgs. 61-62).

Like Iceland, Norway was heavily persuaded by the Soviets to swing towards the latter during the Cold War. However, as Norwegian political scientist, J.J. Holst (1972, pg. 133) asserted, precedent and the status quo prevailed in the end, and America retained better ties with Norway than the Soviet Union did. In effect, Norway cemented its place during this critical period as the western-leaning end of the “Nordic Balance” that served as a unique territorial construct and polar buffer between the two superpowers throughout the Cold War. This construction minimized America’s willingness to more firmly place Norway, and its adjacent Arctic waters, under America’s sphere of influence than it was materially capable of doing.

2.1.6 United States – Sweden

Sweden emerged from World War II in a position that greatly contrasted with its Scandinavian neighbors. It was not attacked, and its neutrality was not challenged like these neighbors which set an important precedent that altered Sweden’s behavior in comparison with these neighbors. Its success during World War II re-emphasized the value of its longtime policy of armed neutrality (a policy first established in 1814), which also previously kept it out of the Franco-Prussian War and World War I (Ferreira-Pereira 2005). Swedish historian Gerard Aalders (1989, pg. 6) claims that “historical experience has become the main force behind the continuation of its policy of neutrality until today.”
However, Sweden also entered the Cold War materially stronger and more confident of its ability to protect its security than its Scandinavian neighbors also (Brundtland 1966, pg. 33). Its relatively strong economy meant that it was better equipped to economically resist the lure of both Soviet communism (Moores 2002, pg. 33) and dependence on American Marshall Plan aid (Aalders 1989, pgs. 164-177). Militarily, it had the fourth largest air force in the world, considerable maritime forces, and approximately six hundred thousand active and reserve soldiers to defend itself (Petersson 2012, pg. 222). The fate of its World War II neighbors taught it that it must maintain a firm internal defense to deter aggression (Aalders 1989, pg. 58).

Still, the American War Department believed in 1946 that Sweden would need the support of a strong ally, presumably the United States, to protect it from the Soviet Union (Aalders 1989, pg. 103). The United States looked to secure bases in Sweden to put Soviet population centers within missile range, to enhance its early warning capability against the Soviets, to acquire uranium, and to increase the formal membership of western democratic countries resisting the spread of Soviet communism (Aalders 1989, pg. 104). Instead, Sweden retained its longtime foreign policy of "non-participation in alliances in peacetime aiming at neutrality in the event of war" (qtd. in Aalders 1989, pg. 5). As Aalders (1989 pg. 182) argues, even though Swedish neutrality was not institutionalized in national law like it was in Switzerland, it “was a belief rooted in the experiences from two world wars and as it were a manifest truth.”

Sweden was also unwilling to bend more towards America or America’s newly enfranchised Scandinavian allies because it had a different “perception of the character of the Soviet Union” than these other countries did. According to Petersson (2012, pg. 224),
Swedish leaders believed the Soviet Union was “defensive and could be handled by reassurance” instead of threatening military alliances aligned against the Soviet Union. Consequently, Sweden shunned the tentative security ties Norway and Denmark wanted to form with it, which paradoxically pushed these other countries further under America’s security umbrella (Brundtland 1966, pg. 33).

Sweden’s intransigence motivated the United States to try to isolate it at first. It threatened to withhold aid to Sweden in time of war, only to adopt a more moderate line after Great Britain, who understood the historic basis for Sweden’s neutrality better than the United States did, pressured the United States to attenuate its approach (Petersson 2012, pg. 222; Aalders 1989, pgs. 105-106). The American press also criticized the hard-handed American approach to Sweden and the change in administrations from Truman to Eisenhower led the Americans to moderate their tone with the Swedes even more (Aalders 1989, pgs. 155-156).

Over time, this more moderate approach resulted, according to Petersson (2012, pg. 222), in “an informal, but quite extensive and intense, Swedish integration in the North Atlantic security system” that better reflected the assumptions of neo-liberal cooperation between the two democratic states.23 The Norwegian ambassador to NATO, for one, believed Sweden would “tie down considerable Russian forces” and protect the Danish and Norwegian flanks if the Soviet Union attacked (Petersson 2012, pg. 225). And Swedish historian Gerard Aalders (1989, pg. 6) makes the point that the Swedish defense industry became dependent on American technology and resources as the Cold War progressed.

The United States, for its part, cooperated with the Swedish military to help it screen the weaker Norwegian and Danish militaries (Moores 2002, pgs. 31-32). The United States

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23 The italics are from the original author.
and Sweden coordinated secret meetings between their militaries’ leaders to gain a mutual understanding of what their respective plans were in case of a Soviet invasion of Sweden (Moores 2002, pg. 33). Sweden also shared some of its intelligence information with NATO (Lovgren 2003) and allowed the CIA to conduct operations from its embassy in Stockholm (Moores 2002, pgs. 47-49).

Still, Sweden explicitly avoided formal alliance with the United States, absolutely prohibited American forces from operating on Swedish soil, and was extremely critical of America’s containment strategy towards the Soviet Union in international venues (Moores 2002, pg. 36). In addition to its historical attachment to neutrality, it did not want to provoke the Soviets by formally aligning with the United States. It believed that if it did so, it would cause a regional imbalance that would give the Soviet Union a credible reason to increase its regional military presence, and thereby increase the threat to Sweden’s territory (Brundtland 1966, pg. 33).

By the early 1970s, America assumed Sweden was a “neutral on our side” because it was believed the Swedish military was focused solely on defending against the Soviet Union, and not NATO (Moores 2002, pg. 30), and that Sweden was an unlikely target of Soviet expansion because of Sweden’s relative military strength (Aalders 1989, pg. 104). Eisenhower’s Ambassador to Sweden explained that getting Sweden to join NATO was now a “dead issue” but still to “America’s liking” – just as long as Sweden’s neutrality was armed neutrality and did not spread westward to Denmark or Norway (Moores 2002, pgs. 35, 39, 45). Pushing Sweden into NATO was now seen as counterproductive by American leadership because it was expected that doing so would push the Soviet Union to pull Finland into the Warsaw Pact. Thus, Sweden retained its historic neutrality and became the central country of
the constructed “Nordic Balance” between the United States and the Soviet Union that ultimately limited both superpowers’ expansion into the Arctic.

2.1.7. United States - Finland

As was thoroughly addressed in Chapter 4, the possibility democratic Finland would fall into America’s sphere of influence after World War II was firmly dashed by the events of World War II. America’s perceived debt to the Soviet Union and Finland’s cooperation with Nazi Germany determined that the United States would allow the USSR to influence Finland’s foreign policy after World War II more than the United States could. Finland negotiated successive trade agreements with the Soviets (Moores 2002, pg. 35), signed the 1948 Treaty of Mutual Friendship and Peace with the Soviet Union, and was saddled with extremely onerous war reparations to the Soviets shortly after the war to cement this construct. In the end, the United States was content that Finland retained a modicum of sovereignty and that Soviet military forces did not seize more military bases in Finland after World War II, making Finland the eastern end of the “Nordic balance.”

2.1.8. Summary

Overall, the United States was less willing to expand its presence into the Arctic than the Soviet Union was after World War II because it already had established regional allies that helped it balance the Soviets, because it was constrained by the high cost and danger of operating in the Arctic, and because it acquired many other international responsibilities in higher priority areas. In effect, historical influences guided the United States to balance with the Arctic allies it acquired during World War II instead of dominating the region like it could have.

2.2 Soviet Geopolitics
According to William Taubman (1982), an expert on American-Soviet Cold War relations, Russia’s traditional fear of foreign invasion was magnified by World War II. Stalin, part of the initial vanguard of the Bolshevik Revolution that regarded capitalism as anathema, also continued to view the United States as a hostile, capitalist, imperialist power, despite the two countries’ tenuous cooperation during World War II. Additionally, his hold on power depended on having an existential foe like the United States to legitimize his heavy-handed domestic rule.

These factors led Stalin to consolidate the gains the Soviets made in Eastern Europe at the end of the war and to expand Soviet influence through European Communist political parties. The Soviets emplaced authoritarian Communist leaders in the Eastern European countries they occupied and backed up their rule with the might of the Soviet military. They also attempted to take advantage of the social unrest caused by the economic problems in Western Europe that were the result of the war. Despite the massive economic, physical, and social destruction World War II inflicted on the Soviet Union, Stalin continued to invest the overwhelming proportion of the country’s GDP in the military (Gaddy 1996). As Taubman (1982, pg. 268) notes, Soviet military demobilization was significantly less rapid and significantly smaller than the American military’s initial demobilization after the war. Even as the Soviet Union demobilized from twelve million soldiers during the war to approximate two million in 1948, it worked on “crash programs” to develop atomic weapons and modernize other segments of its military to expand its international reach.

Paradoxically, instead of providing more security, the Soviet actions led to a security dilemma (Herz 1951). Soviet actions motivated the United States to develop a containment strategy that further pushed the Soviets to concentrate its military forces in the Arctic. As
previously documented in this chapter, it also led to differing levels of “bandwagoning” by
the Soviets’ polar neighbors who wished to avert the fate of their Eastern European neighbors
by taking advantage of the security ties they had developed with the United States during
World War II to balance against the Soviets. This balance of threat reaction by the Soviets’
polar neighbors who then more closely aligned supports Walt’s (1987) tweak to neo-realist
theory.

Despite their growing sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, the Soviets still had
difficulty getting access to the world’s oceans – a historical influence that contributed to the
Soviets’ continued insecurity. Their access to the oceans through access points on the
Mediterranean Sea, Baltic Sea, and the Sea of Japan were effectively challenged by the
United States and its allies. First, the United States and Great Britain used Britain’s historical
ties to Greece and Turkey to constrain Soviet naval forces in the Mediterranean. The Anglo-
American alliance pushed Turkey to refuse Soviet attempts to rework the 1936 Montreux
Convention, which limited Soviet naval movements from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean
Sea. Second, America worked with Great Britain to block the Soviet attempt to move into Iran
after the war. Great Britain’s Foreign Minister, Ernest Bevin, successfully argued that the
Middle East was “one of our spheres of influence,” something Stalin said he “understood”
because of Great Britain’s historical role in Iran (qtd. in Taubman 1982, pg. 156).

Similarly, despite regaining control over Poland, Kaliningrad, and the Baltic states, the
Soviet Baltic Fleet was challenged in the Baltic Sea when Denmark, Norway, Great Britain,
and eventually West Germany formally aligned with the United States in NATO. This meant
that there was a high probability the Soviet Baltic Fleet would be trapped in the Baltic Sea if
war broke out, just as it had been in the previous two World Wars. Finally, the United States
denied the Soviet Union’s attempt to form a joint occupation force in Japan. America’s occupation, and then its formal alliance with Japan, challenged the Soviet Union’s access to the Sea of Japan, and by extension, the South Pacific Ocean.

This left the icy northern waters of the Barents Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk as the Soviet navy’s main access points to the world’s oceans at the beginning of the Cold War. The capability the Soviet Union, and its temporary allies, had so expensively built up over the previous fifty years in this region gave it an advantage over the United States and its allies at the beginning of the Cold War. It also motivated further investment in the Soviet Northern Fleet in the 1950s when Admiral Gorshkov moved to establish a Soviet “blue water” navy capable of exerting Soviet influence around the world.

Soviet investment was further spurred by the development of transcontinental bombers capable of carrying nuclear weapons. The initial short range of these bombers pushed the Soviets to quickly establish a string of forward operating airbases on their Arctic coastline to put these aircraft within reach of American and European targets. These airbases housed squadrons of fighter-interceptor aircraft as well to defend the bases and other potential targets from American bombers coming over the pole. The extremely high cost of establishing, manning, and supplying these bases was effectively hidden by the Soviet command economy and the use of forced labor (Gaddy 1996). The Soviet forward basing strategy contrasted with that of the United States which, as previously detailed, relied more on a defense-in-depth strategy and had much fewer northern airbases than the Soviets throughout the Cold War.

The need to supply Arctic airbases, many of which were separated from the Soviet road system, pushed the Soviets to further develop the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and construct more capable icebreakers that could keep the Northern Sea Route open for longer
periods. The development of the Northern Sea Route was also propelled by the necessity of moving military forces the long distances from its European territory to its Pacific territory – another historical legacy that had hampered Russia in previous conflicts. Later, the development of Soviet ICBMs allowed the Soviets to pull their bombers back from the coastline, but the Arctic air bases still remained to support fighter-interceptor aircraft.

The rest of this section details the Soviet Union’s heavy investment in northern military installations and the geopolitical developments that drove this investment during the Cold War. In doing so, it shows that the Soviet Union built up a far greater and more permanent military presence and capability in the Arctic than the United States did.

2.2.1 The Northern Fleet

Although still primarily a ground power, the Soviets heavily invested in their navy after World War II to escape America’s containment strategy and to influence third world countries to ally with the Soviet Union. In the mid-1950s, the Soviet Navy transferred a substantial amount of its Baltic Fleet to its Northern Fleet since Soviet ships could better avoid NATO challengers in the Barents than in the Baltic (Brundtland 1966, pg. 37). Expanding the Northern Fleet also gave the Soviet navy a better capability to secure vulnerable northern Norway in case a conventional war broke out and to credibly threaten NATO’s northern flank (Baldwin 1955, pgs. 596-597). This made the Soviet Northern Fleet the largest and most important of the Soviet Navy’s four regional groupings. Investment in the Northern Fleet gained impetus after the United States successfully blockaded Soviet naval forces from Cuba during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis (Brubaker and Ostreng 1999, pgs. 301-302).
The difficulty of moving ships built in Leningrad through the Belomor Canal to the Barents Sea during World War II also motivated the Soviets to move more naval construction, including that of submarines and icebreakers, to the Kola Peninsula after the war (Hill 2007). The need to move parts from other locations in the Soviet Union to the shipyards for final assembly pushed the Soviets to also improve the transportation system from central Russia to the northern shipyards (Baldwin 1955). The Soviets rapidly increased their submarine production from these shipyards with the help of German technology acquired after the war. By 1955, it was estimated that the Soviets had constructed over one hundred submarines capable of long range open-water operations. To put that in perspective, Baldwin (1955, pg. 593) stresses that this was twice the number of submarines that the German Navy had when World War II started. Seventy percent of the Soviet’s new submarines were based on the Kola Peninsula and became the backbone of the Soviet nuclear deterrence force (Ostreng 1977, pg. 41).

From their Barents Sea bases, Soviet submarines attempted to evade NATO detection through the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap to establish launch positions on America’s East Coast early in the Cold War (Ostreng 1982; pg. 126). The Soviet’s first nuclear submarine, the *Leninsky Komsomol*, which was based in a World War II-era Nazi base near formerly-Finnish Pechenga made a symbolic trip under the pole in 1963. This event paralleled the *USS Nautilus*’ previous 1958 trip under the ice cap and reflected the Soviets’ ability to match America’s newly developed submarine-launched Polaris second-strike missile capability (Ostreng 1982, pgs. 144-145).

By the early 1970s, the Soviets improved the range of their submarine-launched missiles, so they could hit cities on the North American Atlantic seaboard and northern
Europe from the Arctic (Critchley 1984). This made the Arctic a better deployment area than the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean launch zones they previously occupied (Ostreng 1982, pg. 143). Deploying the Soviet submarines in the Arctic and attempting to keep American submarines from the Arctic became the main objectives of the Soviet’s “bastion” strategy that slowly developed. Deploying submarines in the Arctic versus the Pacific or Atlantic Oceans kept Soviet submarines closer to home ports where they could be quickly repaired and deployed, provided cover under the Arctic ice cap where the Soviet submarines could avoid detection by NATO forces (Ostreng 1982; pg. 141), and put the submarines within the protective range of the Soviet air defense system that was built along its Arctic coastline (Crichtley 1984, pg. 856). The constant presence of Soviet naval assets in the Arctic contrasted sharply with the United States, which based its assets much further south. In effect, the Arctic became the Soviet Navy’s main area of operations – its home.

2.2.2 The Northern Sea Route (NSR)

The accelerated development of the NSR at the beginning of the Cold War was another long-term contribution to future Russian presence and capability in the Arctic. Expansion of this route served multiple purposes. Primarily, it allowed the Soviets to pick up and deliver freight from the resource extraction centers they continued to build throughout the Arctic as is detailed later in this chapter. Secondarily, it allowed the Soviets to supply military units throughout the Arctic and to transfer naval forces from European Russia to Pacific Russia – something that had been a strategic problem for the Russians since the 1905 Battle of Tsushima (See chapter 2).24 Third, when the Suez Canal was closed to international shipping during the Arab-Israeli conflict from 1967-1975, the Soviets warmed to the idea of alternately

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24 Brubaker and Ostreng (1999, pg. 305) argue that the usefulness of the NSR as a military transit route was not as great as it appeared since many of the ships that were moved through the route suffered damage or were forced to winter over on the route until ice improved.
pushing international trade through the NSR (Horensma 1991, pg. 113). These factors pushed the Soviets to aggressively secure the NSR as sovereign Soviet territory at the beginning of the Cold War.

They did this primarily by improving their capability to ply the waters of the NSR. After they were forced to give back the seven icebreakers the United States loaned them during World War II, they retained only six icebreakers (Pastusiak 2016, pg. 30). However, they used the designs of the American icebreakers, and Finnish expertise, to construct and procure over twenty icebreakers, including two nuclear icebreakers (the first nuclear propelled ships in the world) by the early 1960s (LaForest 1967). They also added many other ice-hardened ships to their merchant fleet, which became one of the largest in the world. The improved ships, along with many more communication and navigation aids and better knowledge of the regional geography, allowed the Soviets to extend the length of time they used the NSR each year from under two months to six months in the icier eastern section of the route and yearlong in the western section (Horensma 1991, pg. 122).

The Soviets increased the volume of cargo they moved through the NSR from just one half million tons in 1945 to just under three million tons per year in 1970 (Ragner 2000, pg. 11). They also moved aggressively to restrict other foreign ships from the NSR. In 1960, after failing to push through its desired twelve-mile sovereign claims over coastal waters in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Soviets unilaterally declared a “Statute on the Protection of the State Border of the USSR” (Flake 2016, pg. 84). This statute was in line with previous Soviet-Russian claims to Arctic waterways and territory and effectively claimed Soviet jurisdiction over the NSR.
The biggest challenge to Soviet jurisdiction over the NSR understandably came from the United States, who was afraid the Soviet claims would weaken its ability to operate not just in the Arctic, but in other strategic straits where its registered ships were more active. As was previously documented in the previous section of this chapter, America attempted to operate Coast Guard icebreakers in successive years from 1962-1967 in parts of the NSR. The icebreakers were ostensibly doing scientific research and claimed innocent passage through the waters – something allowed by international law and something that the Soviet Statute on the Protection of the State Border of the USSR expressly allowed for (Pharand 1968, pg. 931). However, the trips also undermined Soviet claims to sovereignty over the NSR, threatened Soviet national security, and provoked aggressive Soviet reactions.

The Soviets harassed the icebreakers with military forces and made many diplomatic reproaches against the United States to signal their intense desire to exclude the United States from the NSR (Brubaker and Ostreng 1999, pgs. 305-306). In 1967, the Soviet government refused the *USS Eastwind’s* request to transit through the Vilkitsky Straits, when the ship attempted to navigate around heavy ice. The United States never successfully voyaged across the whole NSR, and it ended its annual trips into the NSR after the discomfiting 1967 voyage. It likely discontinued the voyages because the military-strategic benefits of operating on the NSR was not worth the economic and political costs that it was suffering. These failures signaled America’s unwillingness to match the Soviet’s regional maritime capability. Although the United States continued to surreptitiously deploy undetected submarines in the NSR for the rest of the Cold War (Brubaker and Ostreng 1999, pg. 314) its decision to stop making the transits into the NSR after 1967, and its limited investment in new icebreakers, set the precedent that the NSR belonged to the Soviets.
The precedent encouraged the Soviet Union to further institutionalize the NSR. In 1967, it mandated that all foreign traffic through the NSR must be escorted by a Soviet icebreaker (Horensma 1991, pg. 113). In 1971, it formed the Administration of the Northern Sea Route to regulate traffic on the NSR (Horensma 1991, pg. 116). The Soviet Union’s almost complete domination of the NSR by the early 1970s strengthened its argument that the NSR was an historic waterway over which the Soviet Union had sovereignty. Additionally, the Soviets also pushed out the British merchant fleet that historically operated in the Kara Sea to control that region as well.

It is important to note that the authoritarian Soviet Union’s approach towards the waters bordering its northern coast was very similar to that of Canada at the same time. Against both liberal and realist theorizing, both countries exceeded the jurisdiction provided them by the international maritime law of the time and pushed the materially stronger United States out of Arctic waterways bordering both countries’ northern coasts. These dual efforts effectively squeezed America’s subsequent ability or willingness to operate in the Arctic Ocean.

2.2.3 Northern Aviation

The emergence of the Cold War conflict with the United States also motivated the Soviets to expand their Arctic aviation footprint. The Soviet Union capitalized on the Arctic air power capability in which it so expensively invested during the interwar and World War II periods. After the war, it improved on this capability by confiscating German brainpower and technology (Naimark 1995, Chapter 4), acquiring western aviation technology through espionage and reverse engineering American (Boyd 1977, Chapters 13-14) and German aircraft it obtained during and after the war.
Still, the shorter range of Soviet bombers compared to their American counterparts, and the slow adoption of air refueling (Boyd 1977, pg. 233), complicated the Soviet Air Force’s efforts to develop a capable transcontinental bomber force and forced it to develop airfields in the Far North to extend their bombers’ range. In the 1950s, it is estimated the Soviets constructed or expanded between thirty and forty bomber bases across the Russian Arctic coastline (Lee 1962, pg. 137). Many of these were staging bases manned with ready maintenance units and navigation aids (Gordon 2009, pg. 78). Additionally, permanently established bomber wings in Chukotka and the Kola Peninsula allowed Soviet bombers to reach targets on the East and West Coasts of the United States by end of the 1960s (English and Bolef 1973, pg. 14). Similar to the change in American strategy, the development of Soviet ICBMs caused the Soviets to reduce the size of its bomber fleet in the 1960s (Muraviev 2001, pg. 90). However, Yefim Gordon (2009, pgs. 82, 131-132) documents that many of the northern auxiliary fields continued to be used throughout the Cold War.25

The Soviets also established a series of fighter-interceptor aircraft bases across the Soviet Arctic coastline and on Soviet Islands in the Arctic Ocean at the beginning of the Cold War. Temporary airbases were even constructed on large ice floes in the Arctic Ocean during the late 1940s and early 1950s to protect against long-range American reconnaissance and

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25 There is still no authoritative source on Soviet Air Force Arctic operations during the Cold War that I could find. Secrecy continues to make it difficult to determine the full extent of the Soviet military infrastructure that was established during the Cold War. The release of CIA imagery since the Cold War, as well as Russia’s recent media campaign to highlight the re-opening of military airbases across the Russian Arctic, suggests it was quite extensive. Tim Vasquez (2010) compiled a database of Soviet airfields that he told me in private correspondence was based on Google imagery and substantiated with information from the CIA Records Search Tool (CREST) and historic aeronautical charts. Yefim Gordon (2009) also documents that the Soviets established at least sixteen bases that were equipped to handle at least medium weight bombers above the Arctic Circle in many NSR outposts like Vorkuta, Graham Bell Island, Anadyr, Chekhoorovskaya, Andermer, Severomorsk (Vayenga), Wrangel Island, Tiksi, Olen’ya, Nagoorskoye, and Magadan in the 1960s with many other “tactical” bases established on less developed airfields (turf and ice) that were capable of handling smaller aircraft. The Soviets even tried to establish staging bases on ice floes until an accident in 1958 with a large Tu-16 bomber changed their minds about the feasibility of this endeavor. Even after this, many Soviet aircraft ditched on the Arctic ice after mechanical problems throughout the Cold War. It makes sense that the NSR outposts would double as military installations and supports my argument that previous investment in the Arctic gave the Soviets the will and capability to quickly expand their Arctic presence during the Cold War.
bomber planes probing the Soviet perimeter (Gordon and Komissarov 2011, pgs. 14-17). Many of these airbases were supplemented with surface-to-air missile systems.

The expansion of the NSR also motivated the Soviets to develop its northern aviation capability. The Soviets based ice reconnaissance aircraft at northern airports that helped Soviet icebreakers successfully navigate the rapidly changing ice conditions of the NSR (Lee 1962, pg. 92). They also developed a robust government-owned commercial aviation industry that transported freight and passengers to outposts across northern Russia. This proved critical when maritime resupply of northern ports was periodically restricted by thick ice (Lee 1962, pg. 153).

Basing and operating so many aircraft so far north contrasted sharply with the United States. The Soviets adopted this forward presence because they did not have to negotiate with allies like the United States, they did not consider the cost of operating these northern bases like the United States, they lacked the sophisticated early warning radar system the United States developed, and they needed to protect and support northern resource extraction sites.

2.2.4 Strategic Rocket Forces

In contrast to the United States, the Soviets also constructed one of its main space and missile centers in the Arctic at Plesetsk in Archangelsk Oblast in the late 1950s. This site was selected because it provided the maximum coverage of the United States for the Soviets’ early, range-limited intercontinental missiles. The existing transportation infrastructure also eased its construction (Podvig 2001, pg. 122). Once established, Plesetsk became one of the Soviets largest and most important space and missile bases. The Soviets developed longer range missiles that allowed them to establish subsequent bases at lower latitudes that could

26 The Soviets only had one long-range early warning radar site on the Kola Peninsula at the end of the 1960s, which was used to alert the government of potential attacks on the urban areas of European Russia (Podvig 2002, pg. 27).
reach American population centers, but Plesetsk allowed the Soviets to launch military
satellites into polar orbits also.

2.2.5 USSR – Finland

Unlike the United States, the Soviets continued to have difficulty building friendly
relationships in the Arctic that could allow it to externally balance against the United States.
Brundtland (1966, pgs. 34-35) believes that, by 1948, the Soviets had the military power to
take over Finland but were distracted by their contemporaneous attempts to consolidate power
in Eastern Europe. However, the Soviet Union’s inability to force the Finns to capitulate
during World War II also made it less willing to forcibly annex Finland or make it a satellite
state after World War II. As Jakobson (1980, pg. 1038) asserts, Finland’s relative success
against the Soviets during World War II allowed it “to approach the task of creating a new
relationship with the Soviet Union without the resentment that follows from humiliation, on
the basis of mutual respect.” Finland also maintained a relatively large conscripted army after
the war to remind the Soviets that taking Finland would be painful and Pyrrhic like the battles
the two fought during World War II.

Stalin discovered that being relatively easy on Finland also enhanced Soviet soft
power and allowed the Soviets to make Finland a neutral buffer state between itself and the
circumpolar NATO countries that opposed it, just as it was during World War I. As Jakobson
argues (1980, pg. 1036), Finland served as a crucial “counter to conventional (Western)
wisdom in regard to Soviet aims” by living harmoniously next to the otherwise aggressive
giant.

Still, just as it had prior to World War I, the Soviets maintained a firm grip on
Finland’s foreign policy and intervened heavily in its domestic politics to keep it from leaning
more heavily towards the West than it did. As Aalders (1989, pg. 70) argues, Stalin had not forgotten that the Soviet Union had been invaded through Finland during World War II and wanted to make sure that his country was never attacked through Finland again. The Soviet Union forced heavy reparations on the Finns and coerced them to abstain from accepting American Marshall Plan aid. This relationship was institutionalized in the 1948 “Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance” (FCMA) that Finland was coerced into signing by the Soviets. This agreement underlined the two countries’ relationship until 1992 and established that the Soviet Union would only move its military forces into Finland if another country attempted to use Finnish territory to attack the Soviet Union. Significantly, this treaty was less stringent than similar treaties the Soviets conducted with their other satellite states at the same time, but still made Finland part of the Soviet sphere of influence (Solsten and Meditz 1988).

In effect, Finland became the Soviet-leaning, matching bookend to the American-leaning Norway in Scandinavia. Like the United States, the Soviet Union did not want to upset the unique regional buffer construction because it believed that doing so would lead to a greater American military presence in the other Scandinavian countries that would threaten it and the fragile balance of power that existed in Northern Europe at the beginning of the Cold War (Brundtland 1966, pgs. 36-37). In fact, the Soviets voluntarily evacuated their World War II era naval base in southern Finland in 1955 after Stalin’s death, when they transitioned the bulk of the Northern Fleet from the Baltic Sea to the Norwegian Sea to relieve regional tension.

The Soviets cemented the unique bilateral construction with the Finns by extending the FCMA in 1955 and 1970, instead of demanding more onerous terms. The Soviets then
only intervened in Finland’s domestic politics when Finland’s neutrality was perceived to waver or when NATO put pressure on Finland. This occurred in the 1958 “Night Frost Crisis” and the 1961 “Note Crisis,” which were precipitated by German re-armament and entry into NATO – events that threatened the Soviet Union for both geographic and historic reasons (Brundtland 1966, pgs. 41-44).

To resolve these crises, Finland played its part to appease the Soviet Union. It re-pledged its neutrality and promised not to elect political candidates perceived to be “anti-Soviet.” It went so far as to amend the results of elections and to force conservative politicians underground on its own (Wiskari 1961). This had the effect of socializing Finnish voters to more deeply embrace neutrality, to avoid voting for politicians deemed anti-Soviet, and to weigh expected Soviet concerns when establishing foreign policy in the future (Solsten and Meditz 1988).

In practice, this meant that the Finns fully repaid World War II reparations to the Soviet Union and limited their contact with the United States and its allies – especially in the security realm. Finland also became the Soviet Union’s largest trade partner, which gave them enough political capital to get the Soviets to allow them to join incipient post-WW II European trade agreements on a limited basis by the early 1970s (Solsten and Meditz 1988). Furthermore, they gained Soviet trust by attempting to persuade Norway and Denmark not to join NATO and, failing that, tried to get these countries to limit their participation with NATO afterwards (Brundtland 1966, pgs. 38, 55). Finland eventually saw its position in the Cold War as a “physician instead of a judge” (Kekonnen qtd. in Palosaari 2013) and established itself as a concerned peacemaker between the two superpowers – a role that eventually would
allow it to facilitate the 1975 Helsinki Accords, agreements which would weaken the Soviet leaders’ willingness to maintain authoritarian policies in their own country.

“Finlandization,” as this behavior was derisively termed in the West, established a logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen 1998) that guided Finland’s and the Soviet Union’s unique behavior towards each other for the rest of the Cold War and beyond. Thus, Finland remained within the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence, but the Soviet physical presence within Finland was extremely limited, especially when compared to the influence the Soviet Union wielded in its other European satellite states.

2.2.6. USSR - Norway

Although Norway leaned towards the United States, the Soviet Union continued to influence Norwegian foreign policy and restrain American influence in Norway. As Norway joined NATO in 1948, the Soviet Union extracted a formal pledge from Norway that it would not allow foreign militaries (read, the United States and Germany) to establish permanent military bases in Norway afterwards (Brundtland 1966, pg. 57; Lodgaard and Gleditsch 1977, pgs. 209-210). The Soviet Union used its superior military might to implicitly leverage Norway’s decision. It also highlighted its decision not to seize the relatively undefended Svalbard Islands or the Finnmark region of northern Norway after World War II to signal its good intentions towards Norway (Aalders 1989, pg. 90).

Norway was persuaded by these tactics to disallow American nuclear weapons and their delivery systems in Norway. The Norwegian Prime Minister explicitly acknowledged the Soviet’s role in this decision in 1958, when he claimed during parliamentary debate he was afraid nuclear weapons on Norwegian soil would unjustifiably strain its relationship with the Soviet Union (Lodgaard and Gleditsch 1977, pg. 210). Lodgaard and Gleditsch (1977, pg.
assert that had Norway accepted nuclear weapons, it would have also been forced to accept a sizable American force to support and operate them. Furthermore, Norway decided not to allow NATO air, land, and sea forces within two hundred and fifty kilometers of the Soviet-Finnmark border to alleviate Soviet security concerns, (Lodgaard and Gleditsch 1977, pg. 211), which also necessarily limited America presence in Norway’s northern territory.

The Norwegian diplomat, Arne Brundtland (1966, pg. 38), argues that Norway’s historic relationship with Sweden also influenced how Norway balanced against the Soviet Union. Norway’s good relations with Sweden, and Sweden’s strong military, allowed Norway to leave its border with Sweden unguarded and instead concentrate its forces in northern and southern Norway to meet a potential Soviet attack (Brundtland 1966, pg. 39). Norway’s historic relationship with Finland also influenced its relationship with the Soviet Union. It feared that if it disturbed the “Scandinavian Balance” with the Soviets, it could provoke a Soviet invasion of Finland, which, in turn, would cause it to share a long indefensible four-hundred-and-fifty-mile border with the hostile Soviets (Kerry 1963, pg. 863).

The Soviet naval shift from the Baltic Sea to the Barents Sea in the mid-1950s pushed Norway to move its military forces further northwards and to rely more on promised NATO reinforcements to protect southern Norway and the Baltic Sea (Brundtland 1966, pg. 37). Even so, the Soviets were widely assumed to have the capability to easily occupy northern Norway (Kerry 1963, pg. 864), which Norway found difficult to defend due to its flatness and the relative lack of conventional forces it could muster in the area (Lodgaard and Gleditsch, pg. 212). Consequently, Norway attempted to signal to the Soviet Union that its northern force was defensive, so it did not threaten the Soviets. It also utilized NATO and the United
States’ security guarantees to deter Soviet aggression (Brundtland 1966, pg. 38; Kerry 1963, pg. 864).

The Soviets, for their part, attempted to pressure Norway to abandon NATO, but when it did this, as it did most forcibly in 1961, Norway played its “America Card.” It threatened to accept American nuclear weapons and conventional forces on its soil if the Soviets did not moderate their behavior (Kerry 1963, pg. 865). The Soviet decision to walk back its threats meant that Norway successfully used diplomacy and its unique geopolitical position to restrict both the Soviet and American presence in northern Norway, further establishing a status quo that limited both superpowers’ influence on the country. However, as Lodgaard and Gleditsch argue (1977, pg. 211), the Soviet decision not to act more forcibly in northern Norway also had to do with precedent. Violating the traditionally peaceful border could have initiated “considerable hostility and escalation” between the two superpowers by disrupting the status quo – a risk the Soviets did not want to take and a situation the Norwegians actively attempted to preserve.

2.2.7 USSR - Sweden

Sweden’s military strength and Finland’s buffer status allowed it to retain its traditional neutral status in the face of the Soviet military colossus that stood across Finland from it as the Cold War began. In this respect, Finland served as a tripwire that allowed the Swedes time to mobilize if the Soviets decided to attack (Brundtland 1966, pg. 39).

Even still, the Soviet Union influenced Swedish foreign policy greatly and kept it from more firmly cooperating with the United States than it did. Despite their shared democratic and free market institutions, Sweden did not formally ally with the United States. Primarily, this was because Sweden was traditionally neutral, and neutrality had worked for it even
during World War II when its neighbors were invaded. Secondly, it knew that if it leaned more heavily towards America, it would provoke Soviet aggression against it (Brundtland 1966, pgs. 59-60). The Soviet trade minister to Sweden warned as much, stressing that Sweden would be attacked if it ever allowed the United States to establish bases on its soil (Moores 2002, pgs. 36-37).

The Soviets also incentivized Swedish neutrality through trade. The Soviet Union needed industrial equipment to rebuild after the United States severed Lend-Lease aid to it after World War II. Missing out on the German market it had during the war, Sweden eagerly accepted Soviet raw materials in exchange for the excess manufactured goods it now produced (Aalders 1989, pgs. 25-30). This symbiotic relationship, and fears of a post-war depression, resulted in a unique 1946 trade agreement that linked the two countries together.

Still, a traditional, strong anti-communist sentiment within Sweden, enhanced by the Communist coups in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, minimized the soft power the Soviet Union had over Sweden. American pressure on Sweden, including Marshall Plan aid, also dampened Sweden’s enthusiasm for establishing deeper economic interdependence with the Soviet Union than it did (Aalders 1989, pgs. 40-43) and contributed to the eventual failure of the Swedish-Soviet trade pact in 1948.

The tension between the two states increased afterwards. The Soviet Union shot down a Swedish Air Force DC-3 reconnaissance aircraft and the Catalina float plane that was sent to rescue it in 1952. Sweden’s fear that the affair would lead to war with the Soviet Union influenced it to describe the incident as a “training accident,” however (Lovgren 2003). After Stalin’s death in 1953, relations improved enough that the Soviets agreed to a Swedish
proposal to establish mutual naval visits between the two countries (Moores 2002, pg. 31) and officially endorsed Swedish neutrality.

This situation reflected that, like the United States, the Soviet Union was now comfortable with the regional construction that limited both of the superpower’s influence over Sweden. Afterwards, the Soviet Union used Sweden’s neutrality to (unsuccessfully) try to persuade Denmark and Norway to leave NATO (Moores 2002, pgs. 42-43).

2.2.8 Summary

Overall, the Soviet Union established a military presence in the Arctic that was much larger and more permanent than that of the United States. First, this was due to geography. As was documented in previous chapters, the Soviet Union’s lack of access to the world’s oceans already pushed it to establish bases in the ice-free waters around the Kola Peninsula before the Cold War. During the Cold War, these efforts were accelerated as it built a “blue water navy” and rapidly expanded its ice breaker fleet to extend its global reach and influence outward from the Arctic. The development of transcontinental bombers and rockets also motivated the Soviets to establish airbases across its northern coastline. These were concentrated on the Kola Peninsula and near the Bering Strait, where they were best situated to protect Soviet population centers and industrial complexes and where they were in range of as many strategic targets in the United States and Europe as possible.

Second, the Soviet Union was much less affected by the cost associated with sustaining a military presence in the Arctic than was the United States. Many of the Soviet military bases were built around gulag work sites, so there was a ready source of labor and a basic infrastructure already in place to sustain the bases. Unlike the United States, the Soviets did not have a difficult time compelling its soldiers to live under the harsh Arctic conditions,
and it did not have to negotiate with allies who could restrain them. And, unlike the United States, the Soviets did not get directly involved in the expensive military conflicts on the Korean Peninsula and in Vietnam, although it did spend more effort and time dealing with its increasingly unruly Eastern European satellites. This allowed the Soviets to augment their military presence in the Arctic even as the United States pulled back its forces and was content to rely on technology to contain the Soviets in the Arctic in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Third, the Soviet Union did not have established allies in the Arctic it could use to balance against the United States. Instead, it had to internally balance against the United States and rely on the neutral buffer states of Finland and Sweden to separate it from NATO forces.

3. Economics

After World War II, the Soviet Union was already much more reliant on resources from the Arctic for its economic strength than was the United States. As previous chapters chronicled, the Soviet Union’s planned economy and its gulag labor allowed it to exploit these resources in a way that the American government was unwilling and incapable of matching with its market economy and its mobile labor.

3.1 American Economics

After World War II, America’s northern economy was still centered on supporting its military forces in Alaska, even as troops were quickly evacuated from the state when the war ended. The Cold War, however, was another shot in the arm for Alaska’s economy. The conflict-induced population boom, and Alaskan politicians’ longstanding desires for greater political representation, were finally awarded in 1959, when Alaska was finally recognized as the forty-ninth American state. Gaining statehood provided Alaska with voting members in
both houses of the federal legislature for the first time and solidified the federal government’s dominant position in Alaska’s economy. Alaska’s newly established political representatives launched mutually beneficial relationships with Alaska’s military leaders to lobby for greater government investment in Alaska afterwards (Cloe and Monaghan 1984). As such, government spending became a greater and more permanent share of Alaska’s economy than it was before World War II.

At the height of the Cold War military build-up, over seventy percent of Alaska’s population was associated with the military (Hummel 2005, pg. 60). The military constructed stores, hospitals, and churches on the existing bases to support the influx of soldiers and their families. The expansion provided an incentive for private companies to build housing outside of the military installations. To economize, the military privatized many of its functions in Alaska. Private businesses were contracted to supply the military installations and to operate the communications systems that tied the bases together. This brought even more civilians into the territory (Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pg. 173) and spurred localized economic activity around the sub-Arctic military nodes of Anchorage and Fairbanks.

The improved transportation infrastructure spurred by this development between Anchorage and Fairbanks decreased the isolation that dissuaded earlier pioneers from occupying interior Alaska. Now that a support structure existed, many soldiers and their families stayed in Alaska after their enlistment was up. These volunteers effectively colonized Anchorage and Fairbanks and created living conditions much more similar to the continental United States than was the case before (Haycox 2002).

A poignant example of how far the new state was willing to go to solicit federal funds was Operation Chariot. Under Chariot, the state of Alaska teamed up with the newly formed
federal Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), an eager local media, labor unions, and grant-hungry administrators at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks to push for a largescale “Atoms for Peace” project in Alaska. The AEC’s audacious plan was to detonate atomic weapons in northwest Alaska to form a deep-water port that could not be created economically using conventional harbor construction techniques. The danger of the operation was readily apparent. Creating a harbor with atomic blasts would obviously harm the environment and potentially put nearby native communities at risk. However, the project also promised to be a boon for the Alaska economy by employing construction crews, helping the coal and fishing industries get their products to market, and bringing research grants to Alaska’s universities (O’Neill 2007). As will be detailed later in this chapter, Project Chariot was defeated by a coalition of natives, environmentalists, scientists, and an adversarial national media. However, the decision not to use nuclear technology to make northern Alaska more accessible was in distinct contrast to the Soviet Union’s use of nuclear technology develop its own Arctic territory at the same time.

Although Alaska’s representatives were successful in funneling some federal funds to their state, their ultimate inability to stop the military exodus from Alaska during the 1960s or to push Project Chariot through to completion reflected the limits of their advocacy in America’s competitive federal system (Cloe and Monaghan 1984, pgs. 210-211). Since Alaska only had one Congressman, and because it cost so much to build in Alaska, it was difficult to persuade the federal government to invest in the Arctic in a comparable fashion to the Soviets. Additionally, because Alaska is physically isolated from the continental United States, its politicians found it difficult to form regional links with representatives from other states to garner mutually beneficial federal funding (Trubowitz 1998).
Despite President Eisenhower’s 1961 warning about the looming power of the American military-industrial complex, this complex did not have the same pull as the military-complex of the Soviet Union. In this regard, Vietnam was a turning point. Vietnam’s travails turned public opinion against the military-industrial complex (Bacevich 2007, Chapter 5). The concomitant decrease in funding for the military as the war wound down disproportionately affected America’s relatively expensive polar outposts.

Vietnam also contributed to Nixon’s decision to end military conscription in 1973. The subsequent volunteer force reduced the number of military members that could be sent to harsh and austere circumpolar locales, like Alaska, now that military members had to be recruited and retained as volunteers. Even before the move to abolish conscription, the military proportion of Alaska’s population decreased. In 1943, more than two thirds of Alaska’s two hundred and twenty-five thousand residents were members of the military. By 1960, only just over a tenth of Alaska’s two hundred and twenty-eight thousand residents were military. This proportion would weaken further through the 1970s, even though influential military leaders worked with Alaska’s politicians to actively lobby against further troop reductions (Cloe and Monaghan, 1984, pgs. 210-211).

The 1968 bonanza discovery of approximately fifteen billion barrels of oil on the North Slope of Alaska, about one-third of the country’s foreign reserves at the time, rapidly focused economic interest in Arctic Alaska because domestic supply was not keeping pace with demand, foreign oil supplies were becoming less reliable, and oil prices were rising as countries around the world moved to take ownership of their hydrocarbon resources from multinational companies (Lajeunesse 2012, pg. 171-176). These oil companies, many of them American, had an eager ally in the newly established State of Alaska that was given the
chance to obtain rights to Alaska territory from the federal government as a result of the Statehood Act. State officials eagerly seized the mineral-rich territory of the North Slope, and other parts of Arctic Alaska, and looked to sell the rights to extract the resources on them to private companies. The federal government also got in the act and leased the mineral rights to the extensive territory it still controlled in Alaska. Even still, high labor prices and the tremendous amount of capital needed to extract and transport these minerals slowed development. Unlike the Soviets, the American government did not have state-owned corporations or gulag labor to push along the development. As will be detailed later in this chapter, strong environmental and native lobbies also slowed the process and increased the transaction costs of doing business in northern Alaska (Grant 2010, Chapter 11). As such, America’s economic presence in northern Alaska was relatively small, and it was less willing to expand its presence in Alaska than the Soviets were on their own northern territory to satisfy economic desires.

American businesses were hampered even further from gaining a toehold in the Arctic by other countries. Notably, the autarkic Soviets continued to effectively bar American companies from their Arctic territory. Similarly, America’s own Arctic allies assertively blocked American companies from operating in their northern territory. As was previously documented, the Danes and Greenlanders quickly assumed many of the support functions for America’s bases in Greenland, so American businesses did not gain a foothold in Greenland. The complete absence of America military bases in Norway and Norwegian protectionism similarly kept American interests out of Norway.

Even more significantly, Canada remained especially worried that American economic pursuits would threaten its Arctic sovereignty, and it assertively acted to keep American
businesses from gaining a toehold in the Canadian Arctic and its bordering waters. To this end, successive Canadian Prime Ministers from John Diefenbaker in 1957 to Lester Pearson in 1963 to Pierre Trudeau in 1968 officially expanded Canada’s sovereignty over Arctic coastal waters to tie them more firmly to Canada and to negate potential American penetration.

First, the Canadian government claimed more expansive sovereignty over the Northwest Passage (NWP) and the Arctic Archipelago than before. Most prominently, spurred by a nationalist Canadian press and its receptive Canadian audience, Pierre Trudeau set the precedent for the political price American oil companies would pay to transit the NWP when he vehemently protested the American Humble (now Exxon) Oil Company’s trial attempts to transport North Slope hydrocarbons to refineries on the North American Eastern Seaboard on the SS Manhattan in 1970. After the Manhattan’s transit, Trudeau officially claimed the NWP as an internal Canadian waterway for the first time. It was afraid that it could not muster the resources to regulate American traffic in the straits and was afraid of losing control to the United States. Thereafter, Canada dissuaded commercial traffic from using the NWP by expanding its coastal jurisdiction over the waterways from the customary three miles to twelve miles (Lajeunesse 2012, pgs. 14-17 and Chapter 5). As is detailed later in this chapter, Canada developed a novel claim to gain international support for this jurisdictional expansion by enacting the 1970 Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act (AWPPA). Canada’s histrionics and legal red tape, along with the already high price and risk of utilizing the NWP to transport North Slope oil in icy waters, contributed to a collaborative decision by prospective American oil companies to build a pipeline to southern Alaska instead of using the NWP to transport North Slope resources to refineries and markets (Mead 1978).
Second, Canada disputed the maritime boundary it shares with the United States in the resource-rich Beaufort Sea that borders Alaska’s North Slope. Canadian efforts here, like their efforts in the NWP, increased the transaction costs for American oil companies (Banet 1991, pg. 17). Again, the United States government was unwilling to push forcefully push their companies’ interests in this region against the Canadian government.

Canadian historian Adam Lajeunesse (2012) convincingly argues that historically recognizing Canada’s “gradual acquisition” over North American Arctic territory from the Klondike Gold Rush onward taught Canada that it could push its claims further into the NWP by the 1970s. The United States also was socialized into this “logic of appropriateness” and tacitly accepted Canada’s position throughout the early Cold War. For example, it applied for a waiver from the Canadian government to transit the NWP when the United States Navy resupplied DEW sites in northern Canada from 1955-1958, it requested permission from Canada for its submarines to transit the NWP from 1958-1962, and it agreed to take along Canadian military “technical observers” on its icebreakers and submarines in waters bordering the Canadian Arctic Archipelago throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Lajeunesse 2012, pgs. 107-112, 116-119).

The United States similarly respected Canada’s national attachment to the Arctic and its historic right as a correspondingly situated democratic state to resolve sovereignty disputes through diplomacy and arbitration (see Chapter 2) in evolving forums like the United Nations Commission on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), where Canada could punch above its relative material strength. In the end, the United States never formally recognized Canadian jurisdiction over the NWP because it feared doing so would set a dangerous precedent that may restrict its freedom of movement in other important waterways. However, the fact that
the United States allowed Canada to effectively block its economic expansion into the North American Arctic and its coastal waters, even though Canada did not have the material power to enforce its claims, reflected the relaxed precedent that American had set against Canada’s assertiveness in the Arctic over the previous decades. This approach to Canada (and America’s other Arctic allies) contrasted with the American government’s assertive efforts to protect the entrenched and lucrative economic interests of American energy companies that were threatened in the Middle East by the early 1970s.

In the end, America’s early Cold War colonization of Alaska cemented the rail-belt between Anchorage and Fairbanks as America’s most dynamic northern economic region. This development created a solid anchor for expansion northward from the rail-belt to the bonanza hydrocarbon find on the North Slope as the on-coming international energy crisis loomed. Significantly, these efforts were supported by Alaska’s elected officials, state agencies, and military leaders that all gained political power because of the Cold War and Alaska’s concomitant recognition as an official state.

However, multiple veto players also sprung up within America’s political system to restrain American economic activity in Alaska, even as its multinational companies were still restrained from doing business in other Arctic countries. This meant that America’s economic expansion into the Arctic paled in comparison to the Soviet Union’s contemporaneous drive to urbanize and industrialize the Arctic and that the American government was not willing to support and promote potential American economic enterprises in the Arctic the way the Soviets did.

1.2 Soviet Economics
The Soviet economic expansion into the Arctic during the Cold War can be split into two phases. The first was the post-war Stalin stage that continued to utilize forced migration and the gulags to develop the Russian Arctic. The second phase was the post-Stalin, Khrushchev-Brezhnev phase which utilized nominally “liberated” labor to do the same. This second phase would not have been possible without the first, however. Lenin-Stalinist economic theories and institutions and a legacy of forced labor that went back to the tsars continued to drive the Soviet economy into the Arctic at a scale that far surpassed the development that Americans undertook. Entrenched institutions, entrenched thinking, and the tremendous amount of economic and human investment already poured into the Soviet Arctic economy meant that even after the regime-shaking death of Stalin in 1953, the Soviet Union not only continued, but increased, its investment in the Arctic and the Arctic became an even more important part of the Soviet economy.

3.2.1 Post-World War II Stalin Stage

After World War II, the Soviet Union renewed its focus on economic development in its northern territory. The motivation for this development was pushed by three factors. First, the Soviet Union desired to make up for its relative economic backwardness, just as it had since the days of Peter the Great. Its post-war economic modernization was driven by the Stalinist planned economy that continued to give weight to Engel’s theory that the distribution of production should be spread equally geographically – which meant a greater focus on the Arctic than otherwise would have been the case. Under this economic system, profit margins were unimportant, labor costs were ignored, and time horizons on the return on investment were long.
Second, military and strategic concerns continued to underline Soviet economic investment in the Arctic. Unable and unwilling to get access to the West’s strategic minerals, the Soviets increased their reliance on Arctic resource extraction and refinement centers. In essence, the Soviet Union’s enduring desire to strengthen itself versus western capitalist economies pushed its frantic attempts to develop the Arctic.

Third, the northern gulags were used by the Soviet regime to control people perceived to be enemies of the state, just as Russian regimes had for almost a century at this point. Stalin continued to fill the northern gulags with thousands of real and imagined troublemakers as well as newly captured prisoners of war. He did so with the willing compliance of gulag administrators and economic ministries who needed the servile labor to fulfill the unrealistic production quotas the Soviet government continued to set. The following paragraphs detail how the confluence of these three factors played out until Stalin’s death in 1953.

Directly after World War II, the Soviet Union was in a materially weakened state. The United States decided to end Lend-Lease shortly after the war, which added to the Soviet Union’s economic troubles. The Soviet Union moved quickly to restart extraction operations in the Kola Peninsula that were shut down during the war because of their proximity to German forces (Josephson 2014, pg. 166). It also expanded extraction operations in places like Vorkuta to supply energy resources for its renewed industrialization efforts in areas that were previously occupied or under siege by Nazi forces.

Stalin also created “secret” cities on the tundra (and elsewhere) in the late 1940s to support the Soviet Union’s growing military-industrial complex. These cities, modeled after the American nuclear towns of Los Alamos and Oak Ridge, housed some of the Soviet Union’s best scientists and skilled workers and their families – including many captured
Germans. The cities did not appear on any official maps and their residents’ ability to travel and communicate with those outside the towns was severely restricted. In return for their isolation, the residents enjoyed relatively higher pay and greater access to consumer goods. Specifically, closed cities in the Kola and Archangelsk Oblasts were created to develop the Soviet submarine industry and to support the nearby Soviet Northern Fleet (Kelly 2016). Many of these cities, like Severodvinsk (formerly known as Molotovsk), now the second largest city in the Archangelsk Oblast, were established on the remnants of pre-World War II gulag work efforts.

As was highlighted in the previous chapter, gulag labor was readily available for the war-shaken nation and readily sent to northern work camps that were already established before or during the war. As Soviet historian Aleksandr M. Nekrich (1978, pg. 90) argues, the deportation of millions of people to work camps in the Soviet interior shortly after the war “could not have been carried out if the state agencies involved had not accumulated a vast amount of experience in governing masses of people in concentration camps” already and were “an inseparable part of the history of the Soviet state and Soviet society” (1978, pg. 103).

From 1946, hundreds of thousands of Baltic ethnics rounded up during the war worked in labor camps in Soviet Karelia, and further east, to deliver raw materials and refine them for Soviet factories (Josephson 2014, pg. 133). Hundreds of thousands of other prisoners of war, including Soviets soldiers captured by the Germans, ethnic Germans from the Soviet Union’s border regions and satellite states, and former Communist bosses that had run awry
of Stalin, were also moved to gulag camps in the Arctic to extract raw resources and maintain
the Soviet Union’s economy (Noble 2015).27

From 1948-1949, Applebaum (2012, pg. 252) claims that Stalin rounded up prisoners
on a scale comparable in size to the “Great Terror” of 1938-39 to “scare new Soviet citizens
into compliance.” The gulag prisoners were used by the Soviets to colonize interior territory.
Applebaum notes that the camps reached their peak population and economic significance
between the years 1950 and 1952, right before Stalin died.28 Poles, Ukrainians, Estonians,
Latvians, Lithuanians, Karelians, Germans, Hungarians, and others were pushed into the
Soviet Union’s northern gulags. Their evacuation from their homelands served the dual
purpose of removing potential troublemakers and diluting national populations so that
incoming Soviets could more easily “Russify” and control the captive populations (Nekrich
1978, pgs. 98-104; Applebaum 2012, pgs. 95, 107, 110, 212).

3.2.2 Post-Stalin Stage

Stalin’s death was a critical juncture in the use of the gulag and is reflective of the
policy changes that can result with the change of ruler in a totalitarian state. However, the
legacy of the tsarist, Leninist, and Stalinist gulag continued to live on. Upon word of Stalin’s
death, many gulag prisoners tested the willingness of the new regime to use coercive
measures to maintain the gulags. Thousands of prisoners revolted and refused to work (Noble
2015; Applebaum 2003, Chapters 23-24; Josephson 2014, pg. 162). This compounded the
productivity problems the camps had even before Stalin’s death, due to their lack of
mechanization and lack of skilled labor (Noble 2015, Applebaum 2003, Chapters 24-25).

27 Applebaum (2003, pg. 580) estimates the total number of POWs in the camps exceeded four million, a significant proportion of which ended up in the Arctic.
28 The number of gulag prisoners is estimated to have been 2,504,514, not all of them in northern camps, in 1953, with Khrushchev estimating that over 17 million people passed through the labor camps between 1937 and 1953 (Applebaum 2003, pgs. 579-580).
The head of the Soviet secret police, Lavrenti Beria, temporarily replaced Stalin and moved to liquidate most of the gulag system. Applebaum (2003, pg. 480) concludes that Beria knew better than anyone else how uneconomical the gulags were and how innocent most of the prisoners were. She believes Beria wanted to secure the loyalty of the ex-prisoners he employed, and the Soviet public in general, by evacuating the gulags. Beria stopped funding some of the most inefficient northern gulag operations, like the Arctic Chum-Salekhard-Igarka “railroad of bones” that had resulted in close to one hundred thousand deaths between 1947 and 1953 with less than four hundred miles of track laid (Ash 2012; Elie 2012, pg. 4).

Applebaum suggests (2003, pg. 480) that Khrushchev was worried by the fast pace of Beria’s reforms and had Beria arrested and killed. Still, Khrushchev and his cohorts were unwilling to undo many of the reforms Beria had already made. Khrushchev also denounced Stalin’s cult of personality to raise his own status. Khrushchev annulled Stalin’s plans to move millions of Soviet Jews from industrial and political centers in European Russia to “special settlements” in Siberia (Neckrich 1978, pg. 105). A few years after Stalin’s death, the gulags’ population was tremendously reduced, and the Soviet economic ministries had to find other ways to entice labor to the Arctic.

Despite this, dependence on servile labor prolonged its use. For instance, Vorkuta was a critical energy supplier for Leningrad (Barenberg 2009, pg. 513), and gulags were responsible for producing the majority of the Soviet Union’s timber and gold (Elie 2012). In 1961, thousands of convicts were still used to build factories in the north near resource extraction sites, great prison camps remained in remote regions like the gold-producing sites

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29 Applebaum (2003, pg. xxx) notes that Khrushchev himself was responsible for exiling collective farmers to the special settlements after the Soviet famine of 1947 and that he was also responsible for sending Ukrainian nationalists to the gulags after World War II (2003, pg. 274), so he was just as complicit as Beria was for Stalin’s institutionalized terror.
of Kolyma until at least 1964, and Elie (2012, pg. 30) claims between 1968 and 1973 over eight hundred thousand prisoners were still used in economic enterprises across the Soviet Union where free labor could not be easily induced to move to.

Perhaps, just as importantly, the economic institutions that supported the gulags were well-entrenched and difficult to eradicate. Applebaum (2003, pg. 490) states anecdotal evidence of authorities instigating revolts after Stalin’s death to highlight the “dangerous prisoners” they held and thus legitimize keeping them in the camps they ran. Khrushchev himself moved soldiers into multiple camps to put down revolts and keep them operating during the first few years of his rule (Applebaum, 2003, pgs. 492-493). Many of the nationalists that were freed from the concentration camps were sent back to the camps shortly after being released because local officials in their home towns were also afraid they would disrupt the tenuous political hold they had in places like the Baltics and Ukraine (Barenberg 2015, pg. 101). Many of the Soviet economic ministers argued to keep the camps open (Applebaum 2003, pg. 510), and camp administrators prevented able-bodied prisoners from leaving the mines after they were released (Applebaum 2003, pg. 512), while advocating that old and invalid prisoners be released instead (Elie 2012, pg. 9). Some northern gulags, (Applebaum 2012, pg. 252; Barenberg 2014) remained open well into the 1960s and continued to farm out labor to industrial enterprises. Moreover, many of the prisoners and other “special settlers” that were exiled in the northern cities were not given internal passports to leave the area after the gulags were dismantled (Hill and Gaddy 2003, pg. 86).30

Paralleling events that occurred after the Cold War, when internal passports in the Soviet Union were done away with, many of the former prisoners sent to northern gulags did

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30 Applebaum (2003, pg. 581) provides a low estimate of the number of special exiles between six million and seven million during Stalin’s rule – again not all in northern settlements.
not even want to leave the camps when they were allowed after Stalin’s death. They had no home or possessions to return to, were a source of embarrassment or concern to their families and friends who were often complicit in their arrests, or somehow still believed in the Communist dogma that was used to legitimize the camps in the first place. This led many of them to take jobs in the northern settlements they were formerly imprisoned at as “free workers” after their release (Applebaum 2003, pgs. 511-520).

Barenberg (2015, pg. 199) estimates that one third of the prisoners released from the large Vorkuta gulag in the 1950s went back to work in the mines after they were released. This transition was made easier for some prisoners categorized as “zazonniki.” These “model prisoners” were allowed to live outside of the prison beginning in 1954, allowed to move their families into town with them, and were paid the same as non-prison workers. By 1956, thirteen thousand prisoners at Vorkuta were categorized as zazonniki. Many of these prisoners were categorized that way because their skills were critical to the mines and factories where they worked, the economic ministries believed they would be more productive and efficient outside of the gulag than inside it, and it was hoped that they would stay in Vorkuta after the gulag was fully dismantled (Barenberg 2009, pgs. 524-526). Many of the former gulag prison staff also remained to work at the mines and factories after the gulag closed.

Barenberg stresses (2015, pgs. 92, 100) that the gulag had a “profound impact on the development” of the cities they were associated with long after the mass releases of the 1950s. The former prisoners and guards “provided the social backbone” of the cities as they slowly mutated from coercive institutions into company towns. Two former gulag workers at Vorkuta incisively commented that they had transitioned back from “slave to serf” during this
era (Barenberg 2009) – a nod to the tsarist legacy that still influenced the Soviet Union’s northern economy.

Khrushchev searched for alternate ways to augment the dwindling supply of labor and spur productivity from those that remained in northern former gulag towns. According to Hill and Gaddy (2003, pg. 91), remoteness, cost, and the significantly long-time horizons on return on investment were still not significant deterrents to his thinking and were a product of the Soviet planned economy and Communist economic thought that continued to guide his economic plans.

At first, the Soviet government intensified “education” programs to motivate increased production through Communist idealism (Nekrich 1978, pgs. 130-131; Josephson 2014, pg. 163). This failed, just as it had before with Stalin’s Stakhanovites. So, the Soviet government moved towards greater subsidization, greater mechanization, and greater scientific research to increase production (Josephson 2014, pg. 166). This had more positive effects. No longer fearful of being imprisoned for political crimes, Soviet scientists ambitiously undertook projects to transform nature and urbanize the north (Josephson 2014, pg. 169). Thousands of more Soviet citizens, many of them recently demobilized Russian soldiers (Barenberg 2015, pg. 101) and Komsomol youth (Kalameneva 2017, pg. 156), were attracted by patriotism and the lure of higher pay and greater benefits to move to northern settlements. Testament to the success of these tactics, the population of the Soviet north actually increased in the decades after the gulags were closed. New extraction settlements like the diamond-town of Mirny bloomed to house thousands of workers by the 1960s, even without the use of gulag labor (RBTH 2016).

Hill and Gaddy (2003, pg. 91) describe the company towns that replaced the gulags “as utilitarian in the extreme” since they were “built to suit the needs of industry and the state…not the needs (apart from the most basic), or desires, or preferences of their populations.” However, Zhuk (2011) argues that the relatively higher pay and availability of consumer goods made these cities attractive to Soviets that had no better prospects in other parts of the countries. In essence, the company towns were a continuation of Stalin’s gulag settlements established by the NKVD, Dalstroi, and Glavsevmorput. The cost of the labor went up, and productivity also went up, but still suffered because former prisoners and managers continued to manipulate production numbers just as they did in the gulag era (Barenberg 2015, pg. 103). Also, the greater amenities needed to retain labor decreased the cost effectiveness of the changes. Kalameneva (2017, pg. 162) states that housing construction cost three to five times as much in the Soviet northern settlements as it did in Soviet southern settlements and machinery often broke down because of the extreme cold.

Another element of Khrushchev’s drive into the north was ambitious projects that displayed the Soviet government’s continued power and desire to undertake large economic projects and conquer nature. It is important to contrast these programs with similar American plans to spur the Alaskan economy during the Cold War that were turned down because they were too fanciful, expensive, or environmentally harmful.32 The Soviet Virgin Lands Program, specifically, was a consequence of the 1947 Soviet famine that killed over one million people. This earlier famine pushed the Soviets to overfish coastal waters, expand their fishing fleets, push these fleets further into the Barents Sea, and to create a string of fish

32 The most prominent of these plans was Project Chariot mentioned earlier in this chapter. But there were other ambitious plans for Alaska that did not involve nuclear energy, like the Rampart Dam (Naske and Hunt 1978) that was designed to dam large bodies of water in interior Alaska to power massive turbines to produce cheap energy for southern Alaska. Unlike the Americans, the Soviets employed both nuclear detonations and massive hydroelectric dams to develop its Arctic economy.
processing plants on its northern coastline (Josephson 2014, pgs. 302-303). Similarly, the Soviet Union moved to reclaim swampland in Karelia in the late 1940s and 1950s in a spectacular, but unsuccessful, attempt to turn this northern region into an agricultural powerhouse (Josephson 2014, pg. 289).

Khrushchev also tried to expand wheat farming further north and consolidated northern reindeer farms to increase production. This change caused the Kola Peninsula’s population to peak in 1971 as herders were housed in newly constructed “agro-cities” on the tundra that were also filled with “reindeer technicians” (Bruno 2011, pg. 161). Notably, Bruno (2011, pgs. 164-166) argues that Khrushchev’s campaign on the tundra inalterably cemented the northern herding economy to the extent that it actively resisted market reforms even after the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991.

Most importantly of all, the Soviet Union moved ambitiously to unearth Arctic hydrocarbons after Stalin’s death. Even before World War II, oil replaced grain as the Soviet Union’s most important export product (Yergin 2008, Loc. 247). By the early 1970s, the Soviet Union had increased oil production from just under thirty-eight million metric tons in 1950 to almost four hundred million tons in 1970 (Hopkins et al. 1973, pg. 25). In doing so, it replaced the United States as the world’s largest oil producer.

In contrast to the United States, the Soviet government completely controlled the oil industry. The Soviet Ministry of Petroleum, unworried about monetary profits, used its excess petroleum to gain political leverage. Cheap (or free) Soviet oil and aid allowed many third world and non-aligned countries to nationalize their oil economies to the chagrin of the United States and greatly increased Soviet influence in these countries (Goldman 2008, pgs. 43-47).
While Soviet oil production skyrocketed, it was very inefficient. The war-ravaged fields in the Baku region and the Caucasus continued to underperform after World War II. Goldman (2008 pgs. 40-43) argues that the Soviet Union’s inability to get more out of its prolific oil fields was the consequence of a planned and centralized economic system that prioritized quantity over quality. Soviet steel, essential to oil production, suffered from quality and innovation problems. This kept the Soviets from drilling deep wells. Soviet drillers were also rewarded for the number of wells they drilled; not how productive the wells were. Not responsible for gas production, oil companies flared off gas associated with their production instead of selling or using it. These institutional problems were compounded by the Soviets’ difficulty procuring western technology, which caused them to flood their fields with water injection when they tried to maintain the wells’ pressure. In 1973, an American defense analysis (Hopkins et al., pg. 22) concluded that the Soviet Union faced an economic crisis if it was not able to increase its energy production further, because it had already become so dependent on hydrocarbons for its economic strength. It was here that the Soviet push into frontier regions in northern Siberian bore fruit.

By 1975, the sub-Arctic Berezovskoe oilfield, first established only in 1968, produced over one-fifth of all Soviet oil production, and the Soviets looked further north and east for new sources of oil (Goldman 2008, pgs. 38-39). Ukhta, first established by gulags in northwestern Siberia during World War II (See Chapter 3), produced, refined, and transported over eleven million metric tons of petroleum products by 1970 (Hopkins et al. 1973, pgs. 86, 104). These fields, like the extreme northern gas fields of Khanty-Mansiysk became a much larger component of the Soviet Union’s overall hydrocarbon production in the following
decades (Kontorovich 2015) and further motivated the Soviets to expand the Arctic transportation infrastructure that moved these hydrocarbon products to markets.

As we will see in the next chapter, hydrocarbon production became a crucial component of the Soviet Union’s economy and national strength. Because of its dependence on hydrocarbons, Russia first became a “petrostate” during this era. Petroleum gave the Soviets power. Oil historian Daniel Yergin claims oil power allowed the Soviets to build up their military and undertake risky foreign adventures in the 1970s (Yergin 2008, Loc. 188). Oil also hardened the centralized political and economic institutions that already existed in the Soviet government and made it vulnerable to political crises emanating from swings in oil prices – what political scientist Terry Karl (1999) calls the “paradox of plenty.”

3.3. Summary

Even with concerted effort and increased investment, the harsh Arctic environment continued to stymie the Soviets. The Soviet Arctic enterprises continued to fall short of planned production goals on many fronts due to a lack of energy, technology, and machinery for much of the period (Josephson 2014, pgs. 292-293). Even still, these efforts were far in excess of what the United States accomplished. Many northern factories were established or expanded in the Soviet Arctic (Josephson 2014, pg. 295). Similarly, the Soviet Union slowly built out its northern transportation and communication infrastructure (Josephson 2014, pgs. 310-316). For instance, it took years more than planned to build a railroad from the Pechenga nickel mines to Murmansk in the 1950s, but it was still finished by 1960 (Bruno 2011, pg. 59), a time when no new roads or railroads were being built in northern Alaska.

Josephson claims that these efforts were “unique in their scope and vision – and failings.” However, in truth, they were entirely within the vision of the Tsarist efforts before
World War I as well as Stalin’s efforts to conquer the Arctic afterwards. They also reflected the continued irrational and institutionalized Soviet economic push into the Arctic. It is hard to conceive that a less centralized government, with a market-based economy, could have continued to colonize and develop the Arctic the way the Soviets did. Furthermore, it is hard to conceive that Stalin’s less brutal successors, Khrushchev and Brezhnev, would have done so to the extent they did if Lenin and Stalin had not given them the institutionalized template and so much blood, sweat, tears, and rubles had not already been invested in the endeavor. The United States, for one, certainly did not move to develop the capability to operate in the Arctic, or exploit its resources, like the Soviets did.

4. Identity

There was a clear division between the Soviet Union’s national attachment to the Arctic and that of the United States by the 1970s. Decades of Soviet propaganda and the migration of millions of Soviets, some of them out of a sense of patriotic duty, connected the region closely with the national psyche. By contrast, the Arctic was what anthropologist Robert McGhee (2005) called the “last imaginary place” – an exotic and remote locale that was not often thought about by most Americans. Even within North America, America was considered an interloper in the Arctic since Canada had firmly appropriated a deeply embedded attachment to the north for itself by this time. The difference in national attachment to the Arctic gave the Soviet Union the willingness to continue its conquest of the Arctic, while the lack of American attachment contributed to the assertive Canadians’ ability to restrict the United States from the Arctic.

4.1. American Identity
The relative lack of American national attachment to the Arctic after World War II is brought into focus when it is compared with Canada’s growing attachment to the region. Canadian historian Adam Lajeunesse (2012, pg. 302) concludes, “Arctic sovereignty has historically been one of a very few subjects capable of evoking aggressive nationalism [in Canada] and the political implications of this public sentiment have never been pleasant for any government.” Other Canadian historians, Shelagh Grant (1990) and Sherrill Grace (2002), argue that a sense of “northern” identity had been cultivated by the Canadian government and readily accepted by a substantial proportion of Canadian citizenry over the previous decades to allow them to differentiate themselves from Americans. Grant (2010, pg. 354) further argues that assertive diplomacy backed by this “Nordic” identity allowed Canada to gain concessions from the more powerful United States. Nationalism motivated successive Canadian governments, both liberal and conservative, to punch above their weight with the United States when it came to Arctic issues during the formative decades after World War II.

Despite adding the USS Nautilus’ sub-ice transit around the North Pole to a long list of previous symbolic and prestigious polar accomplishments, the United States was unwilling and unable to rally national support to develop a similar national attachment to the Arctic. The result of this was that American diplomats continued to acquiesce to the demands of Canadian politicians. They knew Canadian politicians needed to look strong on the Arctic to bolster their domestic political standing. American politicians, because of the lack of national attachment to the Arctic, did not lose much face by giving ground to the Canadians in the Arctic, which still was peripheral to most of America’s strategic and economic interests.

America’s potential attachment to the Arctic was also stressed by a greater acknowledgement of the sovereign rights of Arctic indigenous groups, as will be described in
much more detail later in this chapter. In this light, many Americans came to believe that the true owners of the Arctic were the natives that lived there and not the American government. This feeling necessarily attenuated any national attachment to the Arctic that could have occurred and exacerbated America’s overwhelming disinterest in claiming the Arctic compared to the Soviets and the Canadians, who viewed their Arctic territory as an inspirational part of their national heritage and not as an imperialist smear on their legacy, or an austere wilderness, as the Americans thought of it.

4.2. Soviet Identity

The Soviet narrative of the Arctic and the national attachment to it starkly contrasted with that of the United States. First, the Soviets did not compete for regional identity predominance with another continental power in Eurasia like the United States did with Canada in North America. Second, the Soviet government used its monopoly over the press to mythicize the region as they had since the Bolshevik Revolution. By this point, the “Red Arctic” was an enduring theme in Russian literature (see previous chapters), deeply embedded in the national psyche, and news of more current Soviet exploits to conquer the Arctic continued to be fed to Soviet citizens.

In this respect, the drift ice stations the Soviets established in the Arctic Ocean basin in the 1950s (Webster 1954) provided fodder for Soviet propaganda. These sensational and risky endeavors were followed up by the breathless reporting of the exploits of the Soviet Union’s first nuclear submarine, the *Leninskiy Komosol*, which displayed the Soviet Union’s technological equivalence to the United States in underwater nuclear technology when it travelled under the ice of the North Pole in 1962, just as the *USS Nautilus* previously accomplished. Similarly, the Soviets extolled the development of the world’s first nuclear
icebreaker, *Lenin*, which opened sea ways in the Northern Sea Route during the harsh winter months of 1959 and was supplanted by the *Arktika* icebreaker that led the way for the establishment of a fleet of nuclear icebreakers that first plowed through the Arctic ice to reach the North Pole in 1977. The long-term receptiveness to these nationalistic propaganda efforts by Russian citizens was highlighted by the Russian government’s recent pairing of the *Leninsky Komosol* with the *Lenin* as floating museum pieces at a prominent dock in Murmansk to celebrate the Soviet Arctic accomplishments of the 1950s and 1960s (Nilsen 2017).

While much of the Soviet writing continued to focus on the heroic Soviet accomplishments in the Arctic, more and more also was used to legitimize and advance more commonplace colonization efforts. Yuri Slezkine (1994, pgs. 323-330) argues that Soviet writers often pitted “righteous Russians” against “felonious foreigners” (many of them American) to legitimize Russia’s claims to Arctic territory after World War II in popular fictional novels. This included revisionist claims to Alaska that one prominent Russian writer, S. N. Markov, claimed was “Russia’s by right of discovery and settlement.” The Soviet Arctic was depicted in these narratives as the Promised Land because of Russia’s benevolent development of it. In contrast, the writers concocted narratives that described America as duplicitous and its conduct in the Arctic as evil. As such, American-developed Alaska was depicted as a hell while Soviet-developed Siberia was depicted as a heaven.

Soviet state-sponsored media also romanticized the tens of thousands of Russian workers that were recruited to work in the Russian Arctic in the 1950s. They were lauded by the Soviet media for conquering the harsh Arctic climate and were congratulated for effectively connecting northern territory with rest of the country – a singularly Soviet feat of
Socialism (Kalameneva 2017 pg. 159). Many of the recruits and the former gulag prisoners internalized these praises. The relative suffering and deprivations they endured, and the achievements they contributed to in the Russian Arctic, attached many of them to the region forever and provided them a proud sense of ownership to the territory they had transformed with their own hands. This attachment extended beyond the northern residents to citizens of the whole country, who were proud of their neighbors’ “everyday heroism” which allowed the Soviet Union to conquer nature and modernize the Arctic for the country’s benefit (Kalameneva 2017, pg. 162). As Kalameneva states (2017, pg. 166), the north was now internalized into Soviet culture and politics – not just as a place of extraordinary heroism, but also of ordinary heroism that co-opted the entire Russian population. This gave the Russians a greater willingness to maintain its regional dominance in the decades that followed.

4.3 Conclusion

It is impossible to measure how strongly the Soviet national attachment to the Arctic and the weaker American national attachment to the Arctic was responsible for the states’ differing willingness to stake their Arctic claims after World War II. Geopolitical and economic interests were more decisive in this sense, which is why I devoted so much effort in this chapter to describe how geopolitics and economics shaped each states’ Arctic ambitions. That being said, the Soviet national attachment to the Arctic was a force multiplier for the geopolitical and economic forces that also pushed the Soviet Union into the Arctic. It was used to bolster and legitimize the Soviet Union’s assertive actions in the region, while America’s relative aloofness undermined any determination to exert itself more forcefully – especially in regard to its own Canadian allies or its own indigenous population in Alaska.

5. Environment
After World War II, an environmentally conscious and influential segment of the American population, which had been cultivated for over a hundred years, emerged and made saving Alaska’s wilderness one of its symbolic fights. This influential lobbying group tempered America’s willingness to expand its presence in the region. It promoted environmental security over national security and actively worked to preserve the Arctic. In doing so, it made it harder for “outsiders” attracted to the American Arctic by geopolitical and economic forces to establish themselves. In contrast, the Soviet Union was still devoid of an environmental lobby that could influence government policies and did not conceive the Arctic as being fragile, unique, or in need of preservation from human development. In fact, the environmental preservationist sentiment that was mounting in Alaska juxtaposed traditional Soviet efforts to “conquer” the Arctic and convert it into an urbanized and industrialized workers’ utopia on the tundra.

5.1. American Environmentalism

After World War II, America’s economic prospects improved and its concern for the environment correspondingly grew as the American population emerged from the war cognizant of humanity’s power to cause destruction. Alaska had already acquired the moniker of America’s exceptional “Last Wilderness” (see previous chapters). Under an increasingly romantic view of the value of wilderness, a growing list of influential proponents believed Alaska’s land should be enjoyed for its scenic beauty, isolation, and unspoiled nature instead of being developed. The Wilderness Society, for one, had acquired over seventeen thousand members by 1960. It reflected the growing popularity of scientific ecology which highlighted the human species’ dominating and ultimately damaging role on the human landscape (Kaye 2006, pg. 7). Officers within key American agencies like the United States Fish and Wildlife
(USF&W) expanded their presence in environmental lobbying groups. They moved decisively away from conserving resources, a role their agencies were first designed to facilitate, to preserving wilderness areas – especially in Alaska (Kaye 2006).

As United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) researcher Gregory Brown argues (2002 pg. 13), America’s growing attachment to wilderness preservation was institutionalized in the 1964 Wilderness Act that affected Alaska more than any other state. Alaska’s geographical separation from the “corpus of the country” made it feel removed from the growing suburbs of American settlements. This made northern Alaska a natural “final frontier” that needed to be protected to protect America’s wilderness exceptionalism (Nash 2001). Prominent USF&W researcher and Wilderness Society member George Collins, an acolyte of previous Alaska wilderness advocates John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Bob Marshall, claimed an Arctic Refuge would be “an antidote to the attitude of conquest, control and domination of nature that characterized this pioneering heritage” (Kaye 2006, pg. 27). He was far from the only powerful figure to voice these sentiments or work to institutionalize them. Court Justice William Douglas was also an ardent supporter for the movement and used his position in the Supreme Court to promote preservation of the wilderness in the northern Alaska that he so loved.

The movement expanded its boundaries to embrace anti-nuclear protestors, natives, anti-modernists, sportsmen, and other idealists from the continental United States intent on blocking American expansion into Alaska’s north during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. America’s relatively open political and media systems gave these groups the ability to work on the precedent set by previous wilderness promoters to make Alaska the nation’s key “location of national debate on development versus preservation,” even though
the vast majority of Americans still had never traveled to northern Alaska nor had seen the land for themselves (Nelson 2004, pg. 66). In American social consciousness, northern Alaska, and the Arctic in general, was successfully constructed into a place wilderness promoter Barry Lopez (1986) describes as the “Arctic sublime.”

Taking a cue from Teddy Roosevelt, and setting a deeper precedent for future presidents, President Eisenhower tapped into this movement and bolstered his legacy as an environmental steward at the end of his presidency in 1960 by setting aside nine million acres on Alaska’s North Slope, an area the size of Indiana (Banet 1991, pg. 2), to be perpetually reserved in what is now known as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). At the time, Alaska leaned Democratic and only had one Congressional representative, so the Eisenhower administration correctly believed setting aside this large area, in such an austere part of the country, would not challenge the Republican Party’s existing political power and would augment the president’s legacy (Caldon and Chater 2016).

The creation of ANWR, thereafter, pitted the federal government and the environmental movement against the state of Alaska and resource extraction industries, both of which were interested in developing the region and extracting the refuge’s natural resources for economic gain. The lack of drilling in ANWR so far is a testament to the power of precedent, the environmental movement’s sustained political power, federal agencies’ bureaucratic desire to maintain control over the territory, and support for ANWR from influential and affluent individuals in the continental United States.

Project Chariot was a further rallying cry for environmental activists and their political supporters to save Alaska from development. The reckless plans the newly formed federal Atomic Energy Commission researched in the late 1950s and early 1960s to make a deep-
water harbor in northwest Alaska with an atomic weapon spurred resistance from an increasingly aggressive and connected array of native groups, scientists, and wilderness lovers inside of Alaska, who successfully made saving the Alaskan wilderness a national issue (O’Neill 2007). The pressure these groups put on the federal government resulted in the first federal Environmental Impact Study (EIS) ever. The EIS highlighted the risks of the reckless project, successfully shut it down, and established another road block for subsequent development in America’s north when EISs were made mandatory by the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) that was signed into law in 1970. The networking and organizational skills the organizers developed and the greater institutionalized environmental safeguards they pushed for during this lightning rod affair made it easier for them to organize to challenge subsequent development efforts in Alaska.

One such effort was to stop nuclear tests planned for the uninhabited Aleutian Island of Amchitka in the late 1960s. The tests motivated environmental activists from the United States and Canada to create Greenpeace. Although unsuccessful at stopping the tests on Amchitka, the strong opposition Greenpeace presented, and the popular support they gained, likely kept other tests from occurring in Alaska. Greenpeace’s prominence grew due to its highly publicized direct intervention techniques, while its membership soared, and it gained enough financial assets to fund its own research. This allowed it to influence public opinion and public policy towards wilderness preservation in the Arctic and successfully stop commercial whaling and sealing in the Arctic in subsequent decades (Wynn 2007, pg. 405).

The next critical juncture came when oil companies, supported by the state of Alaska, looked to develop oil fields on Alaska’s North Slope in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The groups that previously worked together to put down Project Chariot and the Amchitka nuclear
tests coalesced into a group called the Alaska Coalition, which was composed of the Audubon Club, the Defenders of Wildlife, Trout Unlimited, the Wildlife Management Institute, the National Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, the Wilderness Society and the League of Conservation Voters, to restrict the proposed project (Nelson 2004, pgs. 103-104). Even right-of-center political interest groups interested in preserving hunting areas, like the National Rifle Association, joined the coalition (Wynn 2007, pg. 268). Recent high-profile oil spills off the North American coasts, like the one off the coast of Santa Barbara in 1969, provided grist for their efforts (Wynn 2007, pg. 298).

As environmental historian Daniel Nelson (2004, pg. 129) concludes, “The unprecedented assaults on the Alaska wilderness” resulted in concerted “new efforts to preserve what remained.” These efforts to slow development were built on nearly a century of growing environmental consciousness and the idea the Arctic was fragile and needed to be preserved. Consequently, American environmentalists took advantage of America’s competitive political institutions to slow hydrocarbon extraction in Prudhoe Bay, construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS), and the construction of supply roads for the TAPS. This occurred even as Norway, a similarly liberal circumpolar country, pushed vigorously to extract off-shore hydrocarbons in the North Sea (Banet 1991, pg. 7).

Canada, a country that was deeply attuned to and affected by America’s cultural proclivities due to the relatively open border between the two countries, put further roadblocks to America’s expansion using America’s sensitivity to the Arctic environment. It had its own growing ranks of environmentalists that were networked with neighboring American activists that also promoted this tactic. These activists pushed the Canadian government to block a proposed pipeline from Alaska’s North Slope down the Mackenzie
River Valley, after witnessing the environmental damage of the supply road that was constructed to support TAPS (Wynn 2007, pg. 209). Spurred by the SS Manhattan’s passage of the NWP in 1969, Canada enacted the unconventional and novel Arctic Waters Pollution Protection Act (AWPPA) in 1970 to claim jurisdiction over the ice-covered passages of the Northwest Passage to nominally protect them from environmental abuse caused by oil tankers.

Prominent Canadian politicians later admitted the law, however, was cynically used to support sovereignty efforts as much as it was to protect the environment (Lajeunesse 2012, pgs. 218-222). Even still, Canada had support from diverse groups for its efforts. A growing population of Canadian environmentalists joined Canadian anti-Americanists to support the bill. Although the American government disliked the law, influential American environmental groups loved it and American newspaper editorials were overwhelmingly in favor of Canada’s initiative (Lajeunesse 2012, pg. 209). Importantly, other polar countries, including the opportunist Soviet Union, also supported the Canadians because the law created a precedent that would also allow them more jurisdiction over their northern coastlines if they made reciprocal laws regarding their own Arctic coastal waters (Lajeunesse 2012, pgs. 214). To this end, AWPPA was later institutionalized under Article 234 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. America’s demure acceptance of Article 234 highlighted the growing domestic and international support for environmental security in the exceptionally “pristine and fragile” Arctic. This ideological construction of the region undermined America’s willingness to promote a larger sphere of influence in the Arctic than it otherwise could have.
America’s greater focus on environmental security can also be seen in Greenland. As the American military retrenched from Greenland in the late 1960s ecologically-minded scientists, many of which had originally worked on defense-oriented science projects, changed their focus to climate-oriented research. One impetus for this was the 1966 ice core project that was conducted at Camp Century. This ice core, first extracted to determine if Greenland would be a suitable site for missile silos, eventually made Greenland famous for providing evidence of previous climatic change. The ice core gave scientists a greater appreciation for mankind’s growing influence on that change (Martin-Nielsen 2013, pg. 56). National Science Foundation (NSF) funded scientists replaced the more national security-oriented Department of Defense (DoD) researchers. According to science historian Janet Martin-Nielsen (2013, pg. 68), Greenland was “re-imagined” through NSF research, which reached a relatively receptive public sphere in the western world through publication of its climatic research, as a prime representation of the “world’s climatic fragility.”

Ultimately, America’s polar concerns actively transitioned from conventional security and economic concerns to environmental and human security concerns as the Cold War stabilized and America’s foreign relationships and geopolitical interests decreased its willingness to expand its sphere of influence into the Arctic. America’s environmental concerns for the Arctic contrasted greatly with the Soviet Union’s continued attempts to “conquer” the Arctic environment.

5.2. Soviet Environmentalism

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33 Full disclosure, I actively participate in current NSF-funded multinational climatic research in Greenland with the New York Air National Guard as a pilot on LC-130 transport aircraft. The mix of NSF and DoD resources used to conduct climatic research reflects the complex mix of conventional and environmental security concerns that now are intertwined in the United States. The continued use of DoD assets to conduct research in Greenland also reflects the power of precedent and the rational interest of bureaucratic agencies like the NYANG, which previously supplied the DEW sites to find new functions after their initial mission goes away.
Early in the Cold War, the Soviet Union continued to neglect environmental preservation that might have slowed its expansion into the Arctic. As Weiner (1999) attests, this was deeply structural, since one of the Soviet system’s main goals was to transform nature, not preserve it. Even the Soviet zapovedniki (nature reserves) that were set aside to study nature, so that it could be improved by the Soviet state, were greatly marginalized after World War II. A 1951 Soviet decree reduced their number from 128 to 88 and their overall area from 0.6% of Soviet territory to less than 0.06% (Weiner 1999, pg. 129). The zapovedniki that survived the bureaucratic assault were used for more utilitarian purposes. For instance, soldiers attempted to train moose to transport military supplies in the European Russian Arctic Pechoro-Ilych Reserve (Weiner 1999, pg. 123) and the Reserve’s forests were actively felled to meet Soviet timber quotas.

The zapovedniki’s administrators and the meager scientific civil society that supported nature protection were culled by Stalinist purges or afraid to speak up more assertively to save the zapovedniki (Weiner 1999, pgs. 63-200). Even Ivan Papanin, former director of Glavsevmorput, who was awarded the honor of “Hero of the Soviet Union” for his aviation exploits in the Arctic, was unable to move the government towards greater concern for the environment when he was co-opted by social activists to resist Stalin’s decision to slash the zapovedniki (Weiner 1999, pg. 120). This reflected Papanin’s acknowledgement of the fragility of the Arctic…and also the Soviet state’s continued disregard for that fragility.

Therefore, there was no organized domestic resistance to the Soviet Union’s auspicious nuclear tests at Novaya Zemlya in the 1950s like there were to the American nuclear tests at Amchitka. Instead of turning the islands into a zapovednik, as was planned before 1949, the Soviets unleashed the largest nuclear detonation ever when the Tsar Bomba
was exploded on the island in 1961 that was three thousand times more powerful than the American bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima. This sensational blast was just one of over two hundred nuclear explosions conducted on the island from 1951-1990 (Clash 2015). The islands were heavily militarized to support the tests and to keep away foreign intelligence assets. Its nature was truly transformed and conquered by the Soviets who were unworried about its pristineness or fragility.

After Stalin died, the high crime of “kowtowing to the West” declined, which allowed some environmental thought from the West to creep into Soviet academia (Weiner 1999, pg. 255). Khrushchev slowly opened up the Soviet government and allowed its scientists to travel abroad. Greater contact with western scientists permitted environmental consciousness to slowly grow within pockets of the Soviet scientific community (Ostergren and Holle 1998, pg. 309). Soviet scientists that were tasked with maintaining the zapovedniki actively looked to build support for their tenuous attempts to preserve nature and cooperated with like-minded western scientists (Weiner 1999, pgs. 255-256).

But the Soviet government was still much less worried about environmental security than the United States and had much more power to develop and enact policy than the American government, which was open to lobbying by influential environmental groups and affluent society. It heavily regulated the Soviet press so that it was hesitant to expose any potentially embarrassing environmental problems, like the American press did, that could have influenced Soviet public opinion against the Soviet government’s attempts to conquer the Arctic. Equally importantly, decades of heavy industrial exploitation in the Arctic had conditioned the Soviets that the Arctic was not the pristine region that America’s conceived it to be. Environmental concerns, therefore, still did not measurably constrain the Soviet
Union’s willingness to expand into the Arctic or to develop capabilities to tame the Arctic. Similarly, even though the Soviet government loosened its control over its citizens, the slim number of Soviet citizens who wanted more environmental preservation had less power to influence policy than their counterparts in America.

5.3 Summary

By the 1970s, the divide between American and Soviet environmentalism had institutionally differentiated the two countries approach to the Arctic. For the United States, environmental preservation more and more trumped the economic and military incentives to develop the region. More and more Arctic territory in Alaska was blocked off from development and human access in nature reserves. In contrast, the Soviets reduced the amount of Arctic territory that was protected and even used some of the territory that was formerly protected for economic and military purposes.

6. Native Rights

As was documented in previous chapters, the Soviet and American approach to their northern native populations contrasted greatly. As the Cold War and the search for scarce natural resources turned the spotlight on the Arctic, this difference made the Soviet Union more willing to expand its presence in the Arctic than was the United States. By the 1970s, it had successfully internally colonized its Arctic territory. In contrast, the United States had allowed its native groups in Alaska a modicum of sovereignty. The natives used this sovereignty to restrain “outsiders” from the United States from expanding their presence and control over northern Alaska.

6.1 American Native Rights
In many respects, Americans saw their country’s role in World War II as a facilitator of self-determination to weak and oppressed people around the world. This role gave the United States the motivation to use its newfound superpower status to undermine international colonial structures. The United States also promoted self-determination internationally to support its ideological battle against the spread of Soviet-inspired Communism (Gaddis 2005). These international efforts paradoxically put pressure on the United States to address the semi-colonial status of its own previously marginalized populations.

Alaskan citizens had long urged for more self-determination (see previous chapters). As American historian Henry W. Clark surmised in 1930, “The lack of government in Alaska is a blot upon our pretensions towards enlightened democracy” (qtd in Naske 1973, pg. 47). As the United States now pushed enlightened democracy to other places around the world, Alaska’s politicians seized on the irony. The Governor of Alaska, Ernest Gruening (1967, pg. ix), stressed that if the United States pushed empowerment and self-determination in other places, shouldn’t it also look to bring “the frontiers of freedom and liberty to America’s farthest north?”

Statehood was finally given to Alaska in 1959. The incorporation of Alaska forced the United States government to re-evaluate how it would deal with the thousands of natives who were not previously given the choice of whether or not to become American citizens when America purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867. Alaska’s natives, now more firmly integrated into local and national politics than at any other previous time, were organized enough and knowledgeable enough of America’s political system, by this time, to take advantage of this zeitgeist. Ironically, state of Alaska officials that wanted more political representation for themselves tried to restrict natives’ claims to Alaskan territory so that it could gain control
over this territory for the newly established State of Alaska. Korsmo (1994, pg. 90) explains that post-Statehood competition for land and water motivated natives to locally resist encroachment, to regionally organize, and to take their claims to the courts.

In 1966, the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) formed within America’s relatively open political system on the back of these international movements and the American Civil Rights movement. It was created from native networks that were successfully established over the previous decades (see previous chapters). According to its current website, the AFN successfully lobbied the American government to sign the Alaska Native Claims Settlements Act (ANCSA) into law in 1971. ANCSA “conveyed over 40 million acres of land and nearly $1 billion dollars in compensation to Alaska Native peoples.” Native “corporations” were formed to govern the resources of over ten percent of Alaska’s land (See Figure 10), much of it in the Arctic territory that “outsiders” from the continental United States had not yet established themselves in, and where native political structures remained largely intact (Bodenhorn 2000, pg. 139; Fierup-Riordan 2000, pgs. 247, 252-253). The federal government put a land freeze on state acquisitions in 1966, and again in 1968, when oil was discovered in Prudhoe Bay, to allow native claims to be settled before development by outsiders was allowed to occur (Bodenhorn 2000, pg. 140).

Accordingly, the North Slope Borough and the Northwest Arctic Borough gained more autonomy than other native territorial holdings in Alaska after the enactment of ANCSA Korsmo (1994, pg. 100). These regional governments gained the power to tax, regulate hydrocarbon extraction operations, run local schools, and regulate hunting and fishing on their territory. This was in keeping with the general move to self-determination in federal Indian
law in the United States and strengthened by the 1968 Indian Civil Rights Act (Korsmo 1994, pg. 100).

Although the political zeitgeist largely contributed to ANCSA, the evolving energy crisis facing the United States, and the large hydrocarbon find in Prudhoe Bay, also pushed the American Congress to push the deal through (Korsmo 1994, pg. 91). Energy companies wanted the property rights to the North Slope clearly defined so they knew with whom to negotiate before they invested the tremendous capital needed to extract the region’s hydrocarbons (Mead 1978). The compromise reflected in ANCSA between the federal government, the State of Alaska, and Alaska’s native groups was a function of America’s plural government system, external forces pushing up the value of energy resources to make them profitable to extract from northern Alaska, and precedent.

Sovereignty over Alaska, which was previously held almost solely by the federal government, was now split between the federal government, the State of Alaska (who was given close to a third of Alaska’s territory), and thirteen native corporations after ANCSA. The complicated ANCSA ruling made it time consuming and difficult to determine who had claims to what territory and resulted in many long court battles (Federal Indian Law for Alaska Tribes 2018, Unit 3). Stock in the native corporations could not be sold on the open market, which effectively kept non-natives from ever gaining ownership rights within the native corporations (Federal Indian Law for Alaska Tribes 2018, Unit 3). This monopoly necessarily limited outside investment so that natives did not lose control of the corporations to “outside” American groups in a neo-colonial fashion.

The thirteen native corporations, themselves, were internally split on whether they wanted to work with environmental groups and federal agencies to preserve lands, and their
Natives from Port Hope that were previously threatened by Project Chariot, for instance, were understandably wary of development schemes and worked cooperatively with environmental groups thereafter to restrain extraction operations near their traditional territory in northwest Alaska (O’Neill 2007). Alternatively, native corporations like the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC) were more amenable to working with extraction companies and economic growth-oriented federal agencies like the USGS and the DOI to extract resources. However, even the ASRC still attempted to highly regulate these operations to protect whale and caribou hunting, which were the traditional sources of their livelihood (Reiss 2012).

ANCSA ultimately restrained American presence in northern Alaska. It institutionalized a dizzying array of native political interest groups who aligned or competed with another dizzying array of environmental groups and/or resource extraction companies. This development increased the economic and political costs of developing Arctic Alaska by institutionalizing territorial monopolies that limited competition, by increasing the number of veto players, by increasing the amount of bureaucratic regulations imposed on operations, and by increasing the number of judicial claims that had to be dealt with before development could occur. As was theorized by political economist Mancur Olson (1984) in a more general manner, the added layers of bureaucracy decreased the economic efficiency of doing business in Arctic Alaska and thereby also restrained American presence and capability to operate in the region. This was the case even though largescale resource extraction became profitable in northern Alaska for the first time since the whaling and Klondike gold-mining eras. In contrast to the natives in northern Russia, however, ANCSA provided natives with financial
resources to improve their human capital and infrastructure, so that they could undertake their own development (Fierup-Riordan 2000, pg. 254).

International concerns for native rights also kept the United States from expanding into Greenland. One of the reasons that Denmark refused to allow the United States to purchase Greenland after World War II was that it could not “sell” Greenland natives’ territory without their permission. The Danish Prime Minister stated that Greenlandic natives should have the right to decide their fate instead of being sold away to the United States as the Russians had previously done to natives in Alaska (Gronlandposten 1948, pg. 70, translated by Google Translator). It is unknown if concern for natives’ self-determination was just a negotiating tactic, because the prime minister never set up a referendum for Greenland’s natives to make this choice. However, the fact that Denmark gave Greenland “home-rule” in 1979 after natives voted for it suggests that the Danish government really was beginning to recognize natives as legitimate owners of Greenland even in the 1940s.

As we will see in the next chapter, the greater political influence given to Greenland’s natives, as well as to the natives of northern Canada and Alaska, allowed the groups to network together across the international borders that separated them. This collective action allowed them to maximize their political power in the decades that followed and resist further encroachment in the Arctic by non-natives.

Overall, compared to the Soviet Union, America’s native concerns increased during the first few decades of the Cold War. While American native groups suffered many of the same problems as Soviet natives, like suicide, alcoholism, wage disparity, economic dependency, and attenuation of their unique cultures, they retained much more political power than their Soviet counterparts. Sometimes native concerns equaled, or at least complicated,
the military and economic concerns that influenced its Arctic policy. This restrained America’s willingness to expand its jurisdiction over the Arctic – even in its own sovereign territory of Alaska. Although native groups had little material power, the American government, motivated greatly by public opinion, American values enshrined in the Constitution, and evolving domestic and international law, recognized native groups’ legitimate rights to govern territory in Alaska based on their historic occupation to this territory. The ability of America’s northern native groups to secure autonomy and political influence during this critical juncture made them the purveyor for greater Arctic native rights that contested the unilateral sovereignty democratically-ruled Arctic countries had over their own northern territory in the decades that followed.

6.2 Soviet Native Rights

In stark divergence with America’s evolving stance towards its own northern native population, the Soviet Union emerged from World War II with a greater control over its northern native population and a greater motivation to subvert, assimilate, and control it than ever before. The most influential post-war policy changes in respect to natives were those that attempted to “Russify” the country. According to Stalin’s new policies, Russia was to be regarded as first among the over one hundred recognized Soviet nations. Under this construct, the other Soviet nations were pushed to assimilate to Russian mores to improve the material power of the Soviet Union (Vakhtin 1994, pg. 53).

In line with this, Yuri Slezkine (1994, pgs. 306-307) argues that under Stalin’s post-war direction northern natives were now seen as an important component of historic “Russian imperial exploits.” Furthermore, Russia’s former colonial efforts in the north were re-imagined as benevolent enterprises to support this narrative – a far change from the rhetoric of
liberation of the natives that was associated with the Bolshevik Revolution. What remained similar between the Bolsheviks and the Stalinists were their state-sponsored efforts to modernize and industrialize their northern populations. The Soviets even used the natives’ progress towards “modernization” to attract third world countries to Soviet Communism (Slezkine 1994, pg. 319).

Natives were now officially recognized as inferior subjects to their Russian patrons – or a “last among equals” according to Slezkine (1994, pf. 323). If they objected to Russian domination too vociferously, they were arrested for crimes against the state. For instance, Vakhtin (1994, pg. 68) claims that over three thousand natives in sparsely populated Yakutiya, and the majority of the native Shor intelligentsia, were arrested for political crimes between 1950 and 1985.

When Stalin died in 1953 and the gulag system was dismantled, a new wave of ethnic Europeans migrated to the north to mine and to provide services to the larger settlements that were being constructed on the Soviet tundra (Anderson 2000, pgs. 64-65). Traditional native land was further appropriated to provide oil and gold for the state (Vakhtin 1994, pgs. 63-65). Natives were unable to challenge the influx of ethnic Russians (Slezkine 1994, pg. 337) even as Stalin’s previously hard-handed policies against them were tempered.

The diluted native northern population found it difficult to maintain its subsistence lifestyle. One of the most extreme examples of this was the Chuckhis, a native group on the Pacific side of the Soviet Arctic Ocean, which went from being 96.3% of the district’s population in 1930 to less than 12.8% of it in 1970. Russian became the dominant language because natives were forced to learn and use it at schools (Schweitzer and Gray 2000, pg. 24; 34)

34 It should be noted that diluting the native population to achieve local dominance was also a tactic used by the Soviets in border regions like the Caucasus, Crimea, and Chechnya (Nekrich 1978).
Anderson 2000, pg. 65; Vakhtin 1994, pg. 54). Native elites were created and installed as the second-ranking official in many local governments (Schweitzer and Gray 2000, pg. 24) to provide the illusion of native progress under Communism some legitimacy. In reality, they had little power. Vakhtin (1994, pg. 54) argues that since these native leaders were hired for their ethnicity instead of their competence, they often performed poorly. This, in turn, fed into greater Russian chauvinism and a greater willingness by the Soviets to subsume the native population. Paradoxically, the Soviet policies expressly designed to create a single Soviet people exacerbated class distinctions based on ethnicity, instead of smoothing them over, and according to David Anderson (2000, pg. 66) were “one short step away from deliberate genocide.” Vakhtin (1994, pg. 69) backs up this claim by showing that the economic disparity between northern natives and Russians that existed in the 1930s continued until the 1990s.

Compounding their weakened position, natives were forced out of their largely nomadic existence and forcibly resettled into larger communities where they were expected to perform more “productive” labor. The resettlement was often handled incompetently (Vakhtin 1994, pg. 59). Collectives consisted of prefab buildings that were not ideally designed for the northern environment (Slezkine 1994, pgs. 341-342). As many as sixteen natives were forced to live in a two-room house and often were not given permission to hunt and fish on “state lands and waters” (Vakhtin 1994, pg. 59) that were historically theirs.35

Native societies were further torn apart by enforced Soviet education policies which included compulsory boarding schools. Slezkine (1994, pgs. 342-243) notes that “successive generations of native graduates (and dropouts) found themselves unwilling and unable to join their elders or even communicate with them in their mother tongue, and the modern

35 The state owned all of the territory of the Soviet Union.
equipment that was supposed to render traditional skills obsolete was either not in evidence or manned by better prepared immigrants.” Vakhtin (1994, pg. 61) asserts that parents no longer felt responsibility for their children because they deferred this responsibility to the Soviet state. This resulted in suicides, alcoholism, and other extreme social problems that further weakened the native communities (Schweitzer and Gray 2000, pg. 24) and resulted in a steep decline in native life expectancy (Vakhtin 1994, pg. 60). It also resulted in socialization and extreme dependence on the Soviet state (Vakhtin 1994, pg. 61) – something that would adversely affect native groups’ ability to contest Russian dominance in northern lands, even after the Soviet Union dissolved decades later (Anderson 2000 pgs. 64-65).

The weakened native societies weighed on the Soviet Union’s northern economic system, which continued to operate in an irrational fashion. Devoid of their subsistence lifestyle, and forced out of jobs by incomers, the Soviet government was forced to subsidize the native groups. The Soviet government had both the willingness and capability to exert control over their northern territory, even if doing so debilitated the local populations and kept them from developing the territory themselves.

6.3 Summary

Unlike the United States, the Soviet Union did not let native interests stand in the way of greater national imperialist desires to conquer the Arctic. As one Soviet state official honestly declared on northern matters, “The interests of the state go first, the interests of the people are subordinate” (qtd. in Vakhtin 1994, pg. 69).

7. Path Dependence

In sum, the United States was much less intent on dominating the Arctic than the Soviets were after World War II, despite the geopolitical and economic pulls that attracted
both countries to the region. Geopolitically speaking, the allies America accumulated during World War II gave it external support which both restrained it from the Arctic and allowed it to direct its material power elsewhere. Specifically, the United States deepened and institutionalized the security ties it had already established with Canada, Iceland, Denmark, and Norway during World War II, and this allowed it to externally balance against the Soviets in the Arctic. It used these allies to construct a defense-in-depth containment strategy on the Arctic perimeter to keep the Soviets contained in the Arctic and transferred more and more responsibilities to these allies as they became capable and willing to handle them.

Market forces and economic protectionism also continued to damper America’s enthusiasm for developing the Arctic. The lack of infrastructure, the austerity of the Arctic from large markets, and the expense of extracting resources in the Arctic cold meant the Arctic remained an economic frontier for most American businesses. However, improvements in Alaska’s transportation infrastructure that resulted from the World War II and Cold War military efforts, and the installment of the Alaskan state government, made economic enterprise more feasible in northern Alaska, when the oncoming energy crises of the early 1970s made it profitable to extract Arctic hydrocarbon resources than was previously the case.

Finally, existing environmental and native concerns in Alaska became more institutionalized and more competent at shaping America’s Arctic policies as their leaders reacted strongly against early Cold War government efforts to militarize and develop Alaska. These groups effectively restrained America from being more assertive not just in Alaska, but in Greenland, after World War II decolonization efforts and the American Civil Rights movement took hold.
In contrast to America’s reluctance to assert itself in the Arctic, the Soviet Union took advantage of the capabilities it had already developed before and during World War II to redouble its previous efforts to conquer the Arctic. Specifically, it used its growing material strength to make the Kola Peninsula and the ice-free waters that bordered it one of the most militarized places in the world. It also established military outposts on its expansive Arctic coastline and in the Russian Arctic Archipelago at settlements from which it already extracted resources. It improved its ability to operate on the Northern Sea Route to support these settlements and installations. It also developed submarines equipped with long-range nuclear missiles and began to bastion them under the polar ice. Cumulatively, these efforts gave the Soviet Union the capability to access the world’s oceans, protect its now vulnerable northern coastline, and extend its control over most of the Arctic Ocean.

The Soviet Union’s bid to control the Arctic was further underpinned by deeply entrenched economic institutions and a dependence on raw resources that pushed it to increase its presence and improve its capability to operate in the Arctic. As the OPEC oil embargo approached, the Soviets became especially enamored with using their hydrocarbon wealth, more and more of which came from the Arctic, to acquire critical foreign currency reserves and diplomatic leverage. Environmental and native concerns were much less important to the Soviets than the United States and did not serve as serious impediments to get in the way of their goal to conquer the Arctic. Furthermore, unlike the United States, the Soviet government continued to develop a national narrative that was now decades old that deepened its national attachment to the Arctic and promoted the myth that Russians and the Soviet state had unique attributes that uniquely allowed them to conquer the Arctic to legitimize its often coercive and expansive plans to develop the Arctic.
Overall, by the early-1970s, the Soviet Union had effectively established itself as master of the Arctic. The United States tried to keep the Soviets contained in the Arctic more than it tried to compete with it there - largely due to the historical precedent, relationships, and institutions that shaped the two countries’ differing approaches to the region.
Chapter 6: OPEC Oil Embargo to the End of the Cold War (1973-1992)

1. Introduction

The 1970s and 1980s were dominated by two events that greatly affected the Arctic. The first was rising energy security concerns. The second was the rapid dissolution of the Soviet Union.

As I will discuss in detail in the economic section of this chapter the Soviet Union was well positioned to profit economically and strategically from the energy crises of the 1970s because of its previous willingness to invest in Arctic resource extraction operations and Arctic infrastructure. The windfall profits from resources extracted from the Arctic gave the Soviet Union the material means to strengthen its military and the willingness to embark on even greater efforts to develop the Arctic. Its limited access to the world’s oceans meant that its expanding navy heavily utilized the Arctic Ocean to meet its increasing international obligations. The increased range of the missiles on Soviet submarines also contributed to the Soviet’s decision to “bastion” its nuclear submarine force under the relative safety of the Arctic ice. This militarized legacy would outlast the Soviet Union and provide the Russian state that emerged from it an outsized military presence in the Arctic.

In contrast to Russia’s largely unilateral approach to the Arctic, the United States’ utilized the polar allies it had already established institutionalized security ties with to balance the Soviet threat. These alliances strengthened as the Soviet military threat grew on the Kola Peninsula and in the Arctic Ocean just as Walt’s theory of alliance building (1987) predicts. However, as we will see, America’s allies continued to be wary of allowing the United States to establish a more permanent military presence in the Arctic than their long-standing relationships had previously
entertained. In essence, they continued to weigh their security concerns with their sovereignty concerns and were concerned with breaking precedent.

The historical and institutional differences between the United States and the Soviet Union also meant the United States was still much less keen on pursuing Arctic resources than the Soviets. The large profit margins created by the energy crises of the 1970s and 1980s lured private American oil companies to the Arctic for the first time in a serious fashion. Unlike the Soviets, these companies had to build the expensive infrastructure to extract and transport the resources from scratch. Additionally, in contrast to the Soviets these companies sharply curtailed their investment in the Arctic when resource prices sharply declined in the 1980s. As will be discussed in the environment and native rights section of this chapter, the now well-developed native rights and environmental lobbies in America restrained the energy companies further, complicated America’s approach to the Arctic, and made the country unwilling to establish more acute material interests in the Arctic than it did during this critical juncture. In fact, these interest groups used the energy crises to more firmly establish the ideological construct of the Arctic as a pristine wilderness area under threat and managed to institutionally protect millions more acres of Alaska’s Arctic territory in nature reserves.

In the end, America’s unwillingness to push into the Arctic to match the Soviets was beneficial because the “resource curse” bit the Soviet Union when energy prices plunged in the 1980s. The associated economic decline weakened the Soviet Union’s material capability to sustain the large military presence it built up in the Arctic. It also opened the door to reformists politicians who attempted to address the impending economic crisis through military retrenchment and economic and political liberalization.
Led by Mikhail Gorbachev, the reformists “new thinking” led to the rapid and largely unanticipated dissolution of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev’s agency at this critical juncture temporarily altered Russia’s approach to the Arctic by increasing its concern for environmental and human security and partially demobilizing its large military presence. His 1987 Murmansk Speech highlighted the Soviet Union’s lack of willingness and capability to expand its sphere of influence into the Arctic while its material power ebbed. This reprieve created the political space that allowed materially weaker Arctic states, international governmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations to construct the beginnings of a legal regime in the Arctic that would restrain both the United States and Russia afterwards.

This chapter explains the reasons for the evolution of both countries’ capability and willingness to control the Arctic from the OPEC oil crisis until the end of the Cold War in more detail. In doing so, it highlights how the previously developed institutions, regional relationships, and interests of the two countries influenced their differing approaches to the Arctic – differences that persist despite the predicted political, economic, and ideological convergence of the two states after the Soviet Union crumbled (Fukuyama 1992).

2. Geopolitics

During the 1970s the security dilemma intensified in the Arctic, instigated by the Soviet military’s build-up on the already heavily fortified Kola peninsula, its use of the Arctic basin as a nuclear submarine “bastion,” and the growing importance of northern Scandinavia to both superpowers’ conventional war plans in Europe. This section discusses why the Soviets continued to militarize the Arctic and why the United States largely chose to balance the Soviet Union with its allies, and rely on a forward flexible presence, instead of establishing a more
permanent military presence commensurate with its overall material strength and the Soviet threat.

2.1. American Geopolitics

After Vietnam, there was greater foreign and domestic resistance to the American military than at any other time since World War II and its resources were sharply curtailed as the American economy stalled in the 1970s. Increasing concerns for energy security and Communist in-roads in South American and Central America pushed the United States to move its geopolitical focus towards the Middle East, South America and Central America and away from northern latitudes. It slowly abrogated more of its security responsibility in the Arctic to its NATO allies. It was able to this because these allies were materially much stronger than they were after World War II, largely because of American post-war economic and military aid. These northern allies haltingly moved to secure NATO’s northern flank against the growing conventional military power of the Soviet Union. Only when Reagan was elected in 1980 did the United States again turn its attention to the Arctic. Even then it worked with its NATO allies under a “flexible forward presence” strategy instead of establishing a more permanent regional military presence to meet the growing Soviet threat.

Far from being solely the result of short-term realist calculations, or liberal cooperation, America’s cautious approach to Arctic security was guided by the enduring relationships it had already established with these other Arctic countries and the relatively high economic costs of maintaining a large military presence in the Arctic. The following sections describes the evolution of America’s military presence in the Arctic geographically from west to east during this timeframe. It shows how this presence was much smaller and much less permanent than the presence the materially weaker Soviets were willing and able to field at the same time.
2.1.1. Alaska

America’s military presence in Alaska continued its decline from its early Cold War prominence throughout the 1970s and 1980s despite the state’s rapidly emerging importance to the country’s energy security and the State of Alaska’s interest in maximizing federal funding. The increasing range of intercontinental ballistic missiles, aircraft, and cruise missiles and the automation of military surveillance and communication decreased the need for a large manned military presence in the state. Equally important, the end of the Vietnam War and the stabilization of the conflict in Korea meant Alaska became a much less important logistical hub than it was before. The slowly declining strategic importance placed on the state can be seen in the abolishment of the Alaska Sea Command and the Alaska Army Command in 1971 and 1974 respectively. By the end of the 1970s, less than twenty-four thousand military personnel were stationed in Alaska, almost exclusively at sub-Arctic bases near Anchorage and Fairbanks (United States National Park Service 2014, pg. 11). This presence contrasted greatly with the hundreds of thousands of military servicemembers that were stationed in the state during World War II and the beginning of the Cold War. It also contrasted greatly with the Soviet Union which continued to build its military presence throughout its expansive Arctic territory at the same time.

Of the three major military services, only the Air Force retained a major command in Alaska after the mid-1970s. Even this remaining command was focused more on using Alaska as a shield than as a platform to project power northward. To that end, the Arctic early warning system was modernized with the construction of minimally attended radars (MARs) that greatly relieved the cost, manning, and supply requirements of the radars they replaced. In 1983 all thirteen aircraft control and warning squadrons in Alaska were decommissioned. Symbolic of the
de-militarization the duties of thousands of military members that formally manned the sites were handed over to tens of contracted civilian maintainers (Cloe and Monaghan 1987, pgs. 238-242). Similarly, the Aleutian DEW stations and their accompanied communication stations were shut down in 1979, replaced by more automated and networked systems (United States National Park Service 2014 pg. 11). The automation saved the government money and reduced its logistical burden. However, the savings came with a cost because the American military’s institutional knowledge of the Arctic also decreased and the logistical supply system that formerly supplied the austere bases were greatly scaled back.

Only with the election of hawkish Ronald Reagan in 1980 did American airpower see a resurgence in Alaska. The most modern American air interceptor, the F-15, was then stationed in Alaska. The concept of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) also took root and plans were made to base missile interceptors in bases near Fairbanks where missile warning systems were already stationed. Strategic bomber and reconnaissance flights over the pole ticked up again as superpower competition increased.

All told, however, American military presence in Alaska was a shell compared to its earlier World War II and Cold War peaks. Very few new military installations were constructed during this period and many of the legacy installations were abandoned, became dilapidated, or were torn down. There was little political will to sustain this expensive presence, especially when America was facing acute economic problems in the 1970s and faced with energy security threats coming from the Middle East and Communist insurgencies in South America and Central America.

2.1.2. American Arctic Maritime Capability
America’s unwillingness to maintain a presence and capability in the Arctic was further reflected in the diminution of its icebreaker fleet. The fleet of seven Windclass icebreakers that was built and loaned to the Soviet Union during World War II, was transferred to the Coast Guard in 1966 and was at the end of its service life by the mid-1970s. The Coast Guard received much less procurement funding than the Navy and its focus was much more insular than the Navy. Consequently, the Coast Guard was not enthused to replace or renovate the icebreakers when it faced funding shortfalls in the 1970s. Even the development of hydrocarbon resources on Alaska’s North Slope and the passage of the Arctic Research and Policy Act of 1984 (sponsored by Alaska Senator Frank Murkowski) that specifically directed the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to “facilitate planning for the procurement, maintenance, and deployment of icebreakers needed to provide a platform for Arctic Research” (Congressional Record 1984) failed to push the American government to maintain and significantly upgrade its icebreaker fleet.

Only two of the Windclass icebreakers, the Northwind and Westwind, were modernized and refurbished in the 1970s. The rest were scrapped. And only two new icebreakers, the USS Polar Star and the USS Polar Sea, replaced the Windclass icebreakers. These new icebreakers had to be procured by the Navy and then transferred to the Coast Guard because the Coast Guard lacked the ability or funding to develop and pay for the icebreakers itself (Barber et al. 1975). By the end of the 1980s these two ships - more capable, but less armed than the ones they replaced - were the only icebreakers left in the American fleet, and they were forced to split their time between the Arctic and Antarctic regions.

Like today, this fleet was far smaller, less capable, and more stretched than the fleet of its Russian adversaries. This marginal fleet limited America’s ability to perform the type of
freedom of navigation exercises through the “Soviet” Northern Sea Route that it attempted during the 1960s (see Chapter 5). In truth, it barely had the capability to perform the much more mundane seasonal resupply and research tasks it was assigned in coastal waters. This was borne out in 1988 when the United States was embarrassingly forced to rely on Soviet icebreakers to free three whales that were stranded on Alaska’s North Slope (Mauer 2012). The fact that icebreaking was considered a Coast Guard function instead of a Navy function underlined the insularity of America’s thinking about the Arctic and its lack of willingness to expand its sphere of influence into the region.

Similarly, America did not really challenge the Soviet underwater fleet that made the Arctic Ocean its “bastion” in the 1970s until the late 1980s. American under-ice operations were restrained by the caution that followed the loss of the USS Thresher in 1963 and an acquisition process that systematically neglected under-ice operations (Leary 1999, Chapter 10). Waldo Lyon, who led the effort that gave America an advantage in polar submarine operations at the beginning of the Cold War, lamented the lack of funding he received in comparison to his Soviet competitors. According to Waldo, American naval leaders failed to see the tactical and strategic problems American submarines could present to the Soviets in the marginal ice areas on the periphery of the Arctic Ocean (Leary 1999, pg. 253). This lack of vision became apparent during the mid-1980s Reagan military build-up when the massive Seawolf, a submarine class that has major difficulty operating under the ice because of its size, was developed to replace Los Angeles class attack submarines that were much smaller (Leary 1999, pg. 256). Nevertheless, American submarine deployments to the Arctic tripled from a meager eleven in the 1970s to thirty-seven during the 1980s under Reagan’s direction (Lejeunesse 2012, pgs. 291-92). These
intermittent deployments, however, paled in comparison to the permanent and extensive Soviet submarine presence in the Arctic throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

American presence in the Arctic Ocean was not only restricted by its unwillingness to invest in polar-specific capability like icebreakers and submarines. It also was relatively restrained by the cementing of international law that regulated coastal waters historically covered by ice. Indeed, Canada’s domestic Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act (AWPPA) was institutionalized in Article 234 of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This further legitimized Canada’s jurisdictional claim to the Northwest Passage (NWP) and exacerbated America’s dwindling capability to make its presence known in Arctic waters.

The confluence of these two factors - international maritime law and America’s marginal capability to operate in ice-covered waters - was highlighted by the USCG Polar Sea Affair. As Arctic experts, Adam Lajeunesse and Rob Huebert recount (2017), the U.S.S. Northwind was unexpectedly laid up in drydock for repair in 1985. This contingency forced the American Coast Guard to substitute the U.S.S. Polar Sea for the Northwind so that the annual resupply of Thule AFB could be safely accomplished. After this was accomplished the Coast Guard wanted the Polar Sea to also fulfill its own annual patrol off the coast of northern Alaska because there were no other icebreakers left in the American inventory. The Polar Sea had to transit the NWP to do this.

The United States did not request exemption from the Canadian Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act, as was required by Canadian law, because it did not want to set a precedent that gave other states the ability to restrict American ships from strategic passageways elsewhere. The United States did accept the Canadian government’s request to have Canadian naval
advisors on-board the Polar Sea and to accompany it with Canadian icebreakers, however. Even so, once the Canadian press publicized the trip public indignation forced the Canadian government to issue a formal protest and to make even more assertive sovereign claims to the NWP.

In line with the pattern that had developed since the Klondike Gold Rush, the Polar Sea affair provoked Canada to challenge America’s ability to operate in the Arctic despite their military alliance with America and America’s relative material strength. The Polar Sea affair and the earlier S.S. Manhattan affair were very comparable. In both cases Canada utilized America’s respect for democratic law-making, the unique Canadian-American relationship, the shared security threat posed by the Soviet Union and its own nationalists’ fervor to expand its sovereignty over the Arctic. To this point the Canadian minister of foreign affairs drew straight baselines around the Canadian Arctic Archipelago and formally declared the intersecting waters as historic Canadian seas for the first time after the Polar Sea affair.36

The Polar Sea transit went ahead as planned, despite the Canadian protestations, but there have not been any official American surface transits through the NWP since. Canada defended its expanded claims to the NWP by suggesting that its ability to restrict American ships also made it better situated to legally restrict the Soviets (Lajeunesse 2012, pgs. 267-68). In truth, however, the Canadians did not have the military capability to restrict either the Americans or Soviets. This did not keep the Canadian Prime Minister from telling the United States that Canada owned the North American Arctic “lock, stock, and iceberg” at the historic Shamrock Summit in 1985 (qtd. in Lajeunesse and Huebert 2017, pg. 101). For his part, President Reagan

36 Although it had threatened to do this much earlier when it felt like the United States was encroaching on the Arctic (See Chapter 3).
continued to show deference to the Canadians on this issue. He told a gathering of international 
journalists that “we are sincerely and honestly trying to find a way that can recognize Canada’s 
claim and yet, at the same time, cannot set the same precedent” (qtd. in Lajeunesse and Huebert 
2017, pg. xii).

In effect, this unwritten bilateral decision to agree to disagree about the formal status of 
the NWP continued the policy that was established between the two countries during the 1970 
_S.S. Manhattan_ affair. Consequently, the United States voluntarily restricted subsequent surface 
operations in the NWP to reduce the possibility of providing grist for Canadian nationalists, even 
while it refrained from recognizing formal Canadian sovereign claims over the NWP. America’s 
unwillingness to more stridently assert its freedom of movement in the NWP (Lajeunesse 2012, 
pg. 373) strengthened Canada’s de facto and _de jure_ hold over the NWP.

America’s access to the coastal waters of the Arctic was further curtailed by the extensive 
exclusive economic zones (EEZs) established in the 1980 iteration of the _UNCLOS_. This stated 
that continental shelves could extend beyond the now-institutionalized two hundred nautical 
miles from a state’s coast when water is less than two hundred meters in depth. The Arctic Ocean 
is shallow in many places, so this greatly expanded the other polar countries’ economic 
jurisdiction of the Arctic and thereby complicated America’s access to the Arctic Ocean. 
Alaska’s relatively small Arctic coastline compared to the coastlines of the Soviet Union, 
Canada, and Greenland meant that America was a relative loser from the convention in the 
Arctic. However, the United States made jurisdictional gains over the coastal waters of the 
Pacific and Atlantic oceans, which were much more important to it than the Arctic (Hollick 
1981, Chapter 10).
In sum, the United States did not prize the Arctic Ocean enough to invest in the capability to operate there or to assertively challenge the Soviet Union or Canada’s attempts to establish larger jurisdictional control over Arctic seas. This set a precedent that continues to reverberate today.

2.1.3. United States - Canada

Despite Canada’s assertive resistance to America in the NWP it remained a steadfast ally of the United States overall and continued to work with the United States to balance against the Soviets. One reason for this was that both the American and Canadian governments knew that Canada did not have the material power to defend itself alone. The second reason for the cooperation was the institutionalized security interdependence between the two countries that had cemented since World War II (see the previous two chapters). This legacy eased the tension that built up between the two countries over Canada’s Arctic sovereignty and motivated the United States to defer to Canada when Arctic issues became contentious to an extent that belied the difference in material strength between the two countries.

Canada’s national attachment to the Arctic, and its desire to maintain Arctic sovereignty, motivated it to mobilize even more of its relatively scarce material strength to assume more of the security burden on itself as the Cold War progressed. After the S.S. Manhattan voyage in 1970 the Canadian National Defence (CND) White Paper focused on increasing Canadian presence and capability in the Arctic by substantially increasing the number and size of their annual deployments to the Arctic. What started off as overly expensive and symbolic show deployments evolved into practical operations that gave Canadian forces the experience and capability to credibly operate in the region by the late 1970s (Lajeunesse 2017, pg. 202).
The 1985 *Polar Sea* crossing led to a similar Canadian reaction. The updated Canadian National Defence white paper in 1987 again emphasized that Canada must improve its ability to operate in the Arctic. A prominent Canadian political scientist claimed, “either we take on a reasonable share of patrolling the Arctic [from the United States] or we shall be deemed, in terms of realpolitik, to have ceded sovereignty to the Americans (qtd. in Lajeunesse 2007, pg. 76). Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, accordingly, worked to rejuvenate the Canadian military and reorient it towards protecting the Canadian Arctic (Lajeunesse 2007).

Despite the sensational outcries against the United States in the press, Canada still secretly cooperated very closely with the United States throughout the end of the Cold War. In 1977, the *U.S.S. Flying Fish* conducted ASW operations to test the capability of the Canadian sound surveillance (SOSUS) network which was probably constructed by Canada in the 1970s and was sustained by Canadian naval deployments throughout the late 1970s and 1980s (Lajeunesse 2012, pg. 283).37 Three American submarines also spent time in the waters of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago between 1970 and 1980. These excursions did not provoke outrage like that of the *Polar Sea* because the two countries kept them completely secret. In fact, Lajeunesse (2012, pg. 297) claims most US submarine activity in Canadian waters from the 1970s onward occurred with the Canadian government’s knowledge, included a Canadian military representative, or was a part of war games that included Canadian forces. Furthermore, the United States shared hydrographic survey information (Lajeunesse 2012, pg. 298) of the Arctic that allowed the Canadian Navy to operate better in the NWP and later gave it the

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37 In this respect, Lajeunesse (2008, pg. 78) makes the insightful point that Canada would sound the alarm if attacked, but America would be the policeman that responded to the alarm.
necessary evidence it to make a formal claim to an expansive Arctic Ocean EEZ under the UNCLOS.

The Canadian government also attempted to keep its decision to allow the United States to test air launched cruise missiles in Northern Canada a secret in the early-1980s. The United States asked permission to test the missiles in Northern Canada, minus their nuclear warheads, because Canada’s northern geography and climate was similar to potential target areas in the Soviet Union (Clearwater 2006). The Canadian government believed that the tests were necessary to deter the threatening Soviets and to maintain its critical security and economic relationship with the United States (Bromske and Nossal 1983). But it also knew that the decision would result in public approbation. This occurred when the cruise missile agreement was leaked to the press. Tens of thousands of Canadian protestors, some of them violent, reflected the tension the Canadian government was under from portions of its own public (CBC Archive 2018), who were frightened by the Cold War rhetoric coming from the Reagan administration and the recent Soviet shootdown of a Korean airliner. Despite the protests, three different Canadian administrations subsequently allowed the tests to continue and the protests waned as the arrangement became normalized.

The ability of the cruise missile agreement to overcome public criticism reflected the strong institutional ties between the two countries’ militaries and governments. It also reflected President Reagan and Prime Minister Mulroney’s burgeoning friendship. This friendship strengthened bilateral cooperation and improved America’s willingness to abrogate more of its responsibilities in the Arctic to the Canadians (Lajeunesse 2012, pg. 332). Reagan felt he owed Mulroney’s Canada for America’s hard stance on issues like the cruise missiles, acid rain, and trade. He was willing to transfer some of America’s Arctic responsibilities to appease the
Canadian public and to help Mulroney’s domestic political prospects. Transferring these responsibilities also allowed the United States to marginally mitigate the cost of its military build-up and to free up some of its scarce polar-specific resources for Antarctica and Alaskan coastal waters.

In that respect, the United States used a Canadian icebreaker, instead of an American icebreaker, to conduct hydrographic research in the Nares Strait and to facilitate the annual resupply of Thule AFB (Lajeunesse 2012, pg. 333) throughout the late 1980s. Reagan also reluctantly allowed Canada to buy British submarines with American nuclear technology so that Canada could better defend the NWP against Soviet subs (Lajeunesse 2012, pg. 351; Lajeunesse 2007, pgs. 78-79).38 There were even credible discussions between the two countries to establish an Arctic maritime equivalent of NORAD that Canada promised to support with extensive additions to its icebreaker, submarine, and patrol fleet.

It is not clear how much of the planned Canadian military build-up in the Arctic in the 1980s was banter designed to appease Canadian nationalists, however. Canadian Arctic militarization was undone by the sudden collapse of the Iron Curtain at the end of the 1980s and worrying sovereign debt (Lajeunesse 2012, pg. 353). Many of the planned upgrades to Canada’s Arctic defense never materialized. 39 New Canadian Minister of Defense, Bill McKnight, explained in 1989 that Canada could not afford the price needed to build a military force sufficient to guard its northern sovereignty now that the Soviets no longer posed an existential threat to Canada (Lajeunesse 2007, pg. 81).

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38 The fact the Canadians needed the Americans to gain this potential capability reflected the continued dependence Canada would have on the United States for its security even if it did acquire the submarines.
39 Canada initially wanted to buy twelve nuclear submarines but did not end up purchasing any of them because of cost, the decreasing threat, and national aversion to nuclear power (Lajeunesse 2008). Instead four conventional, used submarines were bought from Great Britain in the mid-1990s. Canada also canceled its plans for a Polar-8 class icebreaker for similar reasons.
Canada also took a more assertive role within NORAD and markedly improved its ability to operate in the north throughout the 1970s and 1980s. At the historic "Shamrock Summit" of 1985 Reagan not only acquiesced to greater Canadian control of the NWP, he also agreed with Mulroney to upgrade the DEW line in northern Canada to the more automated North Warning System (NWS) that still operates today. Canada’s desire to increase its control of the system was confirmed by the Canadian Minister of National Defence, Erik Nielsen. In a House of Commons debate he asserted that “the DEW line has served Canada well, but Canadians do not control it…the North Warning System will be a Canadian-controlled system, maintained and manned by Canadians. Sovereignty in our north will be strengthened and assured for the future (qtd. in Coates et al. 2008, pg. 120). Unlike the original DEW stations in Canada forty percent of the NWS’s construction and maintenance costs were paid for by Canada and it was run by Canadians after it was constructed (Coates et al. 2008, pg. 120). Canada also established four forward operating airbases across northern Canada which allowed it to forward deploy its own aircraft to intercept possible intruders over the Arctic Ocean in the 1980s (CND 1988, pg. 11).

All told, Canada showed a continued willingness to both cooperate with the United States and to take on a greater proportion of the continent’s Arctic defense. Its success in doing both belied the relative lack of material strength it had compared to the United States but fit with the bilateral construction of the region over the last one hundred years. Canada continued to care about its Arctic sovereignty much more than the United States cared to expand its military control over the Arctic. The United States continually deferred to Canada in the Arctic while Canada haltingly built up its own capability to operate there independent of the United States. When the Soviet threat decreased at the end of the Cold War it became apparent to Canada that it would not have to worry as much about the Soviets. In contrast to realist theorizing, its long-term
relationship with the United States also suggested that the United States would not fill the vacuum left by the Soviets in the Arctic. As we will see later in this chapter this gave it the confidence to construct the beginnings of a regional governing regime that would further reduce America’s willingness and ability to exert an overarching control over the region.

### 2.1.4. United States-Greenland

The American presence in Greenland also declined throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Greenland continued to be a key barrier in the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom “gap” (GIUK). Like Alaska and northern Canada, it lost some of its importance to the United States due to changes in military technology, however. Increasing assertiveness by Greenland’s native population and sympathetic politicians in Denmark also increased the economic and political costs of maintaining its military forces in Greenland. By the end of the Cold War the United States was holding up its end of the formal agreement it first made with Denmark during World War II to reduce its forces in Greenland when external threats to the island decreased.

On the technological front Soviet submarines were now equipped with longer range missiles that allowed the submarines to remain in the safety of the Arctic basin (Taagholt and Hansen 2001, pgs. 46-48). This meant that Soviet submarines did not have to venture through the GIUK gap to establish launch positions along North America’s Eastern Seaboard anymore and reduced Greenland’s importance to American military units tasked with finding and tailing Soviet submarines trying to sneak through the GIUK gap.

Secondarily, the range of American aircraft and missiles allowed them to be pulled back from Greenland to the United States and still reach most Soviet targets as well. These technological improvements allowed the United States to gradually relinquish more control of its defense installations in Greenland to the Danes and Greenlanders – a welcome event during the
economic crises of the 1970s. This is reflected in Thule’s transition from an expansive strategic bomber base in the 1960s to a minimally manned “space base” by 1982. The United States modernized the BMEWS site at Thule to defend against the improved Soviet bomber and submarine launched cruise missiles and to satisfy the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) the Reagan administration undertook (Taagholt and Hansen 2001, pg. 51). However, it also pulled its aircraft back from Greenland, and delegated many support functions to the Danes and Greenlanders at the bases which greatly reduced its footprint and presence.

Similar to Alaska and northern Canada, the DEW sites in Greenland were also made extraneous by technological change. Automation decreased the number of personnel needed to man the sites from over a hundred when they were constructed to less than a dozen by the early 1980s. New satellites, and improved NWS sites in northern Canada, Alaska, and Maine, quickly made even these improved and minimally manned sites in Greenland obsolete and obviated America’s need for them by the late 1980s. The Greenland DEW sites were closed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The airbases that were used to support them, the substantial Sondrestrom Airbase and the much smaller Kulusuk Air Station, were closed in the early 1990s. Giving up these installations saved the American military twenty-five million dollars a year (Dreyfous 1992). However, as in Alaska, this retrenchment also served to complicate America’s future ability to move military forces and supplies into Greenland afterwards as American military institutional knowledge and military ties with Denmark decreased and the logistical chain to Greenland dried up.

America’s presence in Greenland was also restrained by Denmark’s decision to give Greenland natives home-rule in 1979. This critical juncture gave Greenlanders a seat at the table and increased the political and economic expense the United States had to pay to maintain a
foothold in Greenland. It also reflected the weakening support for the construct of colonialism in democratic countries throughout the Arctic (a transnational movement that is explained in greater detail later in this chapter). Native Greenlanders had more acute concerns and grievances with the American presence than the Danish government did. Although Denmark retained control of Greenland’s foreign policy, Greenland natives gained control over many other policy areas and their resentment to historic Danish and American colonial policies could now be acted on using what Danish analyst Kristian Soby Kristiansen calls the “politics of embarrassment” (Kristiansen 2004, pg. 9). This strategy effectively guilted the United States into moderating its assertiveness in Greenland by tying the United States to repressing self-determination – a policy the United States derided other countries, especially the Soviet Union, for perpetuating in Eastern Europe and elsewhere.

In this regard, Greenland’s newly empowered native politicians decried the forced move of natives from Thule that America directed in the 1950s (see chapter 5) and the American nuclear mishaps that occurred at both Thule and nearby Camp Century in the 1950s and 1960s that disproportionally affected them (Archer 1988, pg. 135). They challenged the upgrades to the BMEWS at Thule believing that these improvements would increase the threat to their territory from the Soviet Union (Kristensen 2004) as well as further disrupt their traditional subsistence hunting routines. They challenged the Danes’ use of the “Greenland Card” which let the Americans have nuclear-equipped military bases in Greenland that the Danes would not allow in Denmark-proper (Orvik 1984, pgs. 959-960).

This political pressure made it more difficult for the Americans to legitimize a military presence in Greenland, especially as the Soviet threat waned in the late 1980s. It also made it more expensive. To this effect, in 1987 the Americans agreed to pay the Greenlandic government
to dispose of waste at their military bases, to hire native contractors to work on the remaining bases and returned some of the defense area around Thule to the natives (Archer 1988, pg. 142). Greenlanders’ resistance to America’s 1984 request to establish two new DEW sites on Greenland’s icecap also contributed to America’s decision to abandon all of the DEW stations in Greenland when it constructed the NWS. All told, Greenland’s home rule complicated America’s ability to maintain its Cold War military presence in Greenland, especially its offensive capability (Archer 2003, pgs. 137-138).

The Danes, themselves, became more resistant to America’s military presence in Greenland. The 1968 nuclear incident gave ammunition to Denmark’s left-leaning political groups that wanted to institutionalize a Nordic “nuclear-free zone” (NNFZ) that included Greenland. The left-leaning Danish politicians teamed up with Greenland’s native politicians and were supported by Danish academics that released a series of reports that were critical of the Danish government’s condonation of American actions in Greenland since World War II (Archer 1988).

By 1992 the United States only maintained a small permanent military presence in Greenland that centered around Thule. The sizable infrastructure investment and forward deployment strategy America had followed in Greenland since World War II was largely abandoned. American retrenchment was made easier because overall it still maintained a relatively good relationship with the Danes and the Danes remained dependent on the United States for their security. America also retained the institutional agreement first made during World War II that made it the primary security guarantor of Greenland. Indeed, the Danes allowed the United States to modernize the BMEWS site at Thule during the late 1980s because unlike the DEW sites, the BMEWS site could not be cheaply substituted or easily moved.
elsewhere (Archer 2003, pgs. 138-139) and was not an offensive weapon system. The Danes tacitly showed their understanding of their security dependence on the United States by not putting more pressure on the United States to abandon its modernization plans of a system that also protected Denmark.

In contrast to neo-realist assumptions, the United States did not have the willingness to use its presence in Greenland as a stepping stone towards a greater sphere of influence in the Arctic, even though it certainly had the capability to do so after the Soviet Union imploded. It did not even look to recoup the large economic investment it made in Greenland during the Cold War. Instead, the United States voluntarily moved most of its forces from Greenland, in accordance with the defense agreements it made with Denmark decades earlier. As Taagholt and Hansen (2001, pg. 54) attest, the “evolution of [American] security policy in Greenland was subsequently affected to a greater degree by economic, environmental, and ethnic interests than by global concerns.” These more localized “soft security” concerns, and the declining Soviet threat, meant the United States had much less willingness than before to maintain a large military presence in Greenland.

2.1.5. United States - Iceland

Due to the increased aggression the Soviets showed Iceland during the 1970s and 1980s, and America’s halting support for Iceland throughout the Cod Wars, Iceland became more comfortable with its defense arrangement with the United States than it previously was. As previous chapters document, the defense arrangement between Iceland and the United States was a contingent result of World War II and continued to deepen through the early period of the Cold War. For its part, the United States continued to consider Iceland a critical, if troublesome, node in the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) gap. Defending Iceland allowed it to also
protect vital North Atlantic lines of communication from Soviet forces attacking from the Arctic. For Iceland’s part, the United States continued to provide an external defense it was culturally, institutionally, and materially unwilling and unable to provide itself and gave it leverage in its strained regional relationships with more powerful countries.

In parallels to its policy during World War II the United States re-focused on securing critical lines of communication in the North Atlantic when the strength of the Soviet military suddenly improved during the 1970s and 1980s. Reflective of this threat, in 1985 alone, American fighters at Keflavik intercepted one hundred and seventy Soviet bomber flights in the airspace around Iceland (Rennie 2006). Its existing defense relationship with Iceland made this much easier to accomplish than otherwise would have been the case. Consequently, the United States increased the number of anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft, fighter aircraft, and airborne control aircraft it deployed to Keflavik Air Base. These assets complemented the sound surveillance (SOSUS) system the United States earlier established throughout the GIUK gap, the DEW line radars, and United States Atlantic Fleet submarines. Together, these assets established a protective northern barrier against the Arctic-based Soviet naval and air threat (Gunnarsson 1982, pg. 264).

Still, like America’s other Arctic allies, Iceland still attempted to balance its security with its sovereignty concerns. It capped the number of American forces allowed in Iceland to three thousand in 1978, which was down from around thirty-three hundred in the early 1970s. By the early 1980s, this number was down to about twenty-six hundred (Ingimundarson 2003, pg. 109). Iceland also continued to prohibit American nuclear-capable assets from the island (Gunnarsson 1982, pgs. 264, 267) and limited the influence the American military could have on their small population by insisting that American forces and the American television they watched remain
restricted to its military bases (Gunnarsson 1982, pg. 267). The United States Navy chafed at these restrictions because it considered them a major restraint on its ability to establish dominance over regional waters (Gunnarsson 1982, pg. 268). However, in line with the established relationship it had with Iceland the American government did not leverage its overwhelming material strength to bully the Icelanders. Instead, it overwhelmingly attempted to appease and co-opt the Icelanders.

Importantly, in an informal extension of the Marshall Plan, Iceland continued to receive substantial economic aid from the United States. Specifically, approximately one billion dollars was invested to improve the facilities at Keflavik Air Base during the 1980s even as the facilities were increasingly used for civil purposes (Benediktsson 2011). Hosting American forces also provided Iceland strategic power to punch above its material weight against other regional powers. Notably, American support helped Iceland gain a favorable outcome against the materially more powerful British, in the North Atlantic “Cod Wars” that continued to rage throughout the 1970s. America’s chief diplomat Henry Kissinger, a self-professed practitioner of realpolitik, derided Iceland’s ability to successfully wage a “tyranny of the weak” against the United States and Great Britain, when Iceland successfully threatened to withdraw from NATO if it did not get its way in the Cod Wars (Ingumardson 2003, pgs. 109-110).

Interestingly, America did not allow Great Britain to coerce the almost defenseless Icelanders to fall in line (Ingumardson 2003, pg. 111). First, the United States relied on its special relationship with Great Britain, who was not as economically dependent on fishing as Iceland (Steinsson 2016, pgs. 259-260), and shared America’s interest in keeping strategically-placed Iceland within NATO, to assuage Great Britain’s interests in the Cod Wars. Second, the United States relied on the Norwegian NATO secretary general and Norwegian diplomats who
pressed Iceland to back down from its threats to abandon NATO membership (Gundmundsson 2007, pgs. 106-107). Third, the international move towards a two hundred-mile EEZ, something the British already practiced in their own coastal waters, strengthened Iceland’s legal case for expanding its control over coastal waters (Gundmardsson 2007, pgs. 111-112). The combination of these factors resolved the conflict in favor of Iceland, who then allowed American forces to stay. It is important to note that the United States planned to move the military forces it had stationed in Iceland to Scotland if Iceland did push its forces out of Iceland. This reflected America’s recognition of Iceland’s sovereignty and its lack of willingness to maintain this strategic presence without Iceland’s permission (Ingumardson 2003, pg. 121).

Early success leveraging its strategic geopolitical position vis-à-vis the United States emboldened Iceland. The Icelandic Prime Minister went so far as to demand that American military aircraft stationed in Iceland bomb British warships in contested waters during the Cod Wars (Steinsson 2018, pg. 347) and the Icelandic Foreign Minister wanted to lease three American warships to protect Iceland’s declared fisheries from the British (Gundmundsson 2007, pg. 110). Iceland’s general public also asked why NATO was not protecting them from British aggression (Gundmunsson 2007, pg. 107). Its view of the Soviets also diminished because the Soviets also heavily fished Icelandic coastal waters and were almost as critical of Iceland’s expanding EEZ as the British (Gundmardsson 2007, pg. 113).

In toto, the end of the Cod Wars was a critical juncture that strengthened the trust Iceland had in the United States. To that effect, left-of-center Icelandic political parties credibly threatened to abolish the 1951 Defense Agreement between Iceland and the United States for the last time during the Cod Wars. This trust pushed Iceland to retain American forces on its territory after the Cold War ended. By then Iceland’s leaders had come to the conclusion that
American presence was beneficial to its own security and economy. In fact, at the end of the Cold War Iceland had gone from being one of the poorest countries in Europe to one of its richest on a per capita basis (Ingimundarson 2003, pgs. 98-99). This was important because until that time American military forces in Iceland still engendered hostility from nationalistic and socialist-leaning portions of the Icelandic population that cared much more about sovereignty and their access to fishing grounds than the fragile regional balance of power. In fact, security policy was still considered alien to Iceland even after the Cod Wars. Iceland did not even have government institutions to formulate security policy until the early 1980s (Gunnarsson 1982, pgs. 267, 269). American defense allowed it to maintain its long-held tradition of being unarmed.

However, the Cod Wars also showed Iceland’s willingness to expand its sphere of influence into the waters around Iceland again, despite its relative lack of material capability to do so (Steinsson 2016, pgs. 261-263). This highlighted Iceland as a “rebellious ally” (Ingimundarson 2011) to the United States and had the effect of decreasing America’s willingness to maintain its own presence in and around Iceland after the Cold War wound down and the Soviet threat to the lines of communication between North America and Europe attenuated. This was the case even though Iceland now urged the United States to maintain its presence in Iceland.

2.1.6. United States – Norway

Since World War II, Norway had maintained the twin-pronged strategy of deterring the Soviet Union through its security ties with the United States while it reassured the Soviets by severely limiting the United States’ access to Norway – especially in the Finnmark region of northern Norway that borders Russia (see the previous chapter). However, when the Soviet military strengthened its forces on the Kola Peninsula bordering Norway in the middle of the
1970s, Norway haltingly tilted towards strengthening its security ties with the United States. Historical precedent, and the fear of provoking the Soviet Union, kept it from doing so more assertively.

Most worrying for the Norwegians was that for the first time the Soviet Navy credibly threatened the logistics routes that the United States promised to use to reinforce Norway in case of war. By American estimates it would take over a week for American naval reinforcements to arrive in Norway’s coastal waters after a war started (Norton 1988, pgs. 181, 189). Both Norway and the United States now feared that the strengthened Soviet Navy could prolong this timeline and firmly establish itself in northern Norway where only sixty-five hundred Norwegian soldiers and five hundred Norwegian frontier troops guarded the border before American reinforcements could arrive (Bitzinger 1988, pg. 16). If the Soviets occupied northern Norway, they could also credibly threaten the security of the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom Gap and make it more difficult for NATO ships to operate in the Norwegian Sea (Sullivan 1975, pg. 10). This would provide greater protection to the Soviets’ nuclear submarine fleet. Furthermore, capturing northern Norwegian airbases would extend the range of Soviet bombers and allow them to attack NATO convoys in the North Atlantic (Sullivan 1978, pg. 9).

Second, the Norwegians worried that the Soviet Navy could use its power to disrupt Norway’s oil development in the North Sea and the Barents Sea. These oil fields were responsible for Norway’s economic advance in the 1970s and 1980s and presented an enticing target for the Soviets who, as we will see later in this chapter, also depended on northern oil for their material strength more than ever before (Sullivan 1978, pg. 15). The Norwegians also feared that the oil fields’ importance could induce the Soviets to seize the contested Svalbard
Islands so that the Soviets could gain control of the maritime approaches to the oilfields and its main nuclear fleet on the Kola Peninsula.

To meet the Soviet threat Norway primarily increased its military cooperation with European NATO members, Great Britain, West Germany, and Denmark, who were the main producers and consumers of Norwegian North Sea oil (Sullivan 1978, pg. 19). As was documented in the previous chapter, Norway was much more comfortable balancing with these European countries, especially Great Britain and Denmark, than it was with the United States who was still seen as a disruptive, if invaluable, outsider. However, Norway also moved to strengthen its security ties with the United States to meet the growing Soviet threat. It used its oil wealth to buy American military equipment and constructed storage sites to store American military equipment that could then be used by American reinforcements if Norway was attacked by the Soviet Union (Archer 1982, pg. 172). Norway’s strategy fit with the United States Navy’s forward maritime presence strategy in the 1980s “to repel a Soviet amphibious assault on northern Norway, support northern Norway against land threats, prevent Soviet use of facilities in Norway, and contain the Northern Fleet or destroy it at sea” (Boressen 2011, pg. 100).

To meet these shared objectives the United States increased its participation in the numerous naval exercises that NATO conducted in the Norwegian Sea in the 1980s. Significantly, as part of these exercises, the United States deployed aircraft carriers to the Norwegian Sea for the first time since the 1950s on an almost annual basis from 1985-1989 (Boressen 2011, pg. 97).\(^{40}\) It also allocated a Marine amphibious brigade\(^{41}\) and anti-submarine

\(^{40}\) It only recently deployed an aircraft carrier again in the Norwegian Sea in 2018 after an almost thirty-year absence to confront the resuscitated Russian threat (Ziezulewicz and Larter 2018).

\(^{41}\) It also deployed Marines on a rotational basis to Norway for the first time since the end of the Cold War in 2018 to help the Norwegians balance the Russians (Snow 2018).
warfare assets to deploy to northern Norway in case hostility broke out and it bolstered its defense of logistic lines in the North Atlantic that would be used to resupply Norway.

Influential Norwegian politicians, including defense minister J.J. Holst, still found it difficult to change Norway’s longstanding security policies, despite the Soviet threat. By the 1980s its 1949 decision not to allow foreign bases in Norway had cemented. It knew abrogating this longstanding agreement would be provocative towards the Soviets and be looked poorly on by many of its own citizens. It also lacked a strong majority government and needed to build consensus among disparate groups who had different perspectives on how to meet the Soviet threat (Bitzinger 1988, pgs. 6-11). Norway’s citizenry was still wary of the United States because of the Vietnam War (Boressen 2011, pg. 105) and many Norwegians were averse to the evolving American nuclear strategy that threatened Nordic efforts to “denuclearize” northern Europe (Bitzinger 1989, pg. 4).

So, Holst attempted to reassure the Soviet Union, and his own constituents, that Norway’s increasing security cooperation with the United States was exclusively defensive and under the multilateral aegis of NATO – tactics that had evolved throughout the Cold War. He successfully delayed assertive American requests to access forward operating airfields and ports in northern Norway until the Soviet threat receded at the end of the 1980s. He insisted that the bulk of NATO military forces allocated to Norway if war broke out were British and Canadian – not American, and that a Norwegian commander would retain operational control over NATO forces in Norway during peacetime. He did not allow America to pre-position military supplies in northern Norway where they could support a possible American invasion of the Soviet Union (and also were more vulnerable to Soviet capture) (Boressen 2011, pg. 100). Instead the
American supplies were stored in central Norway. He also did not allow American nuclear-weapon capable aircraft to participate in NATO exercises in Norwegian airspace.

Even with these restrictions, the greater contact between American and Norwegian military forces in the 1980s increased their confidence in each other and set the precedent for future military cooperation (Boressen 2011, pg. 111; footnotes on the previous page). The Soviet threat also resulted in more NATO investment in Norway’s military storage, aircraft shelters, runways and communication and early warning networks (Boressen 2011, pg. 111) that simultaneously did two things. First, it integrated Norway more fully with the American-led NATO command. Second, it allowed Norway to deter a possible Soviet invasion without an actual American presence in Norway. By doing so, Norway maintained its fragile place as the western-leaning bookend of the “Nordic Balance” security construction that solidified throughout the Cold War.

In sum, internal politics and precedent motivated Norway to restrain the United States from establishing a permanent military presence in Norway despite the increased threat the Soviet Union posed to it during the 1970s and 1980s. Some in the American military establishment criticized Norway’s intransigence. Ultimately, this intransigence was condoned, however, because Norway’s behavior towards the United States was not much different than it had been since the end of World War II. Furthermore, America’s post-Vietnam military was thinned out and forced to contain more assertive Soviet threats in Central Europe, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, the Pacific, South and Central America, and Africa by the 1980s so it was not especially keen on establishing a more permanent military presence in Norway than it had to (Sullivan 1975, pg. 13).

2.1.7. United States-Sweden
Like Norway, Sweden’s view of the United States was hurt by the Vietnam War and Sweden heavily criticized America’s international relations thereafter. However, again historical precedent mixed with security concerns to subtly improve Sweden’s willingness to align themselves more closely with the United States. According to Reagan administration foreign policy advisor, Stefan Halper, “the Swedes, did not consider themselves to be part of the Western security system” and believed the Soviets were America’s problem, not theirs (qtd in Schweizer 1994, pg. 162).

Even so, like Norway, Sweden tilted more towards the United States as the Soviet threat grew on the Kola Peninsula from the 1970s to the 1990s. Specifically, Sweden became alarmed as it became more aware that Soviet nuclear submarines were operating in its territorial waters (McCormick 1990). One of these nuclear submarines accidently grounded itself on a Swedish island in 1981 in what became known as the infamous “Whiskey on the Rocks” crisis. This contingent event turned the Swedish government and public opinion against the Soviets thereafter and brought Sweden closer to the United States and NATO.

Sweden was also threatened by the increased presence of Soviet special forces and intelligence assets operating in Sweden. The Soviets were suspected of using naval divers to perform minor acts of sabotage against Swedish coastal defense lines. Soviet military intelligence was also suspected of collecting information on the routines of up to one hundred and twenty Swedish military pilots. Swedish authorities believed these actions were designed to support Soviet plans to quickly decapitate the Swedish military if war in Europe broke out (McCormick 1990, pg. 24). To confront the growing Soviet threat Sweden built on the tacit

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42 The Soviet submarine was a “whiskey-class” boat, hence the catchy name for the episode in the western media.
military cooperation it had established with the United States and NATO over the previous two decades (see previous chapter). It enhanced this cooperation in an attempt to deter the Soviets from further aggression, and failing that, to facilitate wartime military cooperation so it could withstand a potential Soviet attack.

Unlike Norway, however, Sweden still maintained a strong identity as a neutral state, and maintained a large and competent military, that while off its postwar peak, still gave it the capability to remain firmly outside of the formal American security umbrella.43 It ensured that any security cooperation it had with the United States was kept in strict secrecy so that it did not provoke the Soviets, or its own citizens, who were overwhelmingly supportive of Sweden’s foreign policy of neutrality (Tunander 2005, pg. 558). It also refrained from joining emerging institutions designed to integrate other western European countries, because it feared doing so would be perceived by the Soviets, and its own citizens, as aligning it too closely with the United States also.

American officials were now accustomed to Sweden’s behavior and played along to maintain the Swedish government’s façade of strict and formal neutrality. Reagan’s Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, claims the United States made an unwritten “mutual agreement” with Swedish defense officials to come to Sweden’s aid if it was attacked in the 1980s (Tunander 2005, pg. 558). In line with America’s “flexible response” to Norway American defense officials coordinated with Swedish defense officials to use Swedish airfields to provide air cover over Sweden and to support Swedish naval efforts in the Baltic Sea if war with the Soviets broke out. The United States also provided Sweden critical technology to develop its JAS-39 Gripen

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43 It is important to note, however, that Sweden’s military spending decreased with détente and that it only increased its defense budget over that of 1972 in the late 1980s (McCormick 1990, pg. vi).
fighter-bomber and provided intelligence about Soviet submarine activity in the Baltic so Sweden could better protect itself from the Soviet Union (Schweizer 1994, pgs. 162-164).

There were two key differences between US defense cooperation with Sweden and its cooperation with Norway that reflected the difference in the historical ties between the countries. First, America’s war plans with the Swedes were not explicit, institutionalized, or exercised like they were with Norway. This minimized the contact and integration between the Swedish military and the American military and lessened America’s leverage over the Swedes. Second, it is unclear how much Sweden’s political leaders knew about their own defense establishment’s coordination with the United States. It is even more unclear if Swedish political leaders would have agreed to put joint defense plans into action if Europe became a theater of war between the two superpowers. The successful Swedish precedent of sitting on the sidelines during the previous World Wars suggests that Sweden may have done so again if a conventional war broke out in Europe. According to Tunander (2005, pg. 559), Sweden’s “long tradition with neutrality had created its own legitimacy and its own discourse” that kept it from aligning more closely with the United States.

That being said, Sweden’s policies were overwhelmingly in line with those of the United States, so the United States did not push too much against the status quo. Sweden played a key role in pushing through the Helsinki Accords that influenced the Soviet Union, and its Warsaw Pact Allies, to accept a level of domestic insubordination in Eastern Europe it had not allowed since World War II. This, in turn, weakened the Soviet Union’s grip on these satellites. Sweden also felt an allegiance to people threatened by Soviet military actions. It agreed to help the United States funnel critical supplies to the Polish Labor Organization, Solidarity, so that it could withstand a crackdown by Soviet and Polish security forces in the 1980s (Schweizer 1994, pg.
Sweden also sent non-lethal material aid to the mujahedin that was resisting Soviet military forces in Afghanistan (Schweizer 1994, pg. 164). Furthermore, the mere presence of formidable Swedish forces between the Kola Peninsula and the rest of Scandinavia continued to screen the Soviet military from America’s Arctic allies. Although designed to provide security for Sweden, these forces also allowed the United States to neglect northern Norway’s defense to a greater extent than otherwise would have been necessary.

In the end, even though Sweden gradually leaned more towards the United States’ sphere of influence because of the growing Soviet threat during the 1980s, historical precedent and domestic resistance meant that it continued to remain distinctly outside of the United States’ security umbrella. Like its Scandinavian neighbors it attempted to use its geopolitical position to restrain both superpowers and create a buffer between them (McCormick 1990, pg. 4). Sweden’s ability to make it through the Cold War as a formally neutral country further ingrained neutrality in the national psyche and subsequently steeled its willingness to remain outside of the American security infrastructure that expanded into the neighboring Baltics and Eastern Europe after the Cold War.

2.1.8. Conclusion:

The United States was unwilling to match the Soviets’ growing military strength in the Arctic even though it seemingly had the material strength to do so. Instead, the regional allies it had acquired and integrated with since World War II allowed it to externally balance against the Soviets instead. America’s collective defense was institutionalized in the case of Canada by the PJBD, NORAD and NATO. In the case of Greenland and Iceland it was institutionalized under bilateral defense agreements and NATO. In the case of Norway, it was institutionalized under NATO. And in the case of Sweden it was institutionalized in non-official and secret defense
agreements. None of these early Cold War institutions would have existed if not for the long-term threat posed by the Soviets to these other polar countries which slowly pushed even neutral Sweden towards greater security cooperation with the United States by the end of the Cold War.

American behavior did not fit neo-realist thinking which suggests that the United States, as the materially stronger of the two superpowers, would not have wanted external help to balance the Soviet Union in the region. However, America’s allies’ behavior did fit with Walt’s (1987) belief that the level of threat explains whether a country will bandwagon with the materially stronger state as America’s Arctic allies did, or balance against that materially stronger state. Throughout the Cold War, and especially in its last two decades, the Soviets were more threatening than the United States to the other Arctic states. Soviet military forces were much closer and much more concentrated in the Arctic and the United States actively worked to appease their Arctic allies and assuage their sovereignty concerns. However, something that Walt’s theory of alliance does not explain also happened. The longer the Cold War cooperation continued, the deeper the security construction between the United States and its Arctic allies became institutionalized. By the end of the Cold War this cooperation was almost fifty years old, in the case of its NATO allies, and two decades old in the case of Sweden. This history increased the trust between America and these states and made it more likely they would want to remain tied to America even after the Soviet threat receded. In effect, the inertia of the institutions and ties between the United States and its allies, and their lingering fear of Russia, kept them together even after the Soviet Union collapsed.

External balancing was favorable for the United States in the Arctic because its naval forces were still was much less geographically constrained than their Soviet counterparts. Furthermore, the improved range of its weapons and the increased autonomy of its equipment
allowed it to decrease its presence in the Arctic and still protect North America and Europe. As we will see later in this chapter, the US also had very limited material and commercial interests in the region compared to the Soviets, which minimized the need to protect commercial interests there. Balancing with the other polar countries allowed the United States to conserve its forces and “flexibly respond” to Soviet aggression if it did occur in the Arctic. This flexible response strategy allowed it to reduce the relatively high costs of garrisoning forces permanently in the Arctic. It also freed up these forces so that they could respond to other regional problem areas when needed.

This evolving situation suited America’s polar allies. While America proved a good deterrent measure against the Soviet Union, America’s polar allies collectively feared an increased American military presence would provoke the Soviet Union and threaten their own sovereignty. Furthermore, domestic factors such as anti-colonialism and nationalism curbed America’s polar allies from welcoming a larger American military presence than was historically necessary and motivated them to different degrees to counter the Soviet presence without depending on the United States. In doing so they expanded their own sphere of influence with American consent and gradually gained control of the security infrastructure the Americans had so expensively constructed in the Arctic during World War II and the Cold War to expand their own sphere of influence into the Arctic.

2.2. Soviet Geopolitics

Unlike the United States, the Soviet Union did not have a history of cooperation with other polar states it could lean on to balance against the United States. Furthermore, the Arctic remained much more geopolitically important to it than it did to the United States because of its lack of access to other oceans. Most significantly, the Barents Sea remained the Soviets only
direct, ice-free access point to the world’s oceans throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, the Barents Sea became a key to Soviet strength and international influence when the Soviet Union belatedly decided to become a sea power in the late 1960s. Soviet ships, embarked from Barents’ ports, waved the Soviet flag in many of the world’s oceans for the first time during the 1970s and 1980s.

The Soviet government also expanded its already sizable military forces on the Kola Peninsula to support these ambitious naval operations. This growth was sustained by the institutional strength of the Soviet military industrial complex to attract government funding, Admiral Gorshkov’s successful push to improve the Soviet Navy’s ability to spread Soviet influence abroad, and ephemeral Soviet oil wealth that propelled the country’s material strength and hubris (a key element that will be discussed in the economic section of this chapter) until the early 1980s. In fact, one American Cold War analyst (Chipman 1982) suggested that “Never in peacetime history has a nation expanded its navy as rapidly as have the Soviets in recent years.” Soviet economist, Yegor Gaidar (2007, pg. 112), similarly claimed that while the Soviet economy was only a quarter the size of the American economy it managed to build a military that was comparable in size and quality to that of the United States by the early 1980s.

As this section documents, the Soviet Union’s willingness and capability to expand its hold on the Arctic was part and parcel of its drive to expand its influence throughout the globe. This ambitious expansion suddenly crumbled with the strategic uncertainty and “new thinking” foreign policy that came with the rapid economic decay of the 1980s. When the Soviet Union crumbled in 1991, it bequeathed the most militarized section of the Arctic back to Russia. The loss of territory that accompanied this implosion tightened Russia’s access to the world’s oceans and heightened the strategic importance of the Arctic to Russia.
2.2.1 Soviet Arctic Maritime Capability

The Soviets constructed their first aircraft carriers in the mid-1970s. Eventually, six were produced. Although, not as capable as American carriers, they were the largest military ships stationed in the Arctic. The 1936 Montreux Convention, and Turkey’s hold over the Dardanelles Straits, challenged the Soviets ability to deploy large warships, like the new aircraft carriers, to the Black Sea (Miller and Hine 1990), just as seasonal ice challenged their deployment in the Soviet Pacific. So, the bulk of the Soviet aircraft carrier fleet was added to the Northern Fleet. From here they contested America’s control of the North Atlantic. They also provided anti-submarine protection for the Northern Fleet submarine force bastioned in the Barents Sea and protected the approaches to the numerous Soviet naval and air bases on the Kola Peninsula.

The Soviets also increased the size of its Northern submarine fleet and improved its quality. The Typhoon, which debuted in 1981 was, unlike American submarines, specifically designed for under-ice operations and deployed almost completely in the Arctic basin. Adam Lajeunesse (2012) states that by 1981 there was a total of eighty-two Soviet nuclear submarines stationed in the Arctic that were equipped with an estimated nine-hundred and ninety-one Sea-Launch Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs). This constituted approximately sixty percent of the Soviets’ entire nuclear-equipped submarine fleet. The submarines could either move from here to Canadian Arctic coastal waters to decrease the range and time to hit targets in North America or fire their missiles directly from the safety of the Arctic Ocean. This latter “bastion strategy” was increasingly favored by the Soviets as the range of their SLBMs improved throughout the 1970s.

44 It must be mentioned however, that America’s NATO ally, Turkey, overlooked the Montreux Convention to allow the Soviet Union to transit newly constructed Soviet aircraft carriers, called “antisubmarine cruisers” by the Soviets, from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea during the 1970s and 1980s.
and 1980s because they were better protected under the Arctic ice of their coastline than anywhere else. While America had easy access to the open oceans to hide its submarines, the Soviet Navy lacked both the easy access to these oceans and the “quieting technology to ensure their boats the same level of survivability” as the Americans (Lajeunesse 2012, pg. 289-291). The loud movement of the Arctic ice helped hide the Soviet boats and the proximity to extensive Soviet ASW forces that were permanently based on the Kola Peninsula protected them from their American underwater adversaries (Lajeunesse 2012 pgs. 287-288).

Griffiths (1991, pg. 103) suggests that the Soviets achieved nuclear parity with the United States by the late 1970s and that this relieved its traditional paranoia of encirclement and “beatings at the hands of foreigners.” However, military strength also appears to have emboldened it in northern waters where it forcefully tried to undo the encirclement it felt. In addition to the Northern Fleet’s critical role as a strategic second-strike nuclear deterrent to the United States it also increasingly exercised its improved ability to interrupt NATO resupply missions in the North Atlantic and practiced amphibious landings that threatened Norway and Sweden. The Soviets manufactured more than seventy Arctic-capable landing craft to assist in these operations (Egan and Orr 1988, pg. 80).

The Soviets also built one of the world’s largest merchant fleets, and by the mid 1980s had the second largest fishing fleet of any country. More than half of these “merchant” ships were operated out of ports in the Barents and Baltic Seas. The Soviet government owned these ships and used them to support state objectives like intelligence-gathering and military communications, as well as for their advertised commercial purposes (Chipman 1982).

The Soviets also buttressed the sizable advantage they had over the United States in ice-capable ships to complement its merchant fleet. By the end of the 1980s the Soviet fleet had over
six hundred and fifty ice-strengthened ships, its icebreaker fleet numbered over forty ships, and it sported nuclear powered icebreakers that allowed it to sail through the polar ice all the way to the geographical North Pole, as it symbolically accomplished for the first time in 1977 (Egan and Orr 1988, pg. 65). Although mainly developed for commercial purposes (a subject looked at more extensively later in this chapter), the icebreakers could also be used to open up passages for Soviet naval vessels transiting from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans via the Arctic Ocean for a full ten months during a good year. Earlier lessons, like the 1905 Russo-Japanese war and the two World Wars, where Arctic transport routes were critical to Russia, taught the Soviets to invest more heavily in ice-capable naval assets than America did. This investment came in handy in the 1970s when the Sino-American thaw threatened the viability of the Trans-Siberian railroad and Soviet logistic lines to the tenuous border with China (Egan and Orr 1988, pgs. 67-68).

2.2.2. Soviet Union-Sweden

By the beginning of the 1980s the Soviets were concerned that Sweden was leaning too far towards the West and that the balance of power was shifting against it in Northern Europe (Agrell 1983). As was previously noted, Sweden sent aid to anti-Communist groups in restive Poland (Gustafsson 2010, pg. 91) and Afghanistan that strained its relations with the Soviets. These developments with Sweden fed Russia’s traditional fear of encirclement and contributed to the Soviet Union’s decision to increase its militarization of the Kola Peninsula. The Soviets also expanded their efforts to gain intelligence about Sweden’s defenses, thinking they would need to neutralize Sweden quickly to keep their naval forces from being blockaded in the Baltic Sea, and to maintain Sweden as a buffer between NATO land forces and Moscow and Leningrad, if a war broke out (Agrell 1983, pgs. 275-276, 278).
McCormick (1990, pg. 49) suggests that the Soviet Union’s actions were further motivated by Soviet military leaders’ reading of Sweden’s historic foreign policy. According to McCormick the Soviets assumed that Sweden would be compliant if coerced because of Sweden’s previous accommodation to German demands during World War II. This assumption was strengthened by Sweden’s extreme reluctance to assertively call the Soviet Union out for trespassing in its internal waters, even after the Whiskey on the Rocks incident (Amundsen 1985, pg. 260). Furthermore, Sweden’s willingness to allow its military strength to dwindle during the 1970s thaw between the Soviet Union and the West decreased Sweden’s ability to defend itself against Soviet coercion.

It is important to emphasize that the Soviet Union continued to pressure Sweden even when Gorbachev instituted Perestroika and made his famous Murmansk Speech in 1987. Soviet nuclear submarines continued to trespass Swedish waters even as Soviet diplomats vociferously supported the construction of a Nordic Nuclear Free Zone and called the Baltic a “Sea of Peace” (Leitenberg 1982). Former Swedish military commander, Bengt Gustafsson (2010), suggests that Swedish waters were the Soviets’ main submarine training grounds and were used to test the Northern Fleet’s war plans against NATO countries throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Thus, the Soviets did not care that their aggressive actions were counterproductive politically and created a security dilemma that pushed Sweden to re-militarize itself and seek more military cooperation from the United States. They already believed Sweden was aligned with the West. In effect, the Soviet paranoia of encirclement became a self-fulfilling prophesy because its threats to Sweden pushed Sweden closer to the United States and NATO.

Interestingly, Tunander (2004) suggests that Sweden’s intense focus on the increased Soviet threat hid America’s growing military presence near Sweden during the 1980s too. He
presents strong evidence that American submarines, with the knowledge of the Swedish defense establishment, often worked in Swedish coastal waters after the “Whiskey of the Rocks” crisis. According to Tunander, these boats were often confused for Soviet submarines by the Swedish press and Swedish academics. This magnified the perceived threat the Soviets posed to Sweden and pushed Swedish public opinion, and its foreign policy, against the Soviets. Even still, Sweden attempted to appease the Soviets and maintained its now firmly entrenched identity as a precarious neutral buffer between the East and West. Unlike the neighboring Baltic States, this historic precedent and self-identification as a proud neutral would keep it from joining NATO after the Cold War ended. However, the Soviet’s threatening behavior over the previous decades also kept Sweden from completely trusting Russia after the Soviet Union imploded either.

2.2.3. Soviet Union – Finland

The Soviet relationship with Finland also remained uniquely constructed by history and restrained the Soviet Union’s willingness to expand its control over its Arctic neighbor. The Soviets continued to allow Finland to maintain more domestic autonomy than it allowed its Eastern European satellites. For example, Finland successfully turned down Soviet efforts to participate in joint military exercises, maintained its official neutrality despite intermittent Soviet overtures to stop referring to itself as a neutral, and re-strengthened its military’s capacity to withstand a Soviet invasion throughout the 1970s (Forsberg and Pesu 2016, pgs. 484, 487). The Soviets also allowed Finland to integrate with the European economic system in the 1980s – something it would not allow its European satellites to do. The Soviets feared a more aggressive stance towards customarily compliant Finland would alter the “Nordic Balance” construct that had cemented itself during the Cold War by pushing Sweden into NATO and motivating Norway and Denmark to garrison American military forces on their soil (Forsberg and Pesu 2016, pg.
They also believed that hostility towards Finland would cut the amount of Western technology it received through Finland. Moreover, the lingering memory of Finnish resistance during World War II made the Soviets apprehensive of getting into another conflict with Finland (see previous two chapters).

In exchange for the Soviet’s light touch, Finland continued to support Soviet measures at the United Nations and deferred to the Soviets before it made any foreign policy decisions. This was reflected in its lack of public reproach of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and its muted response to the Baltic states’ independence movements in the early 1990s (Forsberg and Pesu 2016, pgs. 480, 486) – decisions that contrasted greatly with its culturally and institutionally similar Scandinavian neighbors. Likewise, the Finnish government marked the anniversary of the Soviet-Finnish Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance (FMCA) and the World War II armistice with the Soviet Union with symbolic ceremonies, public petitions, and speeches that highlighted the decades-long peaceful relations between the two countries (Forsberg and Pesu 2016, pg. 488). Finland’s industry readily supplied the Soviet Union with critical manufactured goods like nuclear power generators and icebreakers that helped the Soviet Union industrialize the Arctic and provide consumer goods to its citizens. Its government refused to seat democratically elected officials that were outwardly anti-Soviet (Forsberg and Pesu 2016, pg. 489). A narrative of “friendship” and “trust” was continuously sold to a receptive Finnish public throughout to placate the Soviets and socialize its own populace. The Soviets used this relationship to illustrate what it believed was the proper relations between a Communist Great Power and a small, democratic state (Forsberg and Pesu 2016, pg. 488).

The Soviets weakened international position appears to have created the first cracks in this construction in 1982. For the first time Finnish intellectuals openly criticized the 1948
FCMA that institutionalized the subordinate relationship it had with the Soviets. Moreover, the Social Democratic Party, which was openly opposed to many Soviet policies, was elected to the Finnish presidency for the first time (Lukacs 1992, pg. 61). The Soviets did not respond aggressively to either event.

Even so, Finland’s new president, Mauno Koivisto, promised to maintain Finland’s decades long policy of accommodation to Soviet foreign policy (Lukacs 1992, pg. 61). This promise was kept even after the Iron Curtain opened in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Finally, a new Treaty of Friendship was signed in early 1992, as the Soviet Union dissolved, that gave the Finns full freedom to follow their own foreign policy. Liberalism would assume that solidly democratic Finland would have immediately moved to join the security architecture of the rest of democratic Europe when it was no longer threatened by Russia, placing it more firmly under America’s sphere of influence.

However, unlike Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and the culturally-similar Baltic States, Finland instead jealously held on to its traditional status as a neutral country that showed deference to Russia. Inertia fed a logic of appropriateness and reciprocation that made Finland behave in a much more accommodating way towards Russia than the Soviet Union’s former satellites and Sweden did, even in the power vacuum that emerged with the Soviet Union’s extinction.

Because of the Soviets comparatively light hand with the Finns during the Cold War the Finns had a different perception of the Russians than other Arctic states. The Finns enjoyed peace and economic prosperity throughout this era by trading with both the Soviet Union and the West. They also retained a heavy dose of distrust in Western security promises because of the traumatic diplomatic isolation they faced when they fought to maintain independence during and
after World War II against the Soviets (Jakobson 1980, pg. 1042). As Forsberg and Pesu (2016, pg. 475) suggest, Finnish accommodation with the Soviets was seen as a successful way to ensure survivability. This success over decades meant that accommodation went from being an instrument of statecraft at the beginning of the Cold War to an end in itself as the Cold War ended. Symbolic of this perception, eighty percent of the Finnish public supported the original FCMA into the late 1980s (Forsberg and Pesu 2016, pg. 478) even as Finland’s formerly captive neighbors pushed as quickly as possible to extricate themselves from Soviet institutions that were much more constraining.

Finland’s assumption of an intermediator role between the East and West, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, also tempered its willingness to move decisively away from the Russians as the Soviet Union imploded. It hosted superpower nuclear disarmament talks, European Security Conferences and the symbolic Helsinki Accords during these formative years. These experiences gave it the confidence and capacity to continue its neutral bridge-building role as the Cold War wound down. This was seen in its instrumental work designing and instituting the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) with Canada in the late 1980s. Through this institution it managed to co-opt both Russia and the United States into a developing regime that reshaped regional relations to the benefit of Arctic small powers like itself (Young 1998).

2.2.4. Gorbachev’s 1987 Murmansk Initiatives and Their Aftermath

Gorbachev’s famous 1987 Murmansk Speech outlined a set of proposed regional initiatives (henceforth called the Murmansk Initiatives) to address shared regional problems. It has since been cited as a major turning point in Arctic relations by many liberal analysts and the necessary precedent for the current regime that governs the Arctic. Among them, Young 1998, Exner-Pirot 2012, and Atland 2008, assert that the Murmansk speech highlighted the Soviet
Union and the West’s seemingly converging perception of shared environmental and human security threats facing the Arctic – something addressed more deeply later in this chapter. Exner-Pirot (2016) believes that the confidence measures that emanated from the Murmansk Initiative make Russia behave more cooperatively in the Arctic than it now does in other regions. Undeniably, at Murmansk Gorbachev asserted that “democratic” and “universal” values were penetrating and changing Soviet foreign policy (1987, pg. 131). His speech outlined a willingness to denuclearize the Arctic, establish confidence-building measures with Northern European militaries, and a desire to improve cooperation to meet shared environmental challenges. As I argue, however, the Murmansk Initiatives reflected the Soviet Union’s declining material strength more than they reflected a broad-based change in the way the Russians viewed the Arctic.

The Murmansk Initiatives reflected what Robert English (2000) called “new thinking” by the Gorbachev reformists. The new thinking was allowed to get its start after the Cuban Missile Crisis as a way for a cadre of Stalin’s neophyte foreign policy successors to better understand its foreign adversaries. After which the Soviets allowed diplomats and scholars more access to their western counterparts. Some of these Soviet elites, including Gorbachev and his Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, developed reformist tendencies and came to prominence as Stalin’s former colleagues died and the Soviet economy crumbled (English 2000). Gorbachev believed that the Soviet Union’s military was over-extended and that its planned economy could no longer keep up with America’s military strength and technological dynamism. He needed to make big changes to the Soviet system to back up the large promises previous Soviet regimes made to improve a Soviet society that was now clearly seen to be in decline.
There was no guarantee Gorbachev and his reformers would come to power after a string of geriatric neo-Stalinist Communist leaders died, but the rapid economic and social decline that beset the Soviet Union in the early 1980s was the catalyst that made it possible (English 2010). It is no coincidence that the Soviet Union did not make value-laden overtures to reduce regional tension like the Murmansk Initiatives until rapidly decreasing oil prices undermined its military strength and international leverage and exposed its overextended international obligations.

It is also no coincidence that the Soviet Union did not attempt to conciliate with the West until the United States successfully moved to limit the Soviet Union’s access to critical Western technology the Soviet Union needed to exploit the Arctic resources. By the middle of the 1980s it was becoming clear the Soviets had run out of the cheap and abundant labor that had previously fed the system. Fertility was down sharply and almost a quarter of all deaths in the Soviet Union occurred to working-age individuals. An even larger number of Soviet citizens were unable to work because of sickness and injury (Feshbach and Friendly 1992, pg. 190). This was worse in the Arctic regions where working conditions were more difficult and health care less available. In some mining districts in Northern Siberia life expectancy was only forty-two years in 1989 (Feshbach and Friendly 1992, pg. 187). Under these conditions it becomes clear why Gorbachev attempted to get access to Western technology in exchange for more peaceful relations with Northern European countries in the historic Murmansk Speech (1987, pg. 131).

The Murmansk Initiatives, while now considered unique by many Arctic regional experts, was just one piece of an overarching Soviet strategy to temporarily decrease competition with the United States until it could regain its economic and military footing. The reactionary military-industrial complex that was firmly entrenched, and the conservative elite that formed the majority of the Soviet government, went along with the Initiatives believing they were mainly
propaganda to appease the West – a practice that was well-established by this time in the Cold War. Unfortunately for them, the movement gained momentum that they could not stop and went much further and faster than even Gorbachev desired as the Soviet economy went into free fall in the late 1980s.

While the Soviet Union retrenched from all of Europe and Afghanistan during the late 1980s the Arctic region’s unique historic construction made it exceptionally receptive to the overtures Gorbachev made at Murmansk in 1987. Most importantly, as was documented above, Scandinavian countries were now firmly established as a “Nordic Balance” between the United States and the Soviet Union. Scandinavian countries’ enduring attempts to decrease regional tension between the superpowers, and to establish a Nordic Nuclear-Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ), gave Gorbachev an opening he did not enjoy in other regions. Here he believed the Soviets could retrench without losing too much face. Gorbachev (1987, pg.132) correctly assumed that the “public climate” of Northern Europe would be extraordinarily “receptive” to the “new political thinking” he elucidated in the Murmansk Speech. He pushed Northern Europe countries to ramp up their collective pressure on the United States to reduce the number of forces NATO now routinely exercised in the Arctic. At the same time, he criticized the United States, in a very traditional Soviet way, for being the main cause of the tension in the Arctic and for “artificially” portraying the Soviet Union as “the image of the enemy” (1987, pg.131). He also pushed the Scandinavians to begin confidence-building military relationships with the Soviets and to work with the Soviets to make the Arctic a “zone of peace.”

While Northern European countries did increase their pressure on the United States, inertia kept the Murmansk Initiatives from achieving early success. The policy changes proposed at Murmansk, which included evacuating Soviet nuclear submarines from the Baltic, getting rid
of some medium-range missile launchers on the Kola Peninsula, and banning naval activity in Arctic international straits, were too drastic for the Soviet military leadership to quickly digest. The overtures threatened to reduce the military-industrial complex’s ability to compete against its Arctic adversaries, and also its ability to compete with domestic institutions for resources. The military establishment only tortuously came around to officially show tepid support for the proposals Gorbachev made at Murmansk three months after the speech was delivered (Purver 1988, pg.148). It is likely it only gave its support for the Initiatives because it believed the proposals were more propaganda than actual propositions.

The Soviet military’s tepid reaction to the Murmansk Initiatives did little to increase the confidence of the other Arctic states about the Soviet Union’s intentions either. As is documented elsewhere in this section, Soviet military’s actions in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan, and the Soviet Union’s military build-up on the Kola Peninsula, made Arctic states wary of the Soviet Union. Even neutrals, Sweden and Finland, refused to officially agree to any of the “hard” security-based initiatives that Gorbachev initially proposed at Murmansk because they were afraid of being isolated and made vulnerable to Soviet military might (Purver 1988, pgs.152-153). American, Canadian, Norwegian, and Danish officials more brazenly declared that the security measures proposed by Gorbachev at Murmansk were designed to give the Soviets a greater military advantage than they already had in the Arctic and were impossible to monitor or enforce (Purver 1988, pgs.154-155). In short, decades-long mutual suspicion kept even the “peace-loving” Scandinavian countries from accepting Gorbachev at face value at Murmansk.

Gorbachev was much more successful at establishing multilateral efforts to combat “soft” environmental and human security concerns after the Murmansk speech, however. These gambits did not threaten the physical security of the other Arctic states and elicited the support of
many affluent people in Western society that were already working to improve the region’s environment and the health of its native inhabitants. Gorbachev hoped to use these security efforts as confidence-building measures to extract cooperation to co-develop Arctic resources the Soviets did not have the technology to extract alone. As such they were more the result of short-term Soviet materialist concerns than actual Soviet concerns for the Arctic environment or its indigenous population. To that end, Gorbachev (1987, pg. 133) wanted the Soviets to hold the primary leadership role in these “cooperative” efforts even though the Soviets did not have any expertise or historical concern for either the Arctic environment or its native peoples – both of which had been decimated under Soviet rule.

By 1991 it was clear that the Soviet Union could no longer negotiate from a position of strength, as it did at Murmansk. The centrifugal forces of rapid economic decline and destabilizing domestic reforms that began around the time of Gorbachev’s Murmansk Speech tore the Iron Curtain and the Soviet Union rapidly and unexpectedly apart. Its military, already suffering from low morale after its failed occupation of Afghanistan suffered epidemics of desertion, draft-dodging, indiscipline, poor health, and supply problems that quickly eroded its capability and willingness to hold the Soviet Empire together by force (Feshbach and Friendly 1992, Chapter 8). Gorbachev accelerated the military’s decline by cutting its bloated budget in a last-ditch attempt to stabilize the free-falling economy. This effort was ultimately counter-productive because the Soviet planned economy was institutionally designed primarily to produce for the military, and it could not quickly or effectively transition to produce consumer goods.

The Soviet military establishment chafed at the budget cuts but illustrated its own internal decay and low morale when whole units of disillusioned Soviet soldiers refused to take part in
the failed military coup against Gorbachev, and his reformists, in August of 1991 (Mandelbaum 1992). This critical juncture further accelerated the Soviet Unions’ implosion. In effect, the Soviet military was now exposed as a crippled giant. As Feshbech and Friendly (1992, pg. 162) attest, it was “Rigid at the top, disintegrating from below, it was prey to the same ills that shook the foundations of every Soviet institution” at the time. Shortly after the failed coup, the near-Arctic Soviet Baltic Republics seized the propitious moment to liberate themselves from Soviet rule. They legitimized their nationalist cause by claiming a right to self-determination and human rights that were institutionalized in the Helsinki Accords. Their cause was strengthened by the historical precedent of Western countries’ unabating non-recognition of the Baltic’s forced incorporation into the Soviet Union after the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (Spohr-Readman 2006).

The Soviet military at first tried to put down the Baltic revolts, which unlike its weakening stance in Eastern Europe, was considered an internal Soviet problem. The Soviets also instituted energy blockades to deter the Baltics from pushing ahead with their independence movements (Spohr-Readman 2006, pg. 18). However, the military backed off after a hesitant and unconfident Gorbachev ordered it out of the Baltics (Schmemann 1991). Gorbachev feared that putting down the independence movements would lead to international isolation that would put critical trade, aid, and nuclear arms negotiations at risk, and would contradict his fateful decision to reverse the Brezhnev Doctrine of retaining Communist client states by force (Spohr-Readman 2006, pgs. 7,12). He was also being pressured by Russian nationalists, like Boris Yeltsin, who promoted other republics’ liberation efforts to raise their own political capital (Spohr-Readman 2006, pg. 25; Raun 1991, pgs. 255-256). The United States, for its part, reactively reinforced Gorbachev’s fears by putting critical trade on hold and implementing economic sanctions in.
response to the Soviets’ energy embargo and repression against the Baltics (Spohr-Readman 2006, pgs. 20, 25). America’s Nordic allies, especially Denmark and Iceland, also put diplomatic pressure on the Soviets with American support (Spohr-Readman 2006).

Russia’s retrenchment from the North signaled by its eventual non-interference in the Baltic independence movements and Gorbachev’s earlier Murmansk Initiatives, as well as the 1990 Baker-Shevardnadze Line that demarcated the Bering Strait between the United States and Russia for the first time, had serious long-term consequences for the region that went beyond the implosion of the Soviet Union. Most importantly, the successful initiation of multilateral soft security efforts these events allowed set the precedent and provided the political space the Canadians and Finns needed to successfully establish the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) (Young 1998). The AEPS, in turn, provided the institutional structure for the Arctic Council that now provides a dose of multinational governance in the Arctic that restrains both the Russians and the Americans (English 2013).

In this way the Murmansk Initiatives were contingent on the agency of the leader of the crumbling Soviet Empire and a weakened Soviet military. Gorbachev set regional relations down a different path than otherwise could have been the case and the Soviet military-industrial complex was unable and unwilling to stop him in its suddenly weakened state. Gorbachev created the conditions where Russia could be perceived as a “cooperative player” in the Arctic by its former regional adversaries after the Cold War ended. However, the Russia that emerged from the Soviet Union also did not have the institutions or the history to be as truly concerned about the environment or Arctic indigenes as many Western analysts assumed (as will be discussed later in this chapter). More importantly, the constrained geopolitical situation and the traditional Russian paranoia of encirclement was exacerbated by the territory it gave up at this
fateful juncture and would make it more assertive and adversarial in the Arctic than the United States afterwards. This was underlined by the Russian Duma’s decision not to ratify the Baker-Shevardnadze Line (Konyshev and Sergunin 2014).

2.2.5. Conclusion

Because of material constraints, international and domestic pressure, and runaway reform efforts supported by “new thinkers” the Soviets went from building themselves up to be the predominant military power in the Arctic by the early 1980s to losing the willingness and capability to exercise any power outside its own borders by the early 1990s. The Soviet retrenchment temporarily improved the relationships Russia had with its Arctic neighbors. They were no longer as threatened by the overwhelming presence of the Russian military as they were before. But, the long history of distrust engendered by the Soviet Union was not overcome quickly and cooperation came slowly and tentatively from the other Arctic states.

Besides, many prominent Russians, including future Russian President Vladimir Putin, also remained distrustful of the other polar countries. These Russian elites felt humiliated by the loss of territory and influence that accompanied the Soviet collapse and felt as encircled as the Tsarist and Soviet statesmen did before them. The loss of the Baltic states was especially significant to how these Russians would see the Arctic. The loss erased a critical territorial buffer that had protected Russia’s most populous and productive cities in the Russian northwest since World War II and potentially restricted Russia’s access to the Baltic Sea afterwards.

Russia’s access to the world’s oceans was further complicated by the loss of Ukraine, and Russia’s decision to give the contested Kurile Islands to the Japanese, during this critical moment of weakness and change. These losses complicated Russia’s access to the Mediterranean Sea and the Pacific Ocean afterwards, and made Russia’s continued hold over the warm-water
ports on the Barents’ Sea even more critical than they were before the 1970s. This geopolitical situation made Putin’s regime more willing to exert influence into the Arctic when it stabilized Russia’s political institutions and economy in the 2000s. The legacy of Soviet militarization and regional expertise would give them the tools to do so.

2. Economics

As was foreshadowed in the previous geopolitical section of this chapter, different domestic economic institutions made the Soviet Union much more willing to expand its presence and hold over the Arctic than the United States throughout the last two decades of the Cold War. This section explains how the energy crises of the 1970s and the Soviet Union’s previous exorbitant and institutionalized investment to develop an extensive Arctic economy and transportation system gave the Soviets a head-start in the race to develop new deposits in the Arctic compared to the United States.

The section then describes how the rapid decline of resource prices in the 1980s accentuated the consequences of the economic warfare the United States waged against the Soviet Union in the Arctic and exposed the “resource curse” that continues to bedevil the Russians. It shows how the burden of the expensive and inefficient Soviet Arctic economic endeavors contributed to the rapid collapse of the Soviet state. Moreover, it explains that the Soviet legacy endowed to Russia a much larger dependence on Arctic resources, and a much more extensive transportation infrastructure, and institutions that had a much larger vested interest in exploiting Arctic resources than existed in the United States after the Cold War was over.

3.1. United States and its Multinational Companies
The OPEC oil embargo of 1973 was a critical juncture that gave America the willingness to develop northern Alaska for the first time since the gold rushes at the beginning of the 20th century. Just like these earlier rushes, America’s market economy underlined the sudden interest in Arctic resources. Oil in 1980 was eleven times more expensive per barrel than it was in 1970 (Lajeunesse 2012, pg. 304). Suddenly, American oil companies decided it was worth making the necessary capital investments to exploit the largest oil deposit ever found in the United States on Alaska’s North Slope (Garrett 1984, pg. 46). To illustrate the expensive nature of the project it cost eight billion dollars alone to construct the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) that transported this oil to Southern Alaska (Duggan 1984, pg. 22). By the time it was completed the development of Prudhoe Bay and the associated TAPS system was the most expensive private development effort ever attempted in the United States. It brought thousands of construction and service workers northward into the Arctic tundra for the first time.

In contrast to Soviet Arctic development endeavors, North Slope operations were designed to be temporary and were triggered by market forces. Structures were torn down when they were no longer needed. Workers retreated to Fairbanks or Anchorage or returned to the continental United States after the TAPS was completed. Once oil exploitation began most of the workers rotated in and out of Prudhoe Bay to keep costs down (Duggan 1984, pg. 24). The total resident population of the North Slope remained below ten thousand people (Miller 1984, pg. 59) in contrast to the cities the Soviets established on their own Arctic tundra that had hundreds of thousands of people, and in some cases, even millions of people.

Even though America had an acute concern for energy security throughout the 1970s that led to the Carter Doctrine, and other national policies to secure access to sources of energy, the American government still played a complementary instead of a primary role in this
development. Unlike the Soviets the American government limited its assistance to easing
regulatory burdens for energy companies interested in extracting energy resources in Northern
Alaska. This regulatory assistance should not be overlooked, however, because as was
documented in the previous chapter, it took unprecedented Congressional legislation to settle
land claims with native groups and to overcome fierce opposition from environmental groups for
development to proceed.

The investment that occurred during the 1970s and early 1980s created an important
precedent that established the energy industry in northern Alaska. Prudhoe Bay quickly became
America’s premier domestic energy source and alleviated the country’s energy security problems
during the 1980s (Duggan 1984 pg. 22). Once the large initial capital investment was made it
became much cheaper to produce and transport oil from the North Slope to markets (Garrett
1984, pg. 52). The initial efforts also gave energy companies the knowledge to find and develop
other North Slope deposits like the nearby Kuparuk and Endicott fields (Garrett 1984, pgs. 40,
49, 52). These newly developed fields, in turn, provided the necessary volume of oil for the
TAPS to keep operating when Prudhoe Bay began its slow decline in the mid-1980s. Overall, the
deposits on Alaska’s North Slope were responsible for a quarter of America’s total known oil
reserves (seven billion barrels) and seventeen percent of the United States’ total oil production
by 1984 (Garrett 1984, pg. 39).

The establishment of the Prudhoe Bay production complex and TAPS also enlightened
American industry to the relatively high capital costs of developing the Arctic, however. The
initial nine hundred million dollar estimate to construct the TAPS turned out to be wildly
optimistic. It underestimated the high cost of creating new transportation routes to bring workers
and supplies to austere Northern Alaska, it underestimated the delays caused by the difficult
environment and weather, and it underestimated the difficulty of complying with environmental regulations, and dealing with the taxes mandated by the federal, state and native governments whose territory the TAPS passed through (Mead 1978, Chapter 11). By the time the TAPS completed construction the tab exceeded sixteen billion dollars (Mead 1978, pg. 448)\textsuperscript{45}.

With a better grasp of the economics of operating in the Arctic new projects were put on hold when energy prices dropped precipitously during the 1980s. Arctic historian Adam Lajeunesse (2012, pg. 348) claims that “low oil and metal prices had effectively scuttled the dreams of an Arctic bonanza and, by the late 1980s, there had been a widespread evacuation of the region by the oil, gas and mining industries.” Unlike the Soviets the American government did not provide large loans or income guarantees to resource companies because it did not want to distort the market forces that overwhelmingly guided the American economy (Dugger 1984, pgs. 29-31). And, unlike the Soviets, the American government was not very dependent on revenue generated by northern resource sales. Without federal government financial support companies no longer found it profitable to make the large capital investments necessary to exploit new deposits when market prices declined. In stark contrast, as we will see later in this section, the Soviets actually increased their production efforts in the Arctic to make up for the gap in revenue when prices declined.

Nevertheless, the energy companies that established a foothold in Alaska prior to the slump in energy prices became a powerful interest group that in a much smaller way paralleled the political strength of the Soviet oil and gas ministries. The State of Alaska and the North Slope Bureau (NSB) governments received tremendous rent from energy companies, which made the relationship symbiotic and meant that all three entities had a vested interest in

\textsuperscript{45} This is $62B in inflation adjusted dollars today.
maintaining energy production. In 1982, taxes on North Slope oil created over three billion dollars in revenue for the State of Alaska (Garrett 1984, pg. 48). Consequently, the State of Alaska, and to a lesser extent the NSB, teamed up with these companies to promote energy development on the North Slope afterwards. Dugger (1984, pg. 26) claims that the State of Alaska’s policies were the most conducive to energy development in the country in the 1980s, even though the substantial taxes it levied on the companies paradoxically made some new projects uneconomical.

Dependence on resource revenue made the steep decline in oil prices during the mid-1980s almost as catastrophic to the Alaskan economy as the Soviet economy (Dugger 1984, pg. 26). By 1982 the oil industry was responsible for eighty-five percent of Alaska’s tax revenue, one-third of its employment (Kruse 1984, pg. 135), and the State of Alaska used oil rent to subsidize its population with a yearly “dividend” that made living in Alaska more affordable. The State of Alaska also supported a burgeoning welfare system with oil money that made living in Alaska more palatable. However, in contrast to the Soviets the State of Alaska did not govern most of the land in Northern Alaska. Instead, it largely remained under the jurisdiction of the federal government, or native groups who were ambiguous to development. Its relatively meager holdings and its relatively meager political representation in the federal government made it difficult for the State of Alaska to more forcefully push legislation to promote energy development in Alaska after America’s energy security concerns ebbed in the 1980s.

Non energy-based resource companies had an even more difficult time getting started in Northern Alaska during the 1970s and early 1980s despite the prodigious size of the deposits located there (Miller 1984, pg. 63). This was even true of the nascent gas industry that was firmly connected to the oil industry. Although gas deposits on the North Slope represented
thirteen percent of America’s total known gas reserves in the 1980s there was not a successful attempt to produce it. Instead North Slope gas extracted along with North Slope oil was either flared off by energy companies or used to inject into existing wells to push out more oil (Garrett 1984, pg. 49).

The almost five-thousand-mile Alaska Natural Gas Transportation System (ANGTS) that was approved by Congress in 1977 to transport North Slope gas to markets in California and Chicago during the height of the energy crisis was designed to alleviate this problem and to ease domestic energy concerns. In contrast to the gas pipeline that the Soviets built from northern Siberia to Europe at the same time the high cost of the ANGTS kept it from ever being completed, however. The most expensive part of the proposed thirty-seven-billion-dollar project was the section in Alaska (Dugger 1984, pg. 25) which was estimated by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to cost twenty-five billion dollars (Garrett 1984, pg. 49). The GAO estimated the cost of gas would need to be ten dollars per thousand cubic feet for the Alaska portion of the proposed pipeline project to break even. With the cost of gas in the continental United States at four dollars in 1984 this was far from the case (Garett 1984 pg. 49).

Coal faced a similar dilemma. Despite renewed efforts to develop the expansive Alaskan Arctic coal fields to substitute for Middle East oil after the OPEC embargo, it was still uneconomical to do so largely because of the high start-up and transport costs associated with proposed development efforts. Furthermore, the Alaskan coal industry lost its most important consumer during the 1960s when military installations in Alaska moved from using coal to natural gas to generate electricity (Capelotti 2005, pg. 391). Geologist, Thomas Miller (1984, pg. 63), estimated it would take until at least the year 2000 for it to become economical to develop coal in Northern Alaska, but this still has not occurred.
Likewise, offshore oil in northern Alaska was not developed because of the high cost of the proposed projects. The pro-oil National Petroleum Council (NPC) estimated it would cost ninety-five billion dollars to develop and produce oil from potential deposits in the Beaufort Sea (Dugger 1984, pg. 37). But these deposits were much more capital intensive to develop than those in waters in the Gulf of Mexico because there was no established way to move the oil to markets and there was a much higher cost to construct the necessary ice-resistant drilling platforms on the permafrost of the Beaufort than there was on the seabed of the Gulf of Mexico (Garrett 1984, pgs. 53-54). The United States Geological Survey (USGS) estimated Beaufort deposits would need to be one-hundred times as large as those in the Gulf of Mexico to be economical (Dugger 1984, pg. 26), which they were not. Similarly, the USGS estimated the cost of producing oil from the Chukchi Sea was fifty to one hundred times higher than what it cost to produce oil in Saudi Arabia (Garrett 1984, pg. 40) – making the Carter Doctrine understandable. It was cheaper for the United States to import energy from the troubled Middle East than it was for it to develop new energy resources in Arctic Alaska.

Mineral development faced similar obstacles to energy development (Hunt 1990). For instance, the copper deposits at Arctic Camp were estimated to be the biggest in the world. However, as geologist Thomas Miller concluded (1984, pgs. 59, 66-67), the deposits were two-hundred miles from the ocean, and it would cost over one-billion dollars to construct a railroad to connect the area with the rudimentary transportation infrastructure that existed in Alaska. Although gold also remained prodigious in Northern Alaska, and despite it being responsible for up to ninety-nine percent of Alaska’s revenue before oil was produced, there was only one gold lode mine, a legacy of the turn-of-the-century gold rush, that still operated in Northern Alaska by the early 1990s. It even shut down operations sporadically when market prices made it
unprofitable (Miller 1984, pg. 68) as occurred during the mid-1980s. William Hunt (1990) claims miners “sometimes dream of a perceived national emergency that would induce the government to virtually beg them to mine much needed metals” in Alaska.

This did not occur, but the State of Alaska did step in to help Cominco and the NANA Native Corporation by loaning one-hundred-and-fifty million dollars to them to cooperatively develop the Red Dog mineral mine in Northwest Alaska in the mid-1980s. This was done to diversify the Alaskan economy, decrease the State of Alaska’s dependence on oil revenue, and to placate the Native groups. The loan allowed the cooperative to construct a fifty-seven-mile road to connect the mine to a shallow port on the Chukchi Sea that is only open about one-hundred days a year due to ice (Hunt 1990). The Red Dog mine quickly became the largest zinc mine in the world and provided four-hundred jobs and needed revenue for the Northwest Borough and the State of Alaska, but its size paled in comparison to Soviet mining communities on the other side of the Arctic.

Despite helpful local laws and policies that aided development in Northern Alaska many federal laws that were designed to support national interests still hindered development. One of these was the enduring Jones Act (see Chapter 3) that made it unlawful to ship American goods to American ports on foreign ships. This law, long despised in Alaska, increased the cost of shipping resources like zinc from the Red Dog mine and oil from the North Slope to the United States.

The 1979 Export Administration Act was a more recent law that disallowed selling American oil to foreign countries and was just as pernicious to development in Alaska as the Jones Act because while it cost only fifty cents to transport North Slope oil to Japan in 1984 it cost around four dollars to transport the same oil to the Gulf Coast (Dugger 1984, pg. 33).
Unfortunately for Alaska, even though the National Security Council favored getting Alaskan oil to the Far East to ease the security concerns of its allies, it did not have the pull to overcome reactionary forces (Dugger 1984, pg. 35). Once the Export Administration Act was enacted a bevy of interest groups rose to sustain it. These groups included environmentalists, the maritime industry, the country of Panama, labor unions, and even major oil companies that had constructed the extensive and expensive transportation network needed to get North Slope oil to the Gulf Coast, Caribbean and East Coast refineries during the late 1970s and did not want their capital investment to be wasted (Dugger 1984, pgs. 33-35; Garrett 1984, pg. 48).

Another malignant federal law, the Crude Oil Windfall Tax of 1980, was applied to Prudhoe Bay oil and any other oil production inside of seventy-five miles from the TAPS (Garrett 1984, pg. 55). The law was a compromise bill the Carter Administration used to ease resistance to its decision to dismantle price controls that were enacted after the OPEC oil embargo. The Carter Administration believed the tax would increase federal tax revenue from oil companies that were thought to be making large profits from high energy prices. However, according to a later study by the Congressional Research Service (2006), the Windfall Tax paradoxically reduced domestic oil production anywhere from one to eight percent (320 to 1,269 million barrels) from 1980 to 1988, by making oil production unprofitable. The law was not extended in 1988 because it hardly produced any revenue for the federal government by then, but by that time the low price of oil further sidelined new development projects in Northern Alaska.

American resource companies faced even greater regulatory and legislative resistance when they looked to extract resources in the Arctic territory of their polar neighbors due to protectionist measures these countries continued to follow. Most significantly, Canada continued its traditional efforts to keep American companies from developing Canadian northern resources,
especially its oil deposits in the Yukon and the Beaufort Sea (Kirton 1984, pgs. 302, 304-305, 310; Lajeunesse 2012, pgs. 248-249). It subsidized its own companies and set tariffs that kept American companies out. Furthermore, Canada and the United States’ inability to compromise on their overlapping EEZ claims in the Beaufort Sea kept both countries from exploiting potentially lucrative oil deposits that both countries claimed.

Altogether, Canadian efforts to protect its sovereignty, and its own companies, increased the political and economic transaction costs American companies faced when they took account of producing and transporting Canadian Arctic resources to markets. This meant the Arctic Ocean remained free from American merchant ships even as resource development took off in the Arctic in the 1970s and early 1980s. The lack of American merchant ships employed in the Arctic subsequently reduced the need for the American government to develop new icebreakers or to deploy other search and rescue assets that would have given them a larger capability to operate in the Arctic. This effectively marginalized America’s presence on the Arctic Ocean, especially compared to the expansive fleet and the navigational infrastructure the Soviets developed at the same time on its side of the Arctic Ocean.

Ironically, the strict government ban enacted by the Reagan administration on technology transfer to the Soviets during the 1980s also restrained America’s presence in the Arctic. As we will see in the next section of this chapter the ban helped cripple the Soviet economy. However, it also eliminated a large commercial impetus that would have brought American companies at least temporarily into the Russian Arctic and given these companies the experience to possibly allow them to economically develop deposits in the North American Arctic also.

All in all, America still lacked the pull to develop a comparable Arctic economy to the Soviet Union because of its historically entrenched market-based institutions and foreign
relations. Although the rapid development of North Slope oil in the mid-1970s showed the United States could quickly develop the capability to develop a more vibrant Arctic economy in the rare cases when the price was right and security concerns motivated it to do so, the lack of previous development made these efforts extremely expensive and there were many reactionary forces that rose up to restrain development.

3.2. Soviet Economics

As was documented in the previous chapters, the coercive economic institutions and planned economy of the Soviet Union made it possible for it to establish vast industrial complexes and urban centers across the Russian Arctic that did not exist in other Arctic countries, including the United States. This gave the Soviet Union a much larger economic presence in the Arctic than every other country even before the energy security crises of the late 1960s and 1970s pushed other polar countries towards securing and extracting Arctic resources.

After the OPEC energy crisis, Soviet Arctic oil, gas, and precious metals were suddenly strategic and economically critical resources that temporarily appeared to justify the Soviet Union’s previous investment. Northern resources contributed heavily to the Soviet Union’s economic resurgence and international influence during this time. These resources were used to fuel the expanding Soviet military-industrial complex, to subsidize the Soviet Union’s expanding number of vassal states, and to purchase critical western technology, western consumer goods, and agriculture products.

Ironically, the Soviet economy’s reliance on northern resources also greatly contributed to the Soviet Union’s demise when international resource prices sharply decreased in the 1980s. The rest of this section describes in more detail how northern resources helped increase Russian national strength in the 1970s and then contributed to national decline in the late 1980s. In doing
so, it shows how the sunk costs of the investments made during this time period made the Arctic economically critical to the present Russian government. Moreover, it shows why Russia gains relative strength from its northern resources when international prices for these resources are high, but also suffers tremendously when resource prices decline.

3.2.1. The Rise

The 1973 OPEC oil crisis was an unexpected and contingent boon to the Soviet economy just as it was a sudden shock to the American economic system. Spurred by the Arab-Israeli war and the nationalization of hydrocarbon resources in the Middle East and Latin America international energy prices spiked. For the first time since the 19th century the United States became a net importer of oil and therefore did not have the excess energy resources available to supply its international allies. The Soviet Union eagerly jumped into this void to cash in on the excess energy it produced in the Arctic and elsewhere. By doing so, historian of Soviet energy, Marshall Goldman (1980), credibly claims that the Soviet Union temporarily gained more power from its energy wealth than it did from its nuclear weapons. In other words, Arctic resources were now one of the main sources of the Soviet Union’s burgeoning strength.

As Goldman (1999, pg. 13) details, the development of Soviet hydrocarbons was designed primarily to support its expansive military-industrial complex – something that is well documented in earlier chapters. How much is unknown because numbers from the Soviet era are historically unreliable, but various sources suggest revenue from oil production paid for a large portion of the Soviet military’s intense modernization efforts in the 1970s and corresponded with increased energy prices (Painter 2014). The previously massive labor and capital-intensive investment to develop these resources made the Soviet Union’s centrally planned economic endeavors appear wise to many. While the American economy faced energy shortages in the
1970s, the Soviet Union became the largest producer of hydrocarbons. West Siberian production alone was greater than the total of American production by 1980 (Goldman 1999, pg. 11).

The Soviets actively pushed the OPEC states they were aligned with to create and sustain the 1973 embargo to punish the United States and its allies which increased its relative strength vis-à-vis the United States. The Soviets were not beholden to this embargo themselves, and they handsomely profited from the rise in energy prices by selling their excess resources to the capitalist countries they admonished in Western Europe (Goldman 1980). The CIA estimated that with every dollar increase in the price of a barrel of oil the Soviets gained one-billion dollars in hard currency. With oil prices rising eleven-fold during the 1970s this generated a tremendous amount of revenue for the Soviet state! By 1976 energy exports were responsible for over half of the Soviet Union’s hard currency revenue (Painter 2014, pg. 194).

This revenue contributed to the hubris that motivated the Soviets to embark on a more assertive foreign policy. First, it used the energy as both a carrot and a stick to strengthen the governments that showed support for Soviet policies and to threaten to embargo governments that were falling out of line (Goldman 1980, pgs. 58-61). It sent energy resources to third world countries to lessen their dependence on Western multinational energy companies, weaken western influence, and support Communist insurrections (Goldman 2008, pg. 44). Second, there is credible evidence that suggests oil wealth heavily contributed to the Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan in 1979 (Brown 2013). Oil prices doubled in the year preceding the invasion when the American-tied Shah was overthrown in Iran. This gave the Soviets the over-exuberance to make a “great gamble” to establish a bridgehead in Afghanistan where they could better influence the Middle East and further direct world energy markets (Brown 2013). Ultimately, the Afghanistan decision fatefully destroyed the Soviet image as the protector of Third World
countries from imperialism, resulted in the end of détente with the United States, and undermined the Soviet Union’s domestic legitimacy when thousands of dead Soviet soldiers returned home (Brown 2013, pgs. 64-66). But, in 1979, it indicated strength and confidence that the Soviets gained partly from their Arctic resource production.

Energy revenue also masked the Soviets’ agricultural and industrial failures. It used the oil revenue to buy critical grain and other agricultural products from the West. Reflective of its dependence on these goods, by the early 1980s the Soviet Union completed the decades-long transition from being the world’s largest exporter of wheat prior to World War I to the largest importer of wheat in the world by 1980s (Gaidar 2007, pgs. 89, 97). The large urban settlements on the Soviet tundra that could not produce their own agricultural products because of the harsh climate and reckless, failed schemes to improve agriculture production elsewhere, contributed to this problem. By the 1980s most Soviets were dependent on other countries to produce the food its citizens needed (Feschbach and Friendly 1992). The Soviet economy also did not produce enough consumer goods, because of its intense focus on military production. Oil revenue was used instead to purchase consumer goods on Western markets as a substitute (Gaidar 2007). This improved the welfare of Soviet citizens, something Soviet leaders had predicted since the Bolshevik Revolution, and allowed them to continue their transition from forced labor to economically incentivized labor in northern resource extraction centers.

Additionally, the Soviet Union’s historically labor-intensive resource extraction operations faced new hurdles by the 1970s that forced them to transition from brute force, labor-intensive extraction to more mechanized extraction operations. One reason for this transition was surprisingly a lack of “free” labor – a problem that was a historic first for the Soviet Union who used crude labor to establish the modern Soviet economy – eventually using up this human
capital. There is strong evidence the Soviets still utilized prison labor and young Communist-party recruits to extract resources in the Arctic throughout the 1970s and 1980s. For example, convicts were used to construct the Urengoi gas pipeline that connected the new gas fields of northwestern Siberia with Europe in the 1970s and 1980s (New York Times, 1982; Haffstutler 1982). The Heritage Foundation (1982) even suggested the Vietnamese and Cuban governments sent servile laborers to work in the Soviet Arctic to pay off sovereign debts it owed the Soviets.\textsuperscript{46}

However, the percentage of foreign laborers was low, and the Soviet government was unwilling to coerce its own citizens to labor in the Arctic to the same extent as it did during the Stalin era. To exacerbate matters, the overall supply of Soviet workers leveled off with declining birthrates in the 1970s (Vandenbrouke 2016). Furthermore, industrial pollution, alcoholism, smoking, and industrial accidents decreased the relative productivity and increased the death rates of the workers that remained in the Arctic (Hill and Gaddy 2003, pg. 98). To maintain production in northern resource extraction centers the Soviets heavily subsidized those that were in the Arctic to remain and to entice new workers to move to the North. These workers were given long vacations to warmer Russian locales and given access to consumer goods that were not as easily obtainable elsewhere in the Soviet Union. The Soviet government could temporarily afford these subsidies because of the high rate of return it received from Arctic resources.

The second reason the Soviets turned away from crude labor and towards technology was that they learned from the premature decline of the Volga oil fields that technology, not brute-force labor, was needed to maximize resource extraction. The new deposits the Soviets wanted to develop in the Arctic required even more equipment and technology to efficiently produce than the Volga Fields due to the difficult environmental and geographical circumstances that

\textsuperscript{46} Russia now utilizes servile North Korean workers in its Far East, which suggests these earlier reports are valid and the use of coerced foreign workers is still institutionalized in Russia’s northern economy (Moscow Times 2018).
confronted them on the northern permafrost. Soviet industry, however, proved incapable of producing this equipment and technology due to a legacy of authoritarian planning and production quotas that killed any kind of initiative the Soviets had to make qualitative improvements (Goldman 2008, pg. 40). For instance, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, underlined the path dependent nature of the steel industry Soviet northern energy operations hinged on. He complained, "The production of steel is like a well-traveled road with deep ruts; here even blind horses will not turn off, because the wheels will break" (qtd. in Goldman 2008, pg. 41).

Still, with European help the Soviets were able to construct the expansive sixty-thousand-kilometer Urengoi pipeline system that connected the gas and oil fields of northern Siberia with Europe by the middle of the 1970s (Campbell 1976, pgs. 37-41). Unfortunately, the poor construction and maintenance of the pipelines resulted in numerous leaks. Feshbach and Friendly (1992, pg. 137) reported six-hundred-and-ninety-eight leaks in Tyumen pipelines in 1988 alone, resulting in over one million tons of spilled oil. This number increased to over eleven-hundred leaks in 1990 when the Belozerneft fire alone resulted in the loss of over four-hundred-thousand tons of oil and twenty-one million cubic meters of gas.

Apart from needing Western technology to cure gross inefficiencies in its own production system, Soviet Premier, Leonid Brezhnev, believed that co-opting Western businesses to provide technology to develop its northern energy deposits would tie these companies to the Soviets in economic relationships that would give the Soviets political leverage and provide a wedge issue that could be used to split the United States from its European allies (Perovic and Krempin 2014, pg. 141; Goldman 2008, pg. 48). In a precedent that continues today, the American Congress restricted American companies from working in northern Russia and from transferring
technology to Russia to hurt the Soviets’ ability to produce the resources it depended so heavily on (Perovic and Krempin 2014, pg. 131). It also pressured European governments to restrict their companies’ cooperation with the Soviets.

However, energy security was much more dire for Western Europe than the United States because of Europe’s reliance on oil and gas from the Middle East that was now being embargoed. This made the Europeans much more willing to cooperate with the Soviets than otherwise would have been the case. Krushchev predicted European compliance in 1971, even before the OPEC-generated energy crisis. He stated, “Take the European part, the oil and gas of Siberia. This is a major issue. This will change our very being. These are major economic indicators. They will change our possibilities, our relationship with all of Europe - and not only with the Socialist countries, where we are able to ship gas and oil, but with France, the FRG, Italy. The key is in our hands. Gas hither - hard currency thither. This is a big economic and political question” (qtd. in Perovic and Krempin 2014, pg. 113).

Significantly, the energy crises motivated a conglomerate of French, Italian, and German companies, with their governments’ approval, to buck American pressure and fund and build the massive Urengoi pipeline, also known as the Northern Lights Pipeline, that brought Siberian gas to Western Europe (Hogselius 2013). This was propitious because after the Iranian Revolution in 1979 negotiations with Iran to build a pipeline to connect the gas fields of Soviet Central Asia and Iran with Europe, fell through. The Iranian Revolution cut the potential supply of energy to Europe and increased the price of gas even as Europe moved towards increased gas use (Hogselius 2013, pgs. 181-182). This critical event made the Northern Lights Pipeline even more important to the Soviets and the Europeans than otherwise would have been the case and made it more profitable.
According to the pipeline agreement the Europeans would receive gas at a guaranteed price for twenty-five years after the pipeline’s completion. In exchange, the Soviets would receive an estimated thirty-billion dollars per year in critical hard currency. The Soviets also used the pipeline negotiations to secure low interest loans from European banks (Schweizer 1994, pg. 42). Most importantly, the pipeline made European countries dependent on the Soviet Union for a large proportion of its overall energy. For instance, West Germany was sixty percent dependent on Soviet energy after the pipeline was constructed and many of the Soviet Union’s Eastern European satellites, and Finland, received almost all of their energy from the Soviet Union by the 1980s (Schweizer 1994, pg. 43). After this umbilical cord was established, the Soviets could credibly threaten to turn the pipeline off to influence these countries’ foreign policy decisions – a tool they honed over the next two decades.

The Soviets also continued to use economic means to maintain their sphere of influence in the geo-politically strategic Svalbard Islands. The only other country to extract resources on Svalbard by the early 1990s was the Norwegians who had half the number of workers as the Soviets, but according to Finn Sollie (1988, pgs. 27-28), still produced as much coal as the Soviets. The Soviets continued to support such an uneconomical presence on the island because doing so allowed it to monitor NATO forces in the sea lanes going to and from the Kola Peninsula. It also provided the Soviets with the opportunity to display the Potemkin economic and social prowess of the Soviet state to the Western world by constructing and displaying large swimming pools and theaters in the Russian mining communities there (Overrein et al., 2007).

Similarly, it appears the only reason the Norwegian government subsidized its money-losing mines on Svalbard was to protect its tenuous sovereignty over the islands and to keep an eye on the Soviets. This was helpful to the United States who was still not willing, or
institutionally set up, to subsidize its own money-losing national companies to operate on the Svalbard Islands. The Norwegians, instead, were relied on to check the Soviet presence there.

The Soviet gold industry, which largely completed its transition from gulag to company towns by the 1970s, also benefitted from the international economic climate of the 1970s. In 1973 the United States officially ended its adherence to the gold standard to ease the burden on its struggling economy. This increased the price of gold on the international markets until 1979. Similar to the energy sector, this contingent international event appeared to reflect the wisdom of previous Soviet investment efforts in austere locations like the Arctic Kolyma goldfields. The Soviets used the gold and other precious metals they extracted from the Arctic to support client states, fund insurrections, and procure critical foodstuffs and consumer goods from the West (Godek 1994).

While much less important than energy and gold, northern fishing also took on a bigger role in the Soviet economy during the 1970s. The Soviet Union developed one of the largest fishing fleets in the world to match its growing naval power. This fleet especially grew on the Kola Peninsula where Soviet vessels embarked on trips throughout the world’s oceans (Solecki 1979). The fishing fleet, like other Soviet industries, was solely owned by the state, which conveniently used many of the merchant vessels concurrently as fishing and reconnaissance and communications’ assets for the Soviet military.

The expansive Soviet fishing fleet also prospered from UNCLOS conventions that brought more Arctic water within the Soviet Union’s economic jurisdiction than ever before (Sollie 1988, pg. 33). These conventions rewarded the Soviet Union for the tremendous Arctic coastline it aggressively established sovereignty over in the previous decades (see the previous three chapters). As a result, the Soviet Union now enjoyed economic jurisdiction over the waters
two hundred miles out from its coastline, and around the numerous islands groups north of the
Soviet coastline, and even further in many places where the shallow Arctic basin is less than the
two hundred-meter depth specified by UNCLOS.

More important than fishing, the UNCLOS conventions gave the Soviet Union sole
mineral rights to the most expansive coastal seabed of any Arctic state. This was something
Russia would look to exploit in the next two decades as technology improved and its terrestrial
hydrocarbon resources dwindled. The UNCLOS conventions also debatably gave the Soviets de
jure control over the Northern Sea Route (NSR) that they used to move supplies and resources in
and out of their burgeoning Arctic communities.47 These conventions complemented the
aggressive shows of force the Soviet Union used to give it de facto control of the Arctic maritime
routes previously (See chapter four).

By the 1980s the Soviet Union had the largest and most capable fleet of nuclear
icebreakers and ice capable cargo ships in the world. The fleet of sixty-one icebreakers greatly
exceeded that of the United States, and its Arctic allies, combined, and allowed the Soviet Union
to extend the duration the NSR could be utilized each year. In the relatively less icy waters of the
Kara Sea the Soviets now conducted transits between the large city of Murmansk and Dikson, an
important port on the Yenisei River, year-round. In the icier east, the Soviets could now transit
the East Siberian Sea and the Laptev Sea for up to six months a year (Lawson 1991). The
icebreakers were supplemented with an array of organizations and other physical assets that the
Soviet state accumulated over the previous decades (see especially chapter 3). The agencies
predicted ice, aided navigation, and managed the logistical necessities of moving cargo

47 This set the precedent for it to restrict and charge substantial fees from foreign vessels that want to ply Russia’s coastal waters (Russian
International Affair Council 2013).
throughout the expanding route. By the beginning of the 1990s, the Soviet Union’s ability to ply Arctic waters and control them was unrivalled.

Soviet economists, themselves, estimated that it cost more than twice the amount of money to transport cargo through the Northern Sea Route than through ice-free waters elsewhere in the world - even with the lengthened season and technical improvements that made Northern Sea Route operations more efficient throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Griffiths 1991, pg. 90). It is likely that operations were even more expensive than this since economic costs were not clear in the Soviet command economy and bureaucrats used sleight of hand to make it appear they had achieved planned quotas. These conditions were the main reason that the Soviet Union was unrivalled in these waters. No other country was willing to make the investment or incur the risks that the Soviet did. In any case, rising revenue from Arctic resources legitimized the build-out in the 1970s and early 1980s.

The one remaining economic competitor the Soviets faced in Arctic waters throughout the 1970s and 1980s was Norway. Norway’s claimed EEZ in the ice-free Barents Sea overlapped with the Soviet Union’s claims in multiple places after the 1980s UNCLOS agreements. Despite the enduring security tension between the two states they tentatively cooperated as they had since World War II. They established a bilateral fishing regime called the “Gray Zone Agreement” in 1978 to regulate their overlapping claims (Churchill 1988, pg. 47). According to Sollie (1988, pg. 32) by the late 1980s “a tacit understanding about mutually acceptable behavior seems to have emerged” between the Norwegians and Soviets within the space.

What justified this economic cooperation between Norway and the USSR in these contested waters? In short, precedent and the economic peace theory provide the best explanations. Like earlier times, the Soviets needed western technology to manage and exploit
northern resources and Norway helped with this. In exchange, cooperation with the Soviets gave the Norwegians a greater level of security and allowed them to exploit Barents’ Sea resources they otherwise would not have access to.48

Like its use of Arctic energy resources, the Soviets also hoped that establishing deeper economic ties with Norway would create a wedge between Norway and the United States just as its hydrocarbon trade with Western Europe was doing. Norway’s previous accommodation with the Soviet Union gave the Soviets hope this was a possibility. However, as was previously documented in the geopolitical section of this chapter Norway successfully managed to maintain its delicate lean towards the United States, despite its economic cooperation with the Soviets.

In total, rising resource prices during the 1970s and early 1980s rapidly increased the relative value of the Soviet Union’s northern resources and underpinned Soviet economic strength and geopolitical power. The Soviet economic thrust was aided by international conventions that expanded national sovereignty further into the Arctic and legitimized the Soviet Union’s expensive investment in its coastal Arctic transportation infrastructure. To put the Soviet economic concentration into focus, between 1976 and 1980 economists Hill and Gaddy (2003, pg. 92) estimate that a full thirty-six percent of all Soviet investment in Siberia went to the northern portion of the territory. This investment would give Russia the capability to uniquely operate in the Arctic in the decades that followed. However, the Soviet Union’s reliance on Arctic resources that were relatively expensive to extract, and transport, also contributed to the severe economic crisis that led to the Soviet Union’s eventual demise.

3.2.2. The Fall

48 This set the precedent for the two countries’ historic agreement to delimit their overlapping EEZs in the Barents Sea that allowed both countries to unlock the hydrocarbon deposits there in 2010 (Harding 2010).
By the early 1980s, commodity prices rapidly declined, and it became apparent that the Soviets’ suffered from a resource curse that political scientist Terry Karl (1997) famously calls the “paradox of plenty.” The Soviet Union’s abundance of natural resources paradoxically created the conditions for the Soviet system’s failure. With respect to the Arctic, the boon provided by resource exploitation that gave the Soviets so much strength during the 1970s suddenly was a severe weight that contributed to the Soviet Union’s economic collapse.

Specifically, the inflation adjusted price of oil decreased from over one-hundred-and-twenty dollars a barrel in 1980 to less than seventy dollars a barrel in 1985. It then rapidly declined even further to just over twenty-five dollars a barrel in 1986 when Saudi Arabia rapidly increased its production (Macrotrends.net 2018) (See Figure 6.2). Similarly, the inflation adjusted price of gold declined rapidly from over twenty-two hundred dollars an ounce in 1980 to around seven hundred dollars an ounce in 1985 (Macrotrends.net 2018) (See Figure 6.3).

Figure 6-2: International oil prices in inflation adjusted dollars from 1973-1992.
Unlike American companies that slowed operations in northern Alaska when prices decreased to reduce their losses, the Soviet government was unwilling and unable to curtail new production efforts in the Arctic. First, its economic institutions were based on production quotas according to five-year economic plans, not profit. Secondly, the Soviet Union paradoxically had to produce more resources to make up for the hard currency it lost as a result of the suddenly lower prices in the international marketplace. In effect, the Soviet Union’s internal command economy could not quickly respond to the external market system it was dependent on.

What made things worse for the Soviets was that the new resource deposits they were interested in exploiting in the Arctic were more expensive and more difficult to extract than anticipated. To this point, the Soviets increased their investment in energy production from an estimated four-and-a-half billion dollars per year in the 1970s to over nine billion dollars per year by the 1980s in an effort to solve this problem (Schweizer 1994, pg. 49). From 1981 to 1985
the Soviets planned to invest over half of their industrial investment in gas production, specifically in northern Siberia (Gustafson 1983, pg. v) and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev authorized over fifty-one billion dollars in 1985 alone to bring sixteen new oil fields online by 1986 (Schweizer 1994, pg. 238). Despite these sizable investments the costs to produce a barrel of oil increased eighty percent during the five-year periods of 1981-1985 to 1986-1990 just as oil prices plummeted and the Soviet economy went into freefall (Gaider 2007, pgs. 166 - 167). To make matters worse the production of Soviet gold actually decreased from a high of over three hundred tons in 1979 to one-hundred and seventy tons in 1992 due to breakdowns in equipment and shortages of fuel that forced the Soviets to “pan” for gold instead of industrially mine for it (Godek 1994).

The tragic 1982 season also highlighted the continued difficulty the Soviets had transporting goods to and from northern resource outposts safely and efficiently. Despite the large investments made in the Northern Sea Route over the previous decades severe ice conditions kept supply ships from reaching Soviet Arctic northern ports on time and many were trapped in the ice. To fill in for the ships, many of the outposts’ supplies had to be expensively airlifted to their destinations. Some of the supplies never got to the outposts. Tons of food spoiled on the trapped ships, and two supply ships disastrously sank because of the ice (Barr and Wilson 1985).

The United States, under the more anti-Soviet Reagan administration, exacerbated the difficulty the Soviets had developing the Arctic after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and cracked down on dissent in Eastern Europe in the early 1980s. The United States stepped up its efforts when it became aware just how dependent the Soviets were on Western technology to extract Arctic resources. Most sensationally, the CIA managed to get the Soviets to utilize bogus
technical plans it clandestinely planted with Western industrial conglomerates to spectacularly cause the Urengoi pipeline to explode in 1982 (Hoffman 2004). The United States also leveraged access to its markets and its technology to persuade reluctant European countries to refrain from transferring Western technology to the Soviets (Schweizer 1994, pgs. 48-49, 78-79, 83).

Yevgeny Novikov, a member of the Soviet Central Committee staff stated that “completing the [Urengoi] pipeline without delay was most important. There was no breathing room” (qtd. in Schweizer 1994, pg. 84). However, without ready access to Western technology the Soviets were forced to divert massive amounts of its own supplies and personnel away from other projects to complete the Urengoi Pipeline project. One of the projects that fell out favor was the ambitious long-term plan to use nuclear detonations to divert Russia’s north-flowing Arctic rivers to the south (Micklin 1986; Josephson 2014, pg. 293). One engineer who worked on the Urengoi project exclaimed, “We failed. It was a huge drain on our resources. It cost us dearly” (qtd. in Schweizer 1994, pg. 110). Another specialist from the Soviet oil ministry, Oleg Tikov, placed the blame on the United States. He claimed, “It was not an excuse when we blamed American sanctions on the delay (to the Urengoi pipeline). It was the truth. Everything was chaotic. First, we had no turbines, then we tried to make our own, then we could get them again. What chaos, what disruptions. Two years, and billions of dollars it cost us” (qtd. in Schweizer 1994, pg. 216).

To make matters worse for the Soviets the United States got the Europeans to cap their dependence on Soviet energy to thirty percent and committed the Europeans to formally state they would attempt to find other sources of energy to replace Soviet gas in 1983 (Schweizer 1994, pg. 140). The planned second strand of the Urengoi was not constructed as a result of these

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49 Schweizer estimates the delay of first pipeline cost the Soviets between fifteen and twenty billion dollars of critically needed hard currency.
efforts. The United States even persuaded international bankers to raise interest rates on loans to the Soviet Union, and its satellites, which made the Soviets’ efforts to fund new northern resource-based operations like the Urengoi pipeline even more expensive (Schweizer 1994, pgs. 71-74).

Coincident with its efforts in Europe, the United States eventually persuaded Saudi Arabia, which was threatened by the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the thousands of Soviet military advisors stationed in surrounding Middle East and Horn of Africa states, to increase production threefold from 1985 to 1986. This caused oil prices to rapidly decline from forty dollars a barrel to under twenty dollars a barrel in a year (Gaidar 2007, pg. 61), crippling the Soviet Union’s hard currency reserves even further. Soviet Communist Central Party Committee member, Yevgenny Novikov, claims the Saudi production increase costed the Soviets tens of billions of dollars of critical revenue from its hydrocarbons (Schweizer 1994, pg. 243). More distressingly, it cost five times more Soviet oil to purchase Western machinery in 1986 than it did in 1985 (Schweizer 1994, pgs. 262-263). The decrease in oil prices caused by increased Soviet production coincidently meant that OPEC clients were short of hard currency and unable to buy Soviet military equipment at the rate they had before (Schweizer 1994, pg. 262).

The rapid decrease in resource prices had a cascading effect on the Soviet economy and the national psyche. First, the Soviet Union had a much more difficult time feeding its own people than before because it had to sell a lot more resources to create the hard currency to buy the agricultural products it had grown accustomed to purchasing on the international market. This was especially the case in the Soviet northern outposts that did not have the ability to produce food themselves. High grain prices during the late 1980s were especially difficult for the
Soviets, forcing them to pay over a billion dollars more for the critical product in 1988 than they did in 1987 (Gaidar 2007, pg. 180). The chairman of the Soviet Foreign Trade Company, Prodintorg, warned in 1990 that if the Soviets Union did not buy more grain it would cause a "sharp increase in social and political conflicts" not only in Russia's metropoles but also in Vorkuta, Tyumen, and other industrial centers in the Soviet north where life was already difficult (Gaidar 2007, pg. 183).

Even with the dire economic conditions, the Soviet government did not think about moving people from the large northern settlements they were having trouble feeding to more southerly and less austere locales. The resources from these northern settlements critically sustained the all-important Soviet military-industrial complex, and critically produced the hard currency the Soviets needed to keep its economy on life support. 50

Second, the Soviets decreased their purchase of foreign products to save hard currency. The rationing and long lines that ensued decreased Soviet citizens’ confidence in the government and Communism. Since access to consumer goods was one of the main perks of working in northern outposts these effects were felt more in the Soviet north than in more southerly districts within the Soviet Union and motivated the Soviet government to make large concessions to keep northern unrest from spreading. For example, the head of the Tyumen labor union successfully lobbied the Soviet government to allow industrial enterprises in the oil-rich republic to sell more of their goods directly to foreign and domestic consumers to avert strikes (Gaidar 2007, pg. 189). The Soviet government reluctantly agreed even though this concession decreased the amount of critical hard currency the state could generate from the enterprise.

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50 By the mid-1980s the American government spent more on its military than the Soviet Union for the first time since the 1960s, even though the Soviet Union also increased its defense budget eight percent per year - a total increase of forty-five percent from 1986-1990 (Schweizer 1994, pgs. 191, 240).
Third, the Soviets reluctantly cut back on the energy subsidies they were providing their republics and satellites so they could sell the energy instead to Western markets. They were reluctant to do this because they relied on their satellites for critical goods and were afraid these countries and restive republics, like the Baltics, Poland, and Ukraine, would be pulled away from the Soviet sphere of influence if they did not receive the energy they depended on from the Soviets. Deputy Chairman to the Soviet Council of Ministers, Stepan Sitarian, made these arguments clearly when the Soviet government decided to curtail the amount of energy it provided to COMECON countries in the late 1980s. He claimed, "the point is that we cannot fail to deliver oil to certain countries. If we stop at this number, it means a complete collapse inside the country and with many other countries. If we give Poland zero, then Poland will not sell us anything..." (qtd. in Gaidar 2007, pg. 164). By 1991, however, the Soviet Union was forced to stop giving Arctic oil and gas to Poland because there was not enough hard currency left to sustain Russia (Gaidar 2007, pg. 214).

Fourth, the Soviet Union was reluctant to use force to put down unrest in its satellites because of the dire financial situation that resulted from its dependence on natural resources. The Soviets were leveraged so much economically by the late 1980s that they became dependent on loans and economic aid from developed countries and from multinational organizations like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to stay afloat. They had spent almost all of their gold reserves by that point (Godek 1994) and spent most of the hard currency they generated just to service loans. Lending countries and organizations made their aid conditional on the Soviets respecting human rights (Gaidar 2007, pgs. 169-170). This contributed to the Soviets’ relatively light hand dealing with unrest in Poland. Once it was determined that the Soviets would not use force to keep Poland in line it was much more difficult for it to keep its
other satellites in line. Other Eastern European countries followed Poland’s lead and ejected their Communist leaders.

The economic stress contributed to the Soviet government’s decision to move slowly away from its planned economy and towards market mechanisms – a painful process that further unsettled things, especially in the north where it was much more expensive to live and work. In the economic and political chaos that surrounded the rapid implosion of the Soviet Union reactionary and opportunist forces moved in to institute control over the Russian economy. Among these elements were KGB agents, like Vladimir Putin, that had contacts with political and economic leaders in both Russia and the West that made them uniquely situated to feed off the already established system of selling Russian natural resources to Western entities for hard currency. This allowed Putin, and his ilk, to maintain control over resources that were being transitioned from Soviet-state run ministries to public-private enterprises and to set up patronage networks that supported their political ascendance (Dawisha 2014). In this way, the Arctic economy the Soviets so comprehensively built up became an important economic and political tool of the Russian political leaders that emerged when the Soviet Union dissolved.

3.2.3 Conclusion

By way of a planned economy and an authoritative political system that could coercively make laborers work in the austere Arctic tundra, the Soviet Union was able to build out the largest economic footprint of any polar country. This gave it an unrivalled presence and capability to exploit and transport the region’s resources to markets, albeit in a largely uneconomical way. This was a blessing, then a curse, for the Soviets as resource prices surged during the 1970s and then collapsed in the 1980s. Even as prices collapsed the Soviet planned economy continued to try to obtain centrally planned quotas and increased production to
maintain hard currency revenue. This gave it the willingness to expand its Arctic footprint. It bequeathed its dependence on natural resources, its legacy of Arctic investment, its economic institutions and the lure of the North’s economic potential to the independent Russia that emerged from the Soviet Union.

Russian transport expert, Alexander Arikaynen, presaged how Russia’s past would continue to guide its future endeavors to develop the North. He stated in 1991 that “the time has come for a full payoff of what the state has invested into development of the Northern Sea Route system.” Thousands of Soviet bureaucrats like Arikaynen, as well as millions of northern laborers, and many Russian nationalists proud of Soviet accomplishments in the harsh Arctic environment, were personally and emotionally attached to the Arctic and committed, like Arikayan, to make the decades of Soviet investment in the Arctic “pay off.” Economists call investing good money after bad money, the “escalation of commitment” (See Shaw 1987) a type of path dependence where rational actors make seemingly irrational choices due to the institutional and cultural pressures to align and conform with previous decisions and actions. Just as it took the Soviets decades to dilute the ruthless gulag system that previously was used to colonize and exploit Russia’s northern territory into a system based on positive economic inducements, Russian leaders would find it very difficult to wean the country from its dependence on natural resources or the tremendous state largesse that sustained its northern economic development after the Soviet Union dissolved.

3. Identity

Economic and geopolitical influences that pushed the United States and the Soviet Union into the Arctic during the last two decades of the Cold War continued to subsume the significance of national attachment to the Arctic based on national spatial identities.
Nevertheless, America’s lack of national attachment to the Arctic in relation to its neighbor and ally, Canada, explains some of America’s relative restraint towards the region even during these sensational times.

In contrast, the Soviet Union’s long use of propaganda to foster a national attachment to the region continued to legitimize its expensive investment in the region and socialized the Russian population into believing that they were the proper “owners” of the Arctic. Additionally, as I detail below a growing group of nationalist Russians co-opted the Soviet efforts to reimagine the Arctic as a potential place of re-birth for a re-awakened Russian state as the Soviet Union weakened and then imploded.

4.1 American Identity

America still did not have a strong national attachment to the Arctic because its Arctic territory, Alaska, was still an isolated enclave that was physically and ideationally detached from the continental United States during the 1980s and 1990s. To make matters worse, it became a more “southern” country as its population’s spatial center continued a slow move from the north to the south (US Census 2000, pg. 8). Furthermore, Canada continued to use its wedge position in between the United States and Alaska, and its own deep-seated northern identity, to emphasize its superior national attachment to Arctic versus the United States at any chance it could get. This relationship continued to socialize American political leaders into seeing the Arctic as Canada’s special place and to defer to Canada in the Arctic in a way that did not represent the two countries’ material strength.

Canadian political scientist, Michael Huebert (1993) pointed to Canada’s national attachment to the Arctic as perhaps the biggest contributing factor to the Canadian government’s adversarial reaction to the U.S.S. Polar Sea’s transit through the Northwest Passage in 1985. As
previously documented, the Canadian nationalist outcry that surrounded the transit helped push
Canada to claim jurisdiction over huge expanses of the Arctic Ocean. It also pushed the
Canadian government to define what were before considered territorial Arctic waters as historic
waters (Lejeunesse 2012, pg. 327-28). America’s relative lack of national attachment to the
Arctic explains its unwillingness to push back against the Canadian.

In contrast to realist theorizing, American leaders were socialized by over a century of
Canada’s spatially-based nationalism and in some respects empathized with it. They also wanted
to maintain good relations with their ally, which softened their reaction to Canada’s nationalist-
inspired actions in the Arctic. Most famously, Mulroney told Reagan that Canada “owned” the
Northwest Passage. “Ron that’s ours” he said. “We own it lock, stock, and icebergs” (Lajeunesse
2012, pg. 341). Another Canadian diplomat, Leonard Legault, told his American counterparts
that “the Arctic is for Canada what the Alamo is for Texas (Lajeunesse 2012, pg. 338). As
Canadian historian Adam Lajeunesse claims, no Canadian national politician could show less
than “complete confidence in Canada's right to control and govern its Arctic” without
committing political suicide (Lajeunesse 2012, pg. 367). American politicians felt no such
domestic push to assert American sovereignty in the Arctic because the national attachment to
the region was weak.

Canadian politicians like Mulroney, just as Trudeau and Diefenbacker before him,
understood that they could use Canada’s greater national attachment to the Arctic to persuade
their much less-interested, but more powerful American neighbors, to cede ground there. It was a
domestic political imperative.

51 The italics are mine. They emphasize this Canadian historian’s implicit view that the North American Arctic is owned by Canada – a view that
my own research shows is overwhelmingly and implicitly pushed within the Canadian social science community.
Although the United States did not formally recognize Canada’s claim to the Northwest Passage it also did not take Canada to international court to settle the matter or criticize Canada internationally. In fact, Reagan was openly sympathetic to Canada’s desire to establish control over the region and did not move to change the longstanding bilateral compact to agree to disagree about international access to the Northwest Passage. Consequently, Canada maintained de facto control over the vast majority of the North American Arctic, and its coastal waters, through sheer nationalist-inspired will that the United States could not match.

4.1 Soviet Identity

When the Soviet Union was ascendant during the 1970s and early 1980s, it continued to use propaganda to espouse a view that it was the Soviet Union’s unique Socialist ability to conquer the Arctic. This was an extension of the Stalinist efforts to legitimize the Soviet Union’s attempts to “conquer” the Arctic – a propaganda campaign that was now more than fifty years old (see the previous two chapters). When the formerly unifying Communist ideal of the Soviet Union became bankrupt in the late 1980s it left an ideational vacuum that the vanguard Russians attempted to fill. A dormant nationalism, with spatial Arctic undertones, filled this vacuum. Under these conditions, Russia’s ideational attachment to the Arctic gained in stature.

Because of the sustained Soviet propaganda efforts documented in previous chapters many Russians believed the Arctic was a place of unique and heroic Russian sacrifice. They believed the Arctic cold helped their sturdy ancestors stop Napoleon and Hitler’s invasions and provided a barrier to hostile NATO forces. Many of Russia’s northern inhabitants valued the heavy sacrifices they and their ancestors made to exploit the Arctic’s vast resource which helped make the Soviet Union a superpower.
Prominent Canadian political scientist, Franklyn Griffiths (1991), suggested that Russians did not have a special cultural predisposition to live and work in the Arctic and correctly pointed out that most of the Russians that lived in the Russian Arctic in the early 1990s would not have been there if their ancestors had not been forced to by the Soviet government. However, he also suggests that the Soviet government’s aggressive development efforts, and the propaganda that surrounded it, successfully socialized the Russian population to see their national place and their national sacrifices in the Arctic as special. Thus, the region was critical to the Russians’ sense of physical security, their physical strength, and they felt a special attachment to it. According to Griffiths (1991, pg. 93) many Russians even considered the Arctic Ocean as a “Russian space” at the end of the Soviet era.

The Soviet government continued to stoke this sense of Arctic exceptionalism before its fall. It renewed its Arctic propaganda efforts to build domestic support for its newly expansive efforts to develop northern Siberian resources in the 1970s and 1980s. These efforts had direct parallels to earlier “Red Arctic” efforts in the 1920s and 1930s identified by McCannon (1998). Just as Stalin “mythicized” earlier northern workers and the rich resources of the Arctic the Soviet state-sponsored media again called Siberia the "continent of discoveries," a "future-oriented region full of possibilities for innovative scientists and enthusiastic workers” (Perovic and Krempin 2014, pg. 136). There was also a vast media effort to raise the social status of Siberian oilmen to hero status (Perovic and Krempin 2014, pg. 136).

These efforts were internalized by many Russians, including even those who had been previously moved to the Arctic by Soviet government force or coercion. They were rightfully proud of the incomparable sacrifices they, and their ancestors, made to develop the Arctic and shared in the prestige they believed their sacrifice brought to the Soviet Empire and Russia.
Likewise, nostalgic Russians in more southerly latitudes vicariously supported and gained satisfaction from Soviet exploits in the Arctic (Griffiths 1991, pg. 104).

Significantly, the power of nationalism increased in Russia as domestic support for the Communist system slowly declined throughout the Soviet Union from the 1980s to the 1990s (Kaiser 1994). Russia, which held the most prominent role in this multicultural union, looked to maintain its former prestige as the Soviet system collapsed. Many Russian nationalists filled the ideological vacuum opened up by the diminution of Communism. Some of the most popular among them were in the growing “Village Prose” movement that pointed to Siberia as the most prominent spot for national renewal. One of these authors, former Siberian gulag prisoner A.L. Solzehnitsyn, presaged this evolution, when he asserted to Russian leaders in 1974, “it is Siberia and the North that are our hope and reservoir.” He believed the Soviet Union had corrupted the Russian culture and believed that the true Russian culture and strength only survived in Siberia. Another popular Russian nationalist writer, Valerie Rasputin (1983), similarly saw the Russian Arctic as a place where a faltering Russia could be saved and renewed as the Soviet Union weakened. Together they believed Siberian development was destined to salvage the exceptional Russian way of life that had been mortally damaged by the Soviet system (Hill and Gaddy 2003, pg. 180).

In short, many Russians had a special ideational attachment to the Arctic that far outpaced that of Americans’ attachment to the Arctic as the Soviet Union collapsed. Additionally, the Russian ideational attachment was much more functional and materialistic than the “Arctic” sublime that many Americans subscribed to. Russians dreamed of the Arctic as a locale where a new and stronger Russia could develop and prosper as the multinational Soviet Empire dissolved. This attachment to the Arctic would bolster the Russia’s willingness to sustain
it presence in the Arctic after the Soviet Union collapsed. Many Russians did not want to move away from northern latitudes they had habituated for generations even after the government no longer forced them to live and work there. This was now their permanent home. Furthermore, nationalist Russians that had not even been to the Russian Arctic valued the prestige they felt their country gained from their predominant presence in the region.

5. Environmentalism

Concern for the Arctic environment increased both in the United States and the Soviet Union as the Cold War wound down. In this respect, there was a true ideational convergence that presaged the ascendance of international environmental security concerns that emerged after the Cold War and restrained both countries’ ability to expand into the Arctic.

That being said, the American environmental movement was much more firmly established and much more internationally networked than that of the Soviet Union. It was also much more interested in wilderness preservation than the incipient Russian environmental movement was. Indeed, as was previously documented, the American environmental movement had taken up Arctic preservation since it believed the Arctic was one of the last areas of uninterrupted wilderness that remained in the United States. The preservation movement, which successfully pushed historic legislation to institutionally protect large swathes of northern Alaska, represented a much larger restraint on America’s presence in the Arctic than the Russian environmental movement.

5.1 Soviet Environmentalism

From the 1970s to the 1990s the Soviet Union’s environmental policies partially converged with those of the United States as the Soviet Union slowly liberalized and opened to the West. One of the biggest reasons for this convergence was that Soviet scientists were slowly
allowed to discuss and collaborate with Western society in ways they were prohibited from doing during the Stalin era (See chapter 5).

The 1972 American-Soviet agreement on Exchanges and Cooperation in Scientific, Technical, Education, Cultural and Other Fields, which agreed to "further the principle of mutually beneficial cooperation" underlined this change (Ostergen and Holle 1998, pg. 307). Collaboration with western society influenced Soviet scientists to recognize the unique fragility of the Arctic wilderness. Ostergren and Holle (1998, pg. 309) claim that the children of Soviet scientists were more cognizant of Soviet abuse of the environment than their fellow citizens and that these children led the incipient Soviet environmental movement in the 1980s and 1990s when they came to adulthood.

The scientists and bureaucrats themselves gained more institutional power to protect Arctic areas – oftentimes with the help of Western society. For instance, Soviet scientists at the Lapland Nature Reserve successfully pushed the Soviet government to nearly double the size of the Lapland Nature Reserve after it was designated an “international biosphere reserve” by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1985 (Bruno 2011, pg. 184). Soviet scientists also moved to protect the diminished number of wild-reindeer on the Kola Peninsula just as the American scientists attempted to do contemporaneously with the wild caribou herd in Northwest Alaska (Bruno 2011, pg. 181).

The Hydrometeorological Agency (a weak shadow-organization of the American Environmental Protection Agency that was formed in the 1960s introduced laws in the 1980s to enforce previously enacted environmental regulations and coordinate environmental efforts which gave institutional strength to these efforts. In 1991 the Goskompriroda State Committee on Environmental Protection was upgraded to ministry level which it gave it more power to
enforce environmental regulation. However, it was also tasked with managing the Soviet Union’s natural resources. According to Soviet ecologist Aleksei Yablokov this was a "crippling internal contradiction," especially after the Soviet economy went into freefall in the 1980s (Feschbach and Friendly 1992, pg. 108).

The collapse of the Soviet economy created an ambiguous response to environmental policies. Arctic expert Franklyn Griffiths (1991) suggests many Soviet elites were disillusioned with the Soviet planned economy and were especially attracted to the growing environmental movement because it offered a possible way to make the Soviet economy more rational and efficient. However, the short-term need for revenue overwhelmed any long-term desire to preserve the environment. A prominent Soviet cardiologist underlined this contradiction when he exclaimed, "You tell me first how we're going to feed and clothe the Soviet people and then I'll tell you when we'll start talking about the cost of cleaning up the environment" (qtd. in Feschbach and Friendly 1992, pg. 253).

The incipient environmental movement was also aided by the partial liberalization of Soviet media. Most persuasively, the nationalist and naturalist “Village Prose” of popular Soviet novelists like Valentin Rasputin and Alexander Solzhenitsyn derided the previous Soviet development model for destroying Russian wilderness, especially in “pristine Siberia” (Josephson 2014, pg. 293). Even these novelists, however, believed the North should be developed, albeit in a more sensitive way than previously. Nonetheless, media allowed environmentalists to explain the Arctic’s relative fragility to the Soviet population for the first time. As a result, northern industries were pushed to mitigate the damage they were doing and check their desire to expand their efforts to develop the Arctic (Roginko 1991, pg. 70).
Despite these tentative efforts, Soviet citizens still did not have access to concrete information or avenues to influence policy. Extensive northern oil spills, much larger than that which occurred during the Exxon Valdez disaster, were never publicized by the Soviet press because of the oil ministries’ overriding political strength and the Soviet Communist Party’s desire to only advertise the strength of the Soviet economy, not its weaknesses (Luhn 2016). As such, Paul Josephson (2014, pg. 243) states, that Soviet citizens “were left to guess how their lungs must be faring” when the hills around their Arctic towns were denuded by the smelters operated there. Without this information workers could not make rational decisions about whether the environment was creating costs to their health that outweighed the critical income jobs on the tundra gave them (Feshbach and Friendly 1992, pgs. 104-105, 225).

The most significant push towards environmentalism in the Soviet Union was the sensationally catastrophic meltdown of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in 1986. The Soviet government was unable to hide the widespread destruction caused by this contingent event, like it could the more insidious environmental problems that were occurring throughout the country – although it tried. The event spurred many unsatisfied Soviet citizens, including Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, into action (English 2000, pgs. 215-221). While at first Gorbachev derided the West for exaggerating the event to instill division within the Soviet Union and its allies, he later relented when Swedish scientists exposed the extent of the radioactive fallout that came from the explosion. He also realized that his own ministries were keeping information from him (Feshbach and Friendly 1992, pgs.13-15). Spontaneous demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people marched through Soviet cities to demonstrate their unhappiness. In these circumstances Soviet scientists and activists gained more room to criticize and redirect Soviet environmental
policy. They worked with international NGOs to rectify the suddenly apparent problems rash Soviet industrialization posed to the country (Ostergren and Holle 1998, pg. 307).

One poignant illustration of the consequences of these changes in the Soviet North was with the ambitious Soviet northern river diversion project. While economic collapse made this expensive project ultimately untenable and was likely the main reason for its cancellation (see previous section), environmental concerns delayed its implementation until extensive impact studies were completed. These circumstances contributed to the project’s sudden cancellation by Gorbachev in 1986 when it appeared construction was imminent. Phillip Miklin (1987, pgs. 78-81) gives Gorbachev, and his “new thinking”, ultimate credit for the cancellation due to the increased Soviet concern for economic efficiency and the environment, and Gorbachev’s inestimable ability to overcome entrenched bureaucratic inertia through his glasnost push.52 Undeniably, the Soviet press derided western environmental concerns about the project and the Soviets seemed primed to start on it before Gorbachev came to power. After Gorbachev came to power the narrative was flipped. The Soviet press now ironically cited the same western environmental concerns as a reason for the project’s cancellation (Micklin 2016, pg. 396).

Under Gorbachev, the Russian environmental movement became a legitimate platform for criticizing the government and some believe it contributed to the Soviet Union’s fall (Ostergren and Holle 1998, pg. 308). Two prominent analysts of the Soviet situation, Murray Feshbach and Alfred Friendly Jr. (1992, pg. 1) wrote, “When historians finally conduct an autopsy on the Soviet Union and Soviet Communism, they may reach the verdict of death by ecocide.” Outsiders like Feshbach and Friendly believed that the Marxist-Leninist concept that

52 It must be noted that the successful diversion of rivers from the Arctic to the south of the Soviet Union would have likely decreased Russia’s ability to access the Arctic Ocean. So, the failure of the diversion project helped maintain Russia’s access to the Arctic as much as it decreased the intended economic pull to the region that would have resulted from its successful completion.
humans could master and remake nature through science and technology had been defeated now that it was apparent what this approach had done to the Russian environment.

In reality, the power of the environmental movement remained somewhat muted when Gorbachev’s political power eroded. Bruno concludes (2011, pg. 197), Russia’s relative lack of concern for wilderness preservation was the direct result of centuries-long authoritarianism that deprived its scientists and potential activists of opportunities to study environmental problems, communicate these problems with the general Russian population, or to collectively act to mitigate these problems. Consequently, Russia lacked institutions and interest groups that could enforce and implement environmental laws to preserve northern wilderness (Ostergen and Holle 1998, pg. 306) after the Soviet Union dissolved. The problem of the lack of institutions was exacerbated by the dire state of the Russian economy that emerged from the Soviet Union. As the Soviet economy collapsed, there was little government money left to devote to environmental causes (Ostergren and Holle 1998, pg. 303) and selling northern resources for vital revenue became even more important than it was during Stalinist autarky.

5.2 American Environmentalism

In contrast to the incipient Soviet environmental movement, the American environmental movement was much more effectively developed, politically influential, and insistent on wilderness preservation. The development of Prudhoe Bay in the early 1970s was the most recent critical juncture to spur the influential American environmental movement to object to greater development. By this time earlier environmentalists’ efforts in Alaska (see previous chapters) nurtured a scientific consensus within American academia, and a growing sense within American society, that Alaska - America’s last wilderness area – was existentially threatened by development. These earlier challenges resulted in a tightly-networked and influential group of
over fifty-one environmental NGOs that operated in Alaska by the end of the 1980s (Nelson 2004, pg. 264). These groups utilized previously enacted federal legislation, and existing networks with prominent politicians, philanthropists, and media organizations, to dissuade further development in Alaska through federal courts, the court of national opinion, and the legislatures.

While these environmental organizations were unable to overcome the overwhelming national fears of energy insecurity and the economic pull that brought oil flowing from Prudhoe Bay during the 1970s, they did collectively act to make this development more complicated, expensive, and time-consuming than the development that occurred simultaneously in the Siberian Arctic. They also used this event to successfully rally public and political support for the monumental 1981 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) that institutionally preserved millions of acres of Northern Alaskan territory in its primitive state for perpetuity. This section details some of these actions to show how the American environmental movement used the “unprecedented assaults on the Alaska wilderness” that occurred in the early 1970s to “preserve what remained” (Nelson 2004, pg. 129).

As Nelson asserts America’s slow transition from an industrial economy to a service and information-based economy was making the country less dependent on natural resource exploitation (Nelson 2004, pgs. 246, 268) until the energy shock caused by the 1973 OPEC oil embargo made American energy companies focus on Northern Alaska again. As he further opined, environmental issues do not tend to do very well when the economy is doing poorly (Nelson 2004, pg. 248), something that appears to reflect the Soviet situation. The stagflation and unemployment of the 1970s, like the early economic depression of the 1890s and early 1900s,
pulled thousands of American workers from the continental United States to find jobs wherever they could, including on the Alaska tundra.

Even so, by 1973 many prominent Americans had a romantic notion of Northern Alaska as an exceptionally pristine and empty “place to recreate and enjoy the scenic beauty rather than as a place for permanent habitation or resource exploitation” (Brown 2002, pg. 13).

Consequently, environmental groups had substantial public support throughout the United States when they moved to oppose development of Prudhoe Bay and the TAPS.

Environmentalists’ earlier challenges against Project Chariot, the Rampart Dam Project, and the Amchitka nuclear tests gave them the ready organizational structure to work from and the public support and legislative tools to contest these new expansive development efforts. The nationally popular Wilderness Society and Sierra Club led the way. The powerful “Alaska Coalition” they established utilized personal connections built between NGOs and federal agencies like the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the newly established Environmental Protection Agency to persuade American lawmakers and regulators to act to preserve territory in Alaska. The Coalition also created professional publications that it sent to thousands of its members, and to sympathetic national media organizations, politicians, and scientists. The publications urged people, including "large numbers of people who had no first-hand knowledge of Alaska” (Nelson 2004, pg. 182) to contact their government representatives to signal their opposition to development in the Alaska wilderness (Nelson 2004, pg. 120).

Many of the most influential supporters of the Alaska Coalition were found among the affluent in urban areas of the country, especially on the East Coast – a tradition that went back to the Age of Theodore Roosevelt (see Chapter 2). One of the Alaska Coalition’s largest opponents,
Alaska Senator Ted Stevens, accused members of the Coalition as being the "effete rich" who wanted to make Alaska "their private playground"..."people from down south or those who live here for two months and call themselves Alaskans" (qtd. in Nelson 2004, pg. 208). These “outsiders” could still unduly affect the course of Alaska’s development because the federal government still had jurisdiction over most of the state’s land.

This powerful lobby helped persuade the United States Congress to include a provision in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) that delayed development of large tracts of federal land in Alaska until these tracts’ potential use as national parks, wildlife refuges, and wilderness areas could be gauged (Scott 2001, pg. 28). They also successfully pushed the American government to use the Wilderness Act to statutorily protect Alaskan wilderness areas from development (Scott 2001 pg. 20). Furthermore, they used the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) to delay TAPS construction until the companies involved in the project completed the required environmental impact studies mandated by the conclusion of earlier Project Chariot affair (Chapter 5; Hunt 1990 Chapter 17). The Arctic Environmental Council (AEC), an offshoot of the Arctic Conservation Society, was nominated to monitor the pipeline construction (Nelson 2004, pg. 164). The myriad design modifications mandated by this organization mitigated the environmental damage associated with TAPS, delayed its completion, made it more expensive, and enlightened businesses interested in developing the American Arctic of the large political and economic costs they would face.

By the time Prudhoe Bay oil was finally moving through the TAPS in 1977 the “Alaska Coalition” had solidified itself as a permanent and influential opponent of resource exploitation in Alaska. It forced the federal government to make an uneasy compromise with resource companies, native groups, and the State of Alaska. Under this compromise TAPS was allowed to
proceed to ease the country’s energy security concerns and provide wanted revenue to the State of Alaska and native organizations. In exchange, the environmental movement was promised that large tracts of land in Alaska, much of it in the Arctic, would be institutionally preserved forever in their present wilderness state.

Congress passed a strong bill in 1978 to preserve extensive Alaskan wilderness areas, but it was successfully blocked by the Senate. Legislative gridlock, and a desire to bolster its sagging domestic support, pushed the Carter administration to issue an unprecedented executive order based on the Antiquities Act that designated fifty-six million acres of Alaska federal lands as wilderness and directed the DOI to make forty million more acres into wildlife refuges in 1978 (Nelson 2004, pg. 222). Douglas Scott (2001, pg. 29) suggests that the executive action “spurred even the bill’s staunchest opponents to want Congress to act, if only to be able to fine-tune the protections and boundaries of the presidential and secretarial orders.”

As President Carter ended his disappointing four year-term in 1980 he managed to push through the landmark Alaska National Interest Land Claims Act (ANILCA) based on this previous executive order. ANILCA expanded on the example set by Teddy Roosevelt and Dwight Eisenhower. It set aside land in austere Alaska to be preserved as eternal wilderness to burnish the outgoing president as a selfless steward of the environment and purveyor of the American wilderness ethos (Caldon and Prater 2016; Nash 2001).

The lasting effects of ANILCA’s passage cannot be underestimated when looking at America’s present capability and presence in the Arctic. It created the expansive Gates of the Arctic, Noatak, Kobuk Valley, and Cape Krusenstern National Parks. It expanded the size of existing designated wilderness areas like the contentious Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) too (Scott 2001 pg. 29). Thirty million Arctic acres were now institutionally preserved
as wilderness by the federal government (Miller 1984, pg. 72). When added to the lands
distributed to the native groups in the ANSCA and those tied up in the National Petroleum
Reserve in Alaska, a total of seventy-five percent of Alaska’s Arctic territory was now
effectively off-limits to resource companies (Miller 1984, pg. 72).

Carter reflected that "never before have we seized the opportunity to preserve so much of
America's natural and cultural heritage" (qtd. in Hunt 1990, Chapter 17). By doing so he
achieved what many earlier influential conservationists and American nationalists as diverse as
Frederick Turner and John Muir had sought. Dennis Nelson (Nelson 2004, pg. 3) suggests
potential developers did not fight back harder at the time because the land that was protected was
still wholly undeveloped and minimally populated meaning "the real significance (of ANILCA)
would not occur for 20, 50, or 100 years."

In the case of mining, however, ANILCA had more immediate results. For instance, the
expansion of Denali National Park meant that the Kantishna mining district was now within the
park’s boundaries. In 1985, the Alaska Coalition successfully litigated against its operations. A
U.S. District Judge forced thirty mines to shut down until the National Park Service (an agency
historically opposed to industrial development) assessed their environmental impact (Hunt 1990,
Chapter 17). In 1987, the same U.S. District Judge shut down mines in interior Alaska until the
Bureau of Land Management completed environmental studies on them (Hunt 1990, Chapter
17). Geographer Thomas Miller (1984, pg. 68), concluded that Alaska’s diminished number of
mines was a consequence of the new conservation zones enacted by ANILCA.

Canada continued to use environmentalism to stymie American economic expansion into
its Arctic territory too. This was underlined by Canadian Judge Thomas Berger’s forceful 1977
Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Enquiry that persuaded the Canadian government to postpone a
proposed pipeline from Prudhoe Bay to the United States. It was also accentuated by the establishment of the Ivavik and Vuntut National Parks in the Canadian Yukon in the 1970s and 1980s (Peter 1994) and the 1988 Arctic Waters Cooperation Agreement (ACWA) between the Canadian and American governments. The ACWA complemented the previously enacted Canadian AWPPA national legislation and Arctic 234 of UNCLOS. It allowed Canada to exclude American ships from its Arctic littoral waters, including where the MacKenzie River flows into the Beaufort Sea, on environmental grounds (Lajeunesse 2012, pg. 314).

These affairs were collectively and successfully promoted by environmental NGOs from both the United States and Canada who shared their resources and influence to effectively oppose exploitation of the rich resource deposits located in the countries’ shared Yukon region. Canadian government officials, and Canadian citizens from southern provinces who historically feared that an inrush of Americans into the Yukon would hurt Canada’s sovereignty, also promoted greater environmental preservation, if only to keep Americans out.

Similarly, the two countries agreed in 1987 to jointly conserve the Porcupine Caribou herd that migrates between Northwest Alaska and the Mackenzie River Valley of the Yukon Territory. This agreement concluded initial efforts by prominent American environmentalists Olaus and Margaret Murie, and influential United States National Park employees George Collins and Lowell Sumner, that began in the 1950s to gain Canadian cooperation. The effects of this agreement did not take long to find out. In 1991, when energy security fears were again spurred by Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, the pro-oil Bush administration tried to open Area 1002 of ANWR, the only portion of the refuge left open to hydrocarbon exploitation by ANILCA. Canada specifically highlighted the Porcupine Caribou agreement to challenge the Bush administration’s attempt to open up Area 1002 by stressing that doing so would likely harm the
herd (Peter 1994). The bill was defeated in the United States Senate partly because American legislators and diplomats were concerned with breaching the environmental agreement with Canada.

Even more important than the Caribou Treaty to the demise of the Bush energy bill was the catastrophic sinking of the Exxon Valdez in 1989, however. The incredible widespread environmental damage caused by this contingent event in Alaska’s coastal waters was widely aired by American and international media (Birkland 1997). The coverage enflamed public support for the environmental lobby’s attempt to proscribe oil exploitation in ANWR (Smith 1992). International and domestic pressure helped the environmental lobby overcome support for the bill from energy companies, national security advocates and the State of Alaska (Nelson 2004, pg. 255). Senator Bennet Johnson, the Chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and an ardent supporter of the Bush energy bill, exclaimed after its defeat, “The environmental groups…wrote the textbook on how to defeat a bill” (qtd. in Peter 1994) like the one designed to open ANWR.

Canada seized upon its previous environmental focus to take a leadership role in the Arctic as the Cold War wound down and traditional security fears dwindled. It teamed with Finland, another Arctic country that was freed by the diminution of Cold War competition, to establish the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) in 1991. The AEPS signaled Canada’s strong national attachment to the region and its shared desire with Finland to turn the region away from the security competition that previously predominated international affairs (Williams 2011). It gave small powers like itself and Finland more relative influence over the United States to govern the Arctic “shared commons.” This multinational organization would, in turn, create the framework for the post-Cold War Arctic Council, a multinational organization of
polar states, native groups and environmental NGOs that would create a unique international regime based on soft-law agreements that now restrains both America’s and Russia’s ability to dictate the future construction of the region (Young 1998).

By the end of the Cold War it was clear that environmental security was as important to many Americans, and the prominent international activists they were networked with, than the more traditional material concerns for physical security that previously guided American policy in the Arctic (Dalby 2008). The rapid decline of the Soviet Union and the rapid conclusion of the brief war with Iraq marginalized material concerns further and propelled environmental security into the vacuum. However, as the previous chapters document, the importance America placed on environmental security and wilderness protection in the Arctic was not a sudden policy change made possible by a “national awakening” or the more permissive geopolitical situation that now existed in the early 1990s alone.

Indeed, the environmental lobby had successfully and gradually gained public support and legislative tools throughout the previous century to construct the Arctic as a uniquely “sublime” place (Lopez 1986) in the American consciousness and institutionalize its protection. Consequently, America voluntarily made millions of acres of Alaska officially off-limits to its military and to its businesses. Furthermore, America’s liberal polar neighbors, especially Canada, largely shared America’ sensitivity to the Arctic environment and effectively used this sensitivity to block American businesses from developing their portions of the Arctic too. The strengthening environmental movement restrained American presence in the region and contributed to America’s reluctance to move into fill the regional power vacuum that occurred when the Soviet Union dissolved. The persuasive American environmental movement was happy the region would remain austere, underdeveloped, and relatively absent of American presence.
6. Native Rights

Similar to the convergence in environmental outlook between the United States and the Soviet Union there was a tenuous convergence for native sovereignty that affected both countries’ willingness to expand their respective presence in the Arctic. However, like the environmental movement, the legacy of the authoritarian state left Soviet native groups with much less institutional strength and much less ability to contest state sovereignty over northern territory than their native neighbors in Alaska. Consequently, they were much less able to restrain the Soviet expansion into the region than Alaska native groups were.

6.1 American Native Rights

Momentum from the Civil Rights movement, the ANCSA, the establishment of native-dominated local governments like the North Slope Borough (NSB), and revenue derived by native corporations strengthened natives’ ability to contest the federal and State of Alaska’s sovereignty over Arctic Alaska. To this point, John Kruse (1984, pg. 138) claims the Arctic Slope Native Association (ASNA) laid the foundation for the formation of the Inuit-governed North Slope Bureau that came to control vast amounts of territory on Alaska’s North Slope by the 1970s. The North Slope Bureau, and other native government institutions in Northern Alaska, successfully established official title to resource-rich territory in Arctic Alaska and acquired zoning and planning authority from sympathetic courts and legislators in the continental United States and Alaska (Kruse 1984, pg. 153).

In 1974 native governments used these occurrences to gain the ability to tax resource operations on their lands. Resource rent gave native groups the financial means to provide services to their own people and allowed them to pursue even larger legislative and judicial battles against outside groups (Brower and Stotts 1984). Afterwards, native groups successfully
pushed federal and Alaskan authorities to restrict tourists, hunters, and other potential
interlopers’ access to the oil roads that now connected Fairbanks with the North Slope. They also
gained the authority to review proposed development schemes on state and federal owned
territory in Arctic Alaska. This allowed them to protect an extensive list of historic and
traditional-use sites from outside development (Kruse 1984, pgs. 144, 146).

The natives also used native corporations, like the Arctic Slope Regional Commission
(ASRC), that were formed during the Alaska National Claims Settlement Act process to restrain
unwanted outside development. The Arctic Slope Regional Commission was tightly tied to the
North Slope Bureau. It partnered with many contractors who provided initial services for the
large energy companies developing the North Slope. In many cases the Arctic Slope Regional
Commission eventually bought the outside companies and took over their operations (Reis 2012,
pg. 104). Minority and disadvantaged status also allowed the Arctic Slope Regional Commission
to favorably compete with outside competitors for government contracts in Alaska (Reis 2012,
pg. 104). Cumulatively, these efforts kept Northern Alaska from experiencing the type of
migration explosion that was associated with earlier resource booms in frontier regions in the
United States (Kruse 1984, pgs. 139, 143, 153).

Likewise, natives strengthened earlier connections they made with environmental groups
during the 1960s to stymie outside development efforts when it suited them. This was especially
true when natives lost their attempt to block off-shore oil exploitation in federal courts in the
1970s (Kruse 1984, pg. 154). Both the natives and environmentalists feared off-shore
development would threaten the migratory whales they both wanted to protect. Accordingly, the
natives and the environmentalists worked together to restrict oil development in ANWR to
protect the habitat of the migratory caribou herds (Nelson 2004, pg. 164). The collective judicial
challenges the environmentalists and natives made in these cases complicated and delayed efforts to develop the resources of the North Slope and its coastal waters.

In other cases, however, the native groups and the environmentalists conflicted. The native groups were especially confrontational when environmental groups tried to dictate the numbers and types of animals they could harvest. Likewise, the natives protested environmentalists’ efforts to completely disallow mineral development on their lands. The North Slope Bureau, for one, now relied on resource rent to fund its massive building spree and the myriad services it began to provide its constituents (Kruse 1984, pg. 155). It believed that paternalistic environmental overreach alternatively threatened its traditional lifestyle and its modernization efforts.

Fortunately, for them, native groups did not have to rely only on environmental groups or sympathetic outsiders to bolster their efforts to maximize their sovereignty anymore. They now had more contact with native groups from other democratic polar countries due to the improved communication and transportation infrastructures that accompanied economic development and modernization. In many cases Alaskan natives found they shared more problems, interests, and objectives with these other northern native groups than they shared with citizens from their own countries. Alaska’s natives were the most organized and led the charge to collectivize with these groups across the porous northern borders when outside developers moved into the region again in the 1970s.

The North Slope Bureau, specifically, used its newfound political and economic strength, and the political acumen its leaders acquired over the previous decades, to create the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) in 1977. This multinational native institution was initially comprised of representatives of indigenous groups from Alaska, northern Canada and Greenland.
It was constituted to address the groups’ shared concerns and promote native self-determination. Shortly afterwards, the Inuit Circumpolar Council was officially recognized by the United Nations, burgeoning its credibility and its ability to advocate for its groups’ interests internationally.

At first the Inuit Circumpolar Council pressured the United States to temper its growing regional military presence in the 1980s. It joined with Scandinavian countries and anti-nuclear protesters throughout the West to credibly protest the American submarines and bombers operating in and above the Arctic Ocean (Young 1986, pg. 166). As the Cold War wound down in the early 1990s, it worked within the developing Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy framework to establish itself as the preeminent source of ecological knowledge about the Arctic, successfully melding environmental and human security concerns that increased in importance as the Cold War wound down (Nowlan 2001, pg. 11). As prominent Alaskan Inuits, Eugene Brower and James Stotts explained (1984, pg. 320), they used the North Slope Bureau and the Inuit Circumpolar Council to develop a comprehensive Arctic policy to primarily address native concerns when the American and Alaskan governments were unable and unwilling to do so themselves.

As Brower and Stotts (1984, pgs. 320-321) also claim, their ambitious ploy to take the lead in national policy debates that concerned the Arctic fit into the American tradition of strong local governance. However, the Inuits’ ability to avoid complete colonial control like other American native groups in the contiguous United States and in Arctic Russia set them apart and allowed them to retain a level of autonomy and independence these other groups did not achieve. As was documented in previous chapters this exceptionalism was the result of long-term institutional and cultural change both within the American government and within Alaskan tribal
groups that allowed the tribal groups to protect themselves and retain a large dose of self-
determination when sustained development efforts finally arrived in Northern Alaska in the
1970s. These changes made the American government less willing and able to assert itself in the
Arctic than it had in previous frontier areas within the contiguous United States and much less
willing to assert itself than the Soviets did in the Arctic.

6.2 Soviet Native Rights

Soviet native rights suffered through the Brezhnev era and then rebounded with the
Gorbachev regime’s “new thinking.” That being said, by the early 1990s the Russian Arctic
native situation was considered to be in a “state of catastrophe” by Russian social scientist,
Shortly after the Soviet Union dissolved, he claimed the native movement in Russia was twenty
to thirty years behind the native movement in the United States. The decades of Soviet control
almost completely colonized and “Russified” the Russian Arctic. Native groups, purportedly
protected according to Soviet propaganda, actually had become very economically dependent on
the Soviet state. Furthermore, they did not have their own political institutions, they did not have
power to influence local or national politics, and they lacked the ability to resist the wide-spread
encroachment on their traditional lands from industrial development plans dreamed up in the
Kremlin.

One of the handicaps the Russian natives faced before glasnost was a lack of information
about their situation. They were unable to receive information about the increasing freedoms and
political power that natives in the United States, Canada, and Greenland were receiving so they
did not fully appreciate how relatively oppressed they were. Instead, propaganda continued to
exhort the “liberating” Soviet policies and disparaged America’s treatment of natives (Forsyth
1992, pgs. 393, 398). This propaganda was parroted by anti-capitalist Westerners like Canadian Farley Mowat (1971) and even the native intelligentsia cultivated by the Soviet state (Thubron 2011).

The path-breaking Gorbachev Murmansk Initiative in 1986 resulted in a flood of candid articles condemning Soviet policies towards natives which also made comparatively favorable references to American policies towards northern natives for the first time (Forsyth 1992, pg. 398). One of the most prominent Soviet native writers, Rythkeu, also turned course and began to criticize the Soviet policies he previously extolled and the native culture he criticized (Forsyth 1992, pg. 408). That being said, the plight of the northern natives and their understanding of their own position lagged behind that of the natives of northern Alaska.

A bigger problem for the natives was the accelerated influx of ethnic-European from elsewhere in the Soviet Union into the tundra during the 1970s and 1980s. As was previously documented, this was the result of the centrally planned economy that attempted to meet the expansive demands of the Soviet military-industrial complex and planned resource extraction quotas (Vakhtin 1994, pgs. 63-65).

The demographic balance was decisively tilted against the indigenous groups by the industrial efforts. By 1979 Russians comprised over ninety percent of the Chukchi National Region and more than ninety-six percent of the population in the Khanty-Mansi National Region (Forsyth 1992, pgs. 367, 391). In total, Siberia was the most “Russified” part of the Soviet Union by 1989 with only five percent of its population comprised of natives (Forsyth 1992, pgs. 394, 403). The male-dominated industrial migrants also procreated with native women producing a sizable population of “half-breeds” (Forsyth 1992, pg. 405). In addition to industry, the Soviets continued to use the Arctic tundra as a dumping ground for convicts which further diluted the
proportion of the native population (Forsyth 1992, pg. 392, 411). As James Forsyth intimates, the Soviet state made it clear through its migration and industrial efforts that native considerations carried little weight (Forsyth 1992, pg. 394-395).

Soviet policies further diminished the political power of the natives. They still did not have any ownership rights to territory, did not receive compensation for damages caused by the industrial enterprises undertaken on their traditional territory, and had very limited access to Soviet government institutions (Vakhtin 1994, pgs. 67-69) which remained very centralized until Gorbachev attempted to devolve power to local institutions when he came to power. With the demographic balance shifting away from natives they had very limited influence on policy - even at the local level because representation was ethnically proportional (Vakhtin 1994, pg. 61-63; Forsyth 1992, pg. 415). To make matters worse, the end of the Soviet Union also meant the end of the tradition of reserving the second highest position in local government to natives (Schweitzer and Gray 2000, pg. 24). Even though these positions were largely honorary, losing them meant that native groups lost even more of their already marginal political voice.

Forced and voluntary assimilation further cemented Russia’s hold on the north. The move to collectivize nomadic groups into villages and mandatory boarding school caused the natives to rapidly lose the ability to use their own languages by the 1980s. Many could not even communicate with their own grandparents when they returned from boarding school (Forsyth 1992, pg. 408). Other individuals were punished for “anti-Soviet nationalism” when they did use their native language (Forsyth 1992, pgs. 367, 382-385, 406, 407). Even without being coerced many younger natives began to forsake native traditions and languages so they could better assimilate with the dominant Russian society (Forsyth 1992, pg. 368). Even as the government
loosened its control over the natives in the early 1990s, an influx of Russian Orthodox missionaries moved in to Russify them (Schweizer and Gray 2000, pg. 22).

Along with assimilation, the Soviets continued to create a structure of economic dependence that shackled the natives. More than half of the Northern natives were unemployed by the early 1990s (Forsyth 1992, pg. 400). Not unlike their native neighbors in other Arctic countries they suffered comparatively high rates of alcoholism, suicide, and other health problems (Forsyth 1992, pg. 384). Unlike these other natives, however, they also suffered directly from nuclear tests that poisoned the lichen their reindeer fed on and pollution from smelters and oil extraction operations that dotted the Russian Arctic landscape (Forsyth 1992, pgs. 401-403). James Forsyth claims, “By the 1980s the remaining communities of aboriginal inhabitants of Kamchatka were seen by some Soviet officials as simply ‘thirty thousand state welfare pensioners’ who they would be glad to be rid of” (Forsyth 1992, pf. 368). When government subsidies were pulled at the end of the 1980s the natives’ economic situation became even more dire (Schweitzer and Gray 2000, pg. 29; Anderson 2000, pgs. 67-69). They could no longer practice their traditional subsistence lifestyles and could not compete on the open market either.

The shadow of the former totalitarian Soviet government still hung over the natives. Opposition to self-determination still remained potent, especially in local governments (Vakhtin 1994, pgs. 73-75). The power of the economic ministries remained supreme and Russian chauvinism remained strong, which meant that paternalistic policies and economic dependence persisted (Schweizer and Gray 2000, pg. 25). Schweitzer and Gray (2000, pg. 33) conclude that the long Soviet rule killed a lot of political initiative that natives might have had. They remained
weak, submissive, and unable to contest sovereignty over northern territory in any comparable way with native groups in Alaska.

Only sustained high birthrates and a slowing in-migration of outsiders allowed northern native groups to survive as distinct entities until Gorbachev’s policy changes gave them new life in the late 1980s (Forsyth 1992, pg. 402). The native intelligentsia that was cultivated by the Soviets often led the way (Forsyth 1992, pg. 371) and took advantage of the more open press and sympathetic legislators to push native causes. The Evenki political organization, Arun, was formed in 1989 and served as a vanguard that helped mobilize support for other Siberian indigenous groups (Anderson 2000, pg. 62). The Association of Lesser-Numbered Peoples of the North (now known as RAIPON – the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North) formed in 1990 as an umbrella group to represent all of the northern natives of Russia. It has since become a member of the Arctic Council.

These groups profited from increased contact with the West. First, foreign scholars were allowed into the Russian Arctic to study the indigenous groups in a sustained and systemic way. Second, visa-free travel for natives across the Bering Strait was allowed in 1989 by the Soviet and American governments. This contact improved the Russian natives’ self-worth, made them more aware of the status of the natives in neighboring Arctic countries, and made them more cognizant of the political power they could have (Schweitzer and Gray 2000, pg. 28). It is likely that they learned how to better tie environmental issues with their own security through this increased contact too. To this end, opposition from natives and environmentalists contributed to the postponement of plans to develop gas on the Yamal Peninsula in the late 1980s until nature conservation, the health of local reindeer, and compensation for locals was studied (Forsyth
1992, pg. 413). The high cost of the project and depressed resource prices were likely more responsible for the postponement, though, because it was later enacted under the Putin regime.

In the end, Soviet northern native groups did not have the institutional strength or relative numbers to contest Russia’s sovereignty over northern territory. As such, they only represented a small restraint on Soviet efforts to conquer and expand their control over the Arctic. This weakness made it relatively easy for Russian nationalists under the Putin regime to reassert control over Siberian natives later.

7. Path Dependence

The Russia that emerged from the broken Soviet Union was more geographically challenged than it was at any time since the Crimean War. The loss of Ukraine, the Baltic States, and Central Asia, as well as the expansion of NATO into the Soviet Union’s former Eastern European satellites and the Baltic States, cut it off even further from the open oceans. The geographical constriction also fed Russian nationalists’ traditional paranoia of encirclement. The belief that climate change was melting the ice in the Arctic Ocean, and opening a way into the blue water oceans, was therefore favorably accepted by many Russians, including the revisionist President Putin who came to power in 2000.

Putin’s regime forcefully acted to reassert its strength and relieve the strangling containment it felt. The Kremlin re-established control in Chechnya, Georgia, and Ukraine, which garnered international attention. With its icy barrier in the Arctic seemingly at risk of melting, it also moved to remilitarize the Arctic. The remilitarization of the Arctic took longer to gain international attention until the other polar states realized just how far behind they were in the Arctic compared to the Russians. This realization has resulted in a decade’s worth of sensational media accounts, as well as academic articles and books, claiming that Russia was
winning the “battle” for the Arctic (for example, Borgerson 2008; Ebinger and Zambetakis 2009).

As the previous chapters explain, however, the head start wasn’t a recent phenomenon. Instead, it was the result of close to a century of unmatched investment that the Soviets made in the Arctic. Its lack of allies and its lack of access to ice-free water since the 1905 Russo-Japanese war motivated it to build out an unparalleled military presence in the Arctic, especially in the sliver of year-long ice-free coastline it controlled on the Kola Peninsula. After Russia recovered its post-Cold War footing, it had both the capability and the willingness re-establish and modernize the military bases it evacuated in the Arctic. It also reconstituted the massive icebreaker, submarine, and bomber fleets it was forced to neglect when the Soviet Union collapsed.

In contrast, the end of the Cold War made the United States neglect the Arctic more than it did previously. It still had ready access to ports in ice-free waters around the world and maintained the close polar allies that it institutionally integrated with over the previous decades. Additionally, the United States enlisted the Polish and Baltic State governments, who were motivated by their historic fear of Russia, into the NATO security community. Besides, the United States believed garrisoning large military forces in the Arctic was prohibitively expensive and wasteful, especially as technology allowed it to garrison its forces further southward, and as other trouble spots diverted its attention after the Soviet Union collapsed. Furthermore, without the Soviet threat, its polar allies welcomed the United States’ retreat from the region. This retreat allowed these allies to reassert their own sovereignty.

As such, America entered the “battle” for a thawing with much less capability and much less willingness than the Russians to enlarge its sphere of influence. However, it also entered the
“battle” with a host of allies that have welcomed it back into the region to collectively balance against the imposing Russian military. As during the Cold War, these allies have used the United States to deter the Russians and have moved to improve their own capability to defend against Russia’s regional expansion (Luhn 2018). Sweden and Finland, who slowly integrated with Europe while Russia slowly re-established itself and slowly turned more authoritarian during the post-Cold War thaw, have also taken audacious steps to lean more towards the West’s security architecture—although their traditional neutrality and fear of upsetting relations with Russia have kept them from seeking official membership in NATO (Nilsen 2018). In all, this geopolitical situation, over a century in the making, has allowed the United States to return to its Cold War strategy of “flexibly responding” to the Russian threat in the Arctic instead of forcefully expanding its own physical presence in the Arctic.

Russia also has much more materially at stake in the Arctic than does the United States. Its massive century-long investment in the region again paid dividends when hydrocarbon prices spiked in the decade after Putin took power in 2000. Putin’s regime, like Brezhnev’s regime before him, enjoyed a rapid change in fortune as the oil and gas pumped from the Siberian tundra brought sudden wealth and political leverage to Putin (Goldman 2008). Putin used his former contacts and training in the KGB to create patron-client relationships after the Soviet Union collapsed that gave him control over large parts of Russia’s lucrative energy industry, even as the rest of the Russian economy was liberalized. This control eventually helped him achieve the presidency (Dawisha 2014).

Putin, then, used the windfall profits to reconstitute Russia’s military and to leverage countries that were still dependent on Russian energy. He also used state funds to reinvest in northern Siberian oil and gas fields and embarked on new expansive, and expensive, efforts to
tap new deposits on Russia’s northern coastline and in its coastal waters in the Arctic. Furthermore, he moved to reconstitute the Northern Sea Route and expanded oil and gas pipelines from the Arctic, so he could move the Arctic energy resources to market. It should not be a surprise then that Putin has welcomed climate change that portends to open up Arctic sea lanes and ease the exploitation and transport of Arctic resources that Russia has invested so much money and human capital to extract (Thomson Reuters 2017). Many of the millions of Russians that inhabit the beleaguered settlements that gulag prisoners first established in the Arctic share his sentiments (Profitt 2019). It is also no wonder that the Putin regime has moved to militarize the region to secure these resources.

In contrast, despite the rise in energy prices during the early 2000s, the United States’ market economy never supported expansive new efforts to develop the Arctic like that which is occurring in Russia. The long-time horizons and large amounts of capital needed to commence Arctic extraction operations in Northern Alaska kept most of them from ever getting started. The relative lack of existing infrastructure, especially in regard to moving natural gas to southern markets through the Northwest Passage or overland through Canada, also hampered efforts. Furthermore, the high energy prices of the 2000s spurred American energy companies to develop hydraulic fracking techniques and other unconventional ways of extracting energy resources, including solar and wind power, that quickly created an energy supply glut that made new operations to extract resources in northern Alaska very uneconomical after 2015 (Raval and Sheppard 2016). Native and environmental concerns, which will be detailed shortly, also increased the economic and political transaction costs of proposed development and contributed to the cancellation of proposed extraction operations. With little development, there was not much for the United States military to protect. Similarly, the limited development reduced any
motivation the United States had to invest in building harbors, icebreakers, or other infrastructure in the Arctic.

The flag-planting episode and the histrionics that followed between the Russian and Canadian governments in 2007, documented in the introduction of the dissertation, attest to the deep national attachment both Russia and Canada still feel towards the Arctic region. In the case of Russia, this has legitimized its more recent investment and militarization in the Arctic. In fact, with the failure of Communism, Russian nationalism has stepped into the vacuum as an ideological contributor to Russia’s foreign policy and Putin’s hold on power. Putin has made it a point to visit the Arctic, send high-ranking emissaries to the Arctic (including patriarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church), and tout the expansive development efforts his country has undertaken in the Arctic. As the previous chapters indicate, this tactic is not new and is made more potent by almost a century of Soviet propaganda that extolled Russian’s unique ability to conquer the Arctic and claim ownership to it. Putin’s actions in the Arctic are interpreted by many Russians as returning Russia to its Soviet glory and have contributed to their strong support for his aggressive policies.

In contrast, a century of Canadian nationalism has made the United States an “other” in the North American Arctic in spite of Anchorage having a larger population than the cumulative populations of Canada’s Northwest and Yukon Territories, and its province of Nunavut, and notwithstanding the long list of American explorers who discovered much of the Arctic before citizens of any other nation. Despite an attempt by the American State Department to influence its own citizens to develop a stronger national attachment to the Arctic when the United States recently presided over the Arctic Council, Americans overwhelmingly do not see themselves as
an Arctic country and are therefore not as motivated as Canada or Russia to claim the region for itself or to develop capabilities to expand its presence there.

Part of the reason for this is Canada, but another reason is the increasing strength of America’s Arctic natives to claim Alaska for themselves. This can be seen in the large amount of Arctic territory Alaska’s Yupik and Inuit govern in northern Alaska. It can also be seen in their ability to utilize favorable legislation to influence development efforts and keep “outsiders” from overwhelming them (Reiis 2012). More recently, it can be seen in their ability to rename significant features, such as the formerly named Mt. McKinley (now known as Denali) and the town of Barrow (now known as Utqiagvik). Their ability to collectivize across international borders, establish the prominence of “local knowledge,” and gain membership status in the Arctic Council has given them political power to govern over the Arctic in a much more influential way than their material resources would suggest. It has also allowed them to establish a narrative in the United States that the Arctic rightfully belongs to them and not to Americans in the contiguous United States or earlier American settlers in Alaska.

The same cannot be said for the “small peoples” of Arctic Russia. As the subsequent chapters document, these natives were decimated and overwhelmed over the last century by successive Russian and Soviet governments that were intent on internally colonizing and conquering the Arctic. Natives in the Russian Arctic have gained some strength since the Cold War, due to an outflow of ethnic Russians and Europeans from the Russian Arctic and through the natives’ integration with neighboring native groups in other polar countries. However, they remain minorities in most of the Russian territories they inhabit, dependent on the Russian government for survival, and have suffered from the Putin regime’s attempts to re-establish dominance over them. The Russian government went as far as to temporarily force the Russian
Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) to close in 2012. It is clear the Russian government, unlike its American counterpart, has very little willingness to put up with contested sovereignty by its natives (Thompson 2017). This conforms with Russia’s traditional approach to its natives.

Furthermore, the Russian government is much less willing to let environmentalism get in the way of its desire to develop and expand into the Arctic. Again, as the previous chapters document, this is in line with Russia’s traditional approach to the Arctic, which has historically neglected to preserve the Arctic wilderness and, instead, endeavored to conquer it. There have been symbolic shows by the Russian government to recently clean debris from its Arctic coastline, and Russia has cooperated in the Arctic Council to restrict fishing from the Arctic basin and promised to cooperate with other Arctic countries to enact comprehensive plans to clean up future oil spills in the Arctic. However, it also has continued to operate large smelters and leaky pipelines on the Arctic tundra. Most spectacularly, it confiscated a Greenpeace boat and jailed its crew after the crew took direct action against an oil platform it built in the Barents Sea (BBC 2012). This has deterred further groups from getting in the way of Russia’s resource extraction operations, especially since many of these groups have also been forced to shut down their local chapters in Russia.

This aggressive approach is in direct contrast to how the American government has handled environmentalists in Alaska. As the previous chapters have documented, American environmental groups have gained in number and strength over the last century. Many individuals have used their positions within American government agencies, academia, the media, in the legislature, the judiciary, and even as the President of the United States to preserve millions of America’s Arctic territory and coastal waters in nature reserves, national monuments,
and national parks, so they will remain wild forever. These forces have successfully moved to challenge any attempt to develop Arctic land or to extract Arctic resources in territory America controls. This very influential collective force has also contributed to America’s overwhelming perception that the Arctic is a uniquely fragile place that must be protected from the potential ravages of climate change. Ironically, this environmental ethic contributed to America’s decision to pay to clean up the nuclear submarine dumping ground the Soviets established in the Barents Sea during the Cold War, even as Russia reinvested in designing and manufacturing new nuclear submarines to be based on the Kola Peninsula (GAO 2004). As such, environmentalism has heavily contributed to America’s reticence to build up a bigger physical presence in the Arctic than it is capable of and certainly has made it much less willing to conquer the Arctic than is Russia.
Chapter 7 - Conclusion

Over the last century and a half Russia has developed a much greater capability and willingness to conquer the Arctic than the “reluctant” United States. The historical experiences of the two countries over the last one hundred and fifty years, not to mention the relationships, institutions, and infrastructure they have developed during that time, have now put the two countries on very different paths. The paths they have taken give the two countries’ leaders a different perspective of what the region is, and what it should be. The different paths also give the two countries’ leaders different capabilities to use, different interests to defend, and different political constraints to work under. In effect, this dissertation highlights the benefits of a deep dive into history that comparatively examines a country’s geography, state-to-state relationships, domestic institutions and unique political restraints. A look into the past allows us to gain a complex understanding of how a country arrived at where it is and gives us the best idea of how it will likely behave in the near-future.

1. The Constructed Behavior of Russia and the United States in the Arctic

Through process tracing, this dissertation demonstrates that a country’s willingness and ability to claim a sphere of influence in a region is affected by both its material and physical attributes and the state-to-state relationships, institutions, interests and identity it develops over time. As a reminder, I defined a sphere of influence in the introduction to the dissertation as “international recognition, if not acceptance, of a state’s de facto dominance in a region without that state necessarily exercising official sovereign control over that region.” This definition itself is a construction that is both materially and ideologically based. A country needs the physical
wherewithal and willingness to claim a sphere of influence and its neighbors must recognize that claim because they are not willing or materially able to challenge the claim.

1.1 Russia’s Construction of the Arctic

As I stress throughout the dissertation, Russia has developed a much more materialistic and antagonistic conception of the Arctic than the United States, which has motivated Russia to expand its sphere of influence into the Arctic more than the United States.

This conception was partly constructed by Russia’s unique geography. While Russia has accumulated an unrivalled amount of territory, and natural resources, it has also been limited by its lack of access to ice-free ports. This physical situation has contributed to Russia’s historic self-conception as a Great Power, but also its deep-seated fear of encirclement. From Peter the Great onwards, Russian leaders have aggressively attempted to gain access to the world’s oceans to satiate their desire to achieve an international status commensurate with Russia’s expansive territory and to break out of the containment they have felt (Newmann and Pouliot 2011). Oftentimes, this aggression has paradoxically created a security dilemma that has pushed Russia’s competitors to contain Russia on the Eurasian continent, and in the Arctic. This was most noticeably practiced by Great Britain during the Great Game for Asia in the nineteenth century, and by the United States, and its NATO allies, during the Cold War. In turn, paranoia has impacted Russia’s willingness to trust other countries even when it is allied with them during conflicts. This has contributed to Russia’s lack of willingness to tie itself down in a security community with its neighbors in the Arctic like the United States has.

Russia has learned through successive conflicts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that the Arctic is a good fence that protects it from potential adversaries. The Bolsheviks, especially paranoid of their “imperialist capitalist” neighbors in the Arctic, were motivated to
assertively claim sovereignty over Arctic islands on their littoral even though they did not
discover many of them and did not have the power to occupy them - the accepted international
conditions for territorial sovereignty at the time – and maintained access to the Svalbard
Archipelago through aggressive diplomacy. Similarly, a paranoid Stalin was motivated to invade
Finland multiple times during World War II to establish a territorial buffer between Russia’s
largest cities and potential aggressors. It was only because of Finland’s surprising ability to avoid
complete occupation by the Soviets during World War II that Russia developed a unique
relationship with Finland. After World War II, the Soviets allowed Finland to maintain its
independence as long as it remained a neutral buffer between the Soviet Union and NATO
countries during the Cold War.

These conflicts also taught Russian leaders that Russia’s “door” in the Arctic, the Barents
Sea, is a critical passageway that it must maintain to secure access to the world’s seaways and
avoid blockade by sea. Throughout these conflicts Russia was pushed to establish military bases
on its coastline with the Barents Sea, making the Kola Peninsula one of the most militarized
places in the world by the end of the Cold War. It was also motivated to develop the Northern
Sea route and a string of airfields across the Arctic during World War II (ironically with the
United States’ help), something it expanded on during the Cold War.

Russia’s paranoia complex and its geopolitical reliance on the Arctic have only increased
since Vladimir Putin became president in 2000. NATO’s expansion into Eastern Europe and the
former Soviet republics on the Baltic Sea, and Ukraine, have aggravated Russia’s sense of
containment and further constrained its access to the Baltic and Black Seas. This has given
Russian leaders a greater willingness to remilitarize the Arctic than the United States, something
they have a head-start on because of previous century of militarizing and developing the region.
In toto, I show that the territorial possessions, relationships, and polar-specific capabilities Russia now has in the Arctic are a product of its unique geography and its unique past. These geopolitical factors give Russia more opportunity and willingness to expand its sphere of influence into the Arctic than the United States as the Arctic ice recedes. In effect, Russia enters any potential scramble for the Arctic with a different security construct of the Arctic than the United States and a large head start claiming the Arctic as its sphere of influence. Indeed, Russia already has sovereign control over more than half of the world’s Arctic territory because no other country wanted to challenge Russia’s ownership of it in the past and it now asserts that about half of the Arctic Ocean is within its exclusive economic zone.

Russia’s uniquely embedded economic institutions, spatial identity, and approaches to indigenous groups and the Arctic environment have also made its leaders more willing and able to internally colonize and physically develop the Arctic than leaders of the United States. These factors have overwhelmingly caused Russian leaders to perceive that the Arctic is a resource base that should be conquered and exploited by Russia – a much different and much more materialistic construct of the region than prevails in the United States.

Specifically, I documented how the Russian government, which has always dominated the commanding heights of the country’s economy, has uniquely promoted the development of resource extraction industries in the Russian Arctic and become dependent on the region’s resources for its material strength and international leverage. It did this first through its subsidization of mercantilist organizations, like the Russian American Company that have no comparison in the United States. These early organizations have direct parallels in how they operate to Russia’s present national champions Gazprom, Rosneft, and Rosatom. The tsars also began to coercively move people to colonize the Arctic. Lenin and Stalin, former Arctic
prisoners of the Romanovs, expanded on this practice after the Bolshevik Revolution. The gulags only slowly emptied out after Stalin died, leaving millions of people stranded in the cities the gulags founded and dependent on the institutions that placed them there. These coercive efforts, like the mercantilist efforts that preceded them, have no parallel in the United States and allowed the Soviets to colonize the Arctic in a way America was unwilling to imitate. These efforts also made Russia dependent on the resources that were extracted from the Arctic. As a matter of fact, since the Cold War more than fifty percent of the Russian government’s budget is paid for by energy exports that are continuously shifting towards the Arctic as more southern deposits are exhausted (Sorensen and Klimenko 2017). Russian leaders also continue to use the hydrocarbon resources Russian national champions extract from the Arctic to mold the foreign policies of the receiving countries in Europe that have become dependent on these resources. These developments are warmly received, ironically, by the millions of descendants of the gulag prisoners that remain stranded in the Russian Arctic. These citizens depend on resource extraction for their livelihood. In turn, the expansion of resource extraction into the Arctic has given the Russian government a greater reason to militarize the region than the United States as it seeks to protect these resources and the sea lanes needed to transport them to markets. Indeed, this economic situation clarifies why Russia’s leaders now openly declare that the Arctic is the country’s “strategic resource base for the twenty-first century.” Russia’s past efforts and economic institutions established Russia’s capability to do so and improves its willingness to turn these declarations into a reality today.

Continuous propaganda that built up Russian citizens’ ideational attachment to the Arctic throughout the Soviet era also continues to propagate the national conception that the Arctic uniquely “belongs” to Russia. The myth of the “Red Arctic” established by Lenin and Stalin and
perpetuated by Soviet propagandists and Russian nationalists at the end of the Cold War, highlighted the region’s historical symbolism as a shield for the “motherland” and legitimized the Soviets’ often coercive efforts to materially “conquer the Arctic.” These spatially-based national sentiments augment Russia’s willingness to expand its claims to the Arctic by adding symbolic prestige to the region. This was underlined by the illustrative 2007 planting of a flag on the North Pole seabed by Russian Duma member, Artur Chiligarov that was mentioned in the introduction.

Additionally, Russia’s materialist conception of the Arctic has not been challenged by concerns for indigenous groups or the environment as it has in the United States. In regard to the environment, this dissertation shows that the Soviet government effectively strangled any nascent environmentalist sentiment from the West that could have significantly changed its’ prevailing conception of the Arctic as a region that must be materially conquered and developed. In contrast, the predominance of the military and centrally-planned economic institutions in Soviet decision-making meant that Russia disregarded any idea that Arctic terrain was especially fragile or pristine or that is should be preserved in its wilderness state. The continued predominance of these materialistic institutions within the Russian government means that environmentalism does not noticeably restrain the present Russian government’s willingness to expand its physical presence into the Arctic.

The materialist conception of the Arctic also made the Soviet government much more willing to internally colonize the Arctic and subjugate its native groups than the United States was. This legacy means that indigenous groups in Russia are now much less able than their American neighbors to internally contest Russia’s sovereignty over Arctic territory or to restrain Russia’s ability to economically develop what was historically their territory.
When taken together, the factors I identified, and process-traced, explain why Russia has uniquely constructed the Arctic region as a place that is critical to the country’s security, material strength, and identity. Russia’s institutions, interests, spatial identity and past efforts to conquer the Arctic have made it more willing and capable to expand its influence into the Arctic than the United States.

1.2 America’s Construction of the Arctic

In contrast, America’s less materialistic and less adversarial construction of the Arctic has made the American government less willing and able to expand its influence into the region than Russia.

Like Russia, America’s unique geopolitical past has contributed greatly to its behavior. Since its highly contingent purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867, America has been much less physically restrained than Russia has been. America’s easy access to both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, and its ability to connect the two oceans together through the Panama Canal and via a national transportation infrastructure, have allowed the United States to regard the Arctic as a geopolitically peripheral area. Instead of using its purchase of Alaska to project power northward, it instead has overwhelmingly used the Arctic as a tripwire to detect against threats to population and industrial centers much further south. Furthermore, just as Deutsch (2015) first conceived was possible, America was able to construct an institutionalized collective security community in the North Atlantic with the polar states of Canada, Denmark, Iceland, and Norway and the near-Arctic state of Great Britain after World War II. This security community worked from the precedent of institutionalized cooperation that was established between these states during World War II. In turn, this security community has contributed to the United States’ willingness to subsequently balance with these countries and to transfer the defense facilities it
established on their territory so these countries could better defend themselves as the Cold War progressed. To different degrees, this arrangement allowed these other states to restrain the American presence on their territory to that which was historically necessary to defend them against Nazi Germany during World War II and the Soviet Union during the beginning of the Cold War.

Additionally, America’s market-based economic institutions and its economic relationships with other polar countries have also limited its willingness and ability to expand its presence into the Arctic compared to Russia. The physical difficulties and high cost of developing the Arctic, the difficulty of attracting labor, and the isolation of Alaska from the contiguous United States have historically made resource extraction in the Arctic uneconomical except in times when extreme scarcity has attracted temporary development in the region like the Klondike Gold Rush and the OPEC oil embargo. Moreover, against liberal assumptions of international relations, America’s democratic polar neighbors have successfully moved to keep American companies from establishing operations on their Arctic territory because they have been afraid they could not properly govern the lightly populated areas against the potential influx of Americans they believe would threaten their sovereignty. Paradoxically, America’s promotion of coastal Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) since the Roosevelt administration has also limited America’s government’s willingness to pursue and control natural resources in the Arctic. While America protected its control of resources off its own Atlantic and Pacific coasts through the promotion of EEZs, the subsequent institutionalization of EEZs in international agreements has greatly complicated American business’s access to the coastal resources of the other polar states. Specifically, Russia has moved to limit foreign access to its coastal waters in the Arctic Ocean since the 1960s by calling on its international responsibility to protect its EEZ from
foreign intrusion. Canada, likewise, has restricted American merchant ships from utilizing the Northwest Passage. In all, America’s economic institutions and interests have given it less willingness than Russia to develop the Arctic. Correspondingly, with less material interests at stake in the region than Russia, the United States has been much less willing to militarize the Arctic than Russia and much slower to develop polar-specific capabilities like icebreakers and ice-hardened merchant ships that would expand its control over Arctic sea lanes.

In contrast to Russia, America has also failed to develop a strong ideational attachment to the Arctic. In addition to America’s historically small geopolitical and economic interests in the region, I pinpoint Alaska’s physical dislocation from the contiguous United States by the consolidation of Canada as a key contributing factor to America’s overwhelming perception that it is not inherently an “Arctic” country. As I document, against neo-realist assumptions, Canada has actively and successfully worked since its formal emancipation from England in 1867 to cement itself as the “pre-eminent Arctic country of North America” despite its lack of physical strength. It has seized on its northern location vis-à-vis the United States to differentiate it from its otherwise very similar southern neighbor and successfully made America an “other” in the Arctic. Canada has successfully used its own national attachment to the Arctic to legitimize its attempts to keep America from “trespassing” on the expansive Arctic territory of North America and the adjacent coastal waters it has laid claim to. Over the last century and a half, American leaders have been socialized to Canada’s nationalist assertions and often are deferential to Canada’s requests that America limit its presence in the Arctic - despite America’s predominant material strength in the relationship.

America’s progressive approach to its indigenous groups in northern Alaska has also diluted America’s identity as an Arctic state and restrained its ability to economically develop
the Arctic. Native groups in Alaska have collectivized and politicized over time and have used America’s relatively open political system to contest America’s sovereignty over territory in the Arctic. Their success lobbying lawmakers in the State of Alaska and the federal government has resulted in legislation that has allowed them to gain control over a vast amount of territory in northern Alaska and allowed them to stem the influx of outsiders from the contiguous United States into their traditional territory. Additionally, their cooperation with environmental groups has successfully stopped proposals designed to economically develop northern Alaska and its coastal waters. Despite realist assumptions of international relations, native groups have also overcome their relative material deficiency to work through the transnational non-governmental Inuit Circumpolar Council in both the Arctic Council and the United Nations to achieve greater self-determination than is allowed indigenous groups in the Russian Arctic and the contiguous United States.

Finally, I process-trace how America’s approach to the environment in the Arctic has radically restrained the American government’s willingness to mobilize its material strength to conquer the region like Russia has. Specifically, I demonstrate how America has developed a uniquely strong wilderness ethos that motivated leaders as early as Theodore Roosevelt to conserve America’s resources in Alaska. I also show that influential and affluent Americans have organized and successfully lobbied the federal government, as well as utilized their prominent positions in federal agencies and within American academia and the media, to promote their work. In doing so, this highly influential network of groups has successfully preserved millions of acres of Alaska’s territory forever in its wilderness state. The environmental lobby has also worked within America’s relatively inclusive political and judicial processes to restrain efforts to economically develop the Arctic, despite the objections of American resource extraction
companies and many State of Alaska officials who have worked, largely unsuccessfully, to gain access to Alaska’s resources. Ultimately, I show that environmentalists have succeeded at framing the Arctic as a uniquely threatened and fragile region, “an Arctic sublime,” in the American mindset. This ideational construct, in turn, keeps the United States from more forcefully moving into the region as the ice melts and sea lanes and resource deposits are uncovered than Russia has.

When taken together, it is clear that the five factors I identified, and process-traced, have created a much different construct of the Arctic in the United States than exists in Russia. In turn, this construct has made the United States much less willing and ultimately less capable of expanding its sphere of influence into the Arctic than Russia and explains why the United States can now be aptly called a “reluctant Arctic power.”

3. Weighing the Factors

Table 2: Comparison of the Different Factors’ Effects on America’s and Russia’s Approaches to the Arctic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Russia</th>
<th>United States</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geopolitics</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial identity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Concern</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Rights</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When taken together, the five factors I present and analyze in this dissertation clearly explain why Russia has been much more willing and capable of expanding its sphere of influence into the Arctic than the United States. This is simplistically modeled in Table 2 above which shows that geopolitics, economics, and spatial identity have spurred Russia into the Arctic
and that Russia has not been restrained by environmental concern or native rights when compared to the United States.

It is clear that these factors have affected each other over time to influence each country’s behavior in a way that is greater than the sum of its parts. However, it is still useful to look at the factors on their own to determine which ones have been more important to the two countries at different junctures to determine if there are noticeable patterns in how they affected the country’s behavior.

At the beginning of the dissertation I described the very different physical capabilities that both Russia and the United States have accumulated in the Arctic to illustrate the very different material opportunities the two countries now can mobilize to expand their respective spheres of influence into the Arctic. As this dissertation spells out, the willingness to build out this capability in the first place is a function of how the two countries have constructed the region differently.

Geopolitical concern has been the most important and consistent factor that has motivated Russia to expand its sphere of influence into the Arctic. This was especially the case after the Bolshevik Revolution when the Soviets first developed the material power to expand into the Arctic and this motivation increased during World War II and the Cold War. The three times that Russia retrenched from the region occurred when internal disarray and material weakness caused it to temporarily slow its attempt to conquer the region. Specifically, this occurred during the transfer of Alaska in 1867, the Bolshevik Revolution from 1917 to 1922, and at the end of the Cold War. After all three of these critical junctures, however, Russia forcefully reasserted itself in the Arctic. In contrast, the geopolitical push America has felt to expand into the Arctic has been much less sustained than that of Russia. In fact, while geopolitics have pushed the United
States to expand its presence into the Arctic more than any other factor also, the United States government has more often than not been pushed into the Arctic by other polar countries than it has been willing to expand into the region on its own. In this respect it purchased Alaska at the behest of Russia in the middle of the 19th century. It then expanded into Iceland and Greenland at the behest of Great Britain, Denmark, and Iceland during World War II. After each geopolitical conflict in the twentieth century it attempted to retrench from the region to economize on the high costs of operating in the region and to fulfill the contractual agreements it made with its allies to leave when security threats to these countries ebbed. By the middle of the Cold War the strength of America’s allies and the improved range of its military equipment allowed the United States to pull back from the Arctic. It has not forcefully re-asserted itself in the region militarily since, except when the Reagan administration temporarily increased the number and size of “flexible response” military deployments to the Arctic in the second half of the 1980s. As such, America has increasingly viewed the Arctic as a cooperative responsibility between itself and its polar allies over time instead of the unilateral approach to the region that Russia has assumed.

Likewise, economic interests have only sporadically pushed the United States into the Arctic, although at these times economics was the largest factor that pushed the United States into the Arctic and was able to overcome resistance from the environmental and native lobbies. American businesses have only been induced to develop the region during short periods when resource prices made it profitable and only had indirect government support to do so in these rare occasions. The last time American business were spurred to develop the Arctic occurred during the energy security concerns of the 1970s. When these fears waned in the 1980s, and resource prices sharply declined, American businesses and the American government again lost their collective interest in the region. This interest has further declined with the increasing costs and
bureaucratic wrangling imposed on American businesses by a myriad of interest groups that have largely blocked their access to the region. On the contrary, Russia has become more and more dependent on resources from the Arctic over time. This has been a very large factor that has continuously pushed it to expand into the Arctic. Since the Bolshevik Revolution the Russian government has untiringly attempted to develop the region’s resources and sea-lanes. It is instructive that as American resource companies became disinterested in the Arctic as resource prices declined in the second half of the 1980s that the Soviet government pushed its firmly entrenched economic ministries to extract more hydrocarbons in the Arctic to produce enough revenue to keep the country solvent. After the Cold War ended, the sale of resources from the Arctic continued to be used by Russian leaders to stem economic collapse, to leverage dependent neighbors, and to develop and maintain domestic patron-client relationships. As such, constructed economic imperatives have pushed Russia to expand its control over the Arctic in a much more serious and sustained way than the United States.

Russia’s push into the Arctic has also been sustained by the national attachment its’ governments have cultivated towards the region, but this factor is secondary and complementary to the geopolitical and economic factors that dominate its behavior. Spatial attachment to the Arctic first took hold during Stalin’s reign as a way of legitimizing the very large social and economic costs the Soviets sunk to develop the Arctic. The continuous propaganda disseminated by the Soviet government throughout the Cold War successfully made the Arctic a special place in the Russian psyche and continued to legitimize the Soviet Union’s economic and military expansion into the region. As the power of Communism declined in the 1980s, and Russian nationalism replaced it as an ideological stimulus, the importance of Russia’s identity as the preeminent Arctic state has increased. Like Stalin, Putin uses this attachment to legitimize the
very large economic and military investment his government is making in the region and to bolster the morale of the Russian populace. In contrast, America’s national identity as an Arctic state has never really materialized, largely because Canada appropriated an identity as an Arctic state and successfully constructed the United States as a regional “outsider.” This lack of identity as an Arctic state has been a contributory factor to America’s present status as a “reluctant Arctic power” but was especially significant during the formative exploratory years of the Arctic during the 19th century and early 20th century. Despite the prestige American explorers gained for themselves by their discoveries in the Arctic, there was never a determined effort by American leaders to use these symbolic achievements to secure territory in the Arctic even when its more nationalistic polar neighbors aggressively claimed Arctic territory Americans discovered. As such, there has been no national imperative to establish a sphere of influence in the Arctic based on the symbolic importance of the region like there historically has been for Russia or Canada.

Native rights is another secondary factor that has made the United States more unwilling to expand into the Arctic than Russia. The weight of this factor was small at the time of the Purchase of Alaska for both countries but increased over time for the United States. After the American Civil Rights movement in the 1960s the semi-autonomy and self-determination of native groups in Alaska was institutionalized. Millions of acres of territory were formally ceded by the American government to native groups, especially in northern Alaska. Furthermore, natives in Greenland were allowed “Home Rule” which contributed to America’s decision to retrench from Greenland beginning in the 1970s. The ability of native groups to collectivize across borders and utilize international government organizations to push for greater self-determination has increased native groups’ ability to restrain not just the United States, but also its polar allies, from developing Arctic territory when compared to Russia. Additionally, the
American government’s changing focus from traditional security threats to human security threats after the Cold War has allowed native groups to shape the American government’s policies towards the Arctic. Specifically, native concerns have contributed to a very strong sentiment in American policy making circles that the receding ice in the Arctic is a danger that should be mitigated instead of an opportunity that should be seized. In contrast, concern for native groups has never really restrained the Russian government from seeking to expand its control over Arctic territory. Native groups have not been treated as the rightful owners of Russia’s Arctic territory since Russia moved to colonize the region in the 17th century and the Soviets aggressively moved to assimilate native populations when Stalin came to power. Even after Russia’s political and economic liberalization at the end of the Cold War native groups gained very little power to restrain the Russian government from developing the Arctic and even less ability to contest the Russian government’s sovereignty over territory in northern Russia.

Similar to native concerns, apprehension for the environment did not really affect either country’s approach to the Arctic when Alaska was transferred from Russia to the United States. However, beginning in the late 1800s the weight of this factor increasingly restrained America’s willingness to expand into the Arctic, while it has done little to curb Russia’s enthusiasm to conquer the Arctic. In fact, successive Soviet governments believed that the environment was an obstacle that must be overcome instead of preserved in its pristine state, especially after Stalin came to power. Paradoxically, since Russia did not efficiently extract or utilize the resources it procured from the Arctic it was motivated to push further into the region in search of new deposits. Only after the Chernobyl explosion did an environmental movement develop in the Soviet Union that diluted the government’s willingness to develop the Arctic. Even then the country’s dire economic circumstances, the lack of a strong environmental lobby, and the
deeply-ingrained national imperative that the Arctic needed to be conquered meant that the
nascent environmental movement in Russia did not change the materialist construct Russia had
of the Arctic and did little to dampen Russia’s enthusiasm to expand into the region. On the other
hand, the strength of the environmental movement in the United States was apparent beginning
in the 19th century and has strengthened over time. As such, by the 1980s the environmental
lobby was able to successfully set aside millions of acres in northern Alaska from ever being
developed. It also successfully molded the ideational construct many American policy makers
have of the Arctic. Instead of seeing the region as a place that needs to be conquered like the
Soviets, many affluent Americans came to believe the region should be protected from human
influence as traditional security concerns waned and worries about environmental security
increased. After the Cold War receding ice was therefore viewed as a threat to the environment
that should be mitigated instead of the opportunity many prominent Russians determined it was.

In toto, geopolitics and economics explain Russia’s and America’s diverging behavior in
the Arctic more than the other factors do. However, the strength of the factors of national
identity, native concern and environmental concern have grown over time and have
complemented the geopolitical and economic factors that have otherwise stimulated the two
countries’ approaches to the Arctic. Ultimately, the conglomeration of these factors means that
Russia has developed a much more material and adversarial construct of the Arctic than the
United States. This has given its leaders a much greater desire to establish Russia as the
predominant power in the region than the United States despite Russia’s relatively weaker
overall material strength. In contrast, the Arctic has historically been a peripheral issue for
American policy makers and increasingly considered to be the rightful domain of other entities -
the other states in the Arctic the United States has allied with, the native groups that have
traditionally lived in the Arctic, and the property of nature itself. This means that the United States has not developed the capability or the willingness to dominate the Arctic that Russia has developed.

3. Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism

Realism does a good job of explaining Russia’s behavior in the Arctic over the last century and a half. Specifically, realism explains Russia’s ego-centrism and paranoia throughout most of the Cold War and its revisionism towards the region now. Russia has traditionally looked to expand into the Arctic to increase its security, its material strength, and its prestige just as realist proponents suggest it should act. However, neo-realism especially, does a much poorer job of explaining why Russia, which has been materially weaker than the United States since before World War I, did not balance with the other polar states to confront the United States.

This phenomenon is better explained by Walt’s (1987) “balance of threat” theory which suggests that a state will balance against the state that is perceived to be the greater threat to it. This dissertation shows that perceived threat can be the result of material imbalances between countries, but also from the learning that occurs when leaders observe the behavior of other states. For most other polar states since World War I, Russia has been more threatening than the United States because of its willingness to expand its control over the Arctic and its aggressive actions in Eastern Europe. In contrast, America’s reluctance to forcefully push into the Arctic and its willingness to ease other polar countries’ fears by giving them an institutional say in collective defense, and by retrenching from the region when external threats decreased, has made the United States a better alliance partner for these states than Russia. However, as I show, the relationships America developed with these partners are subtly different and historically
constructed. As such, these states balance with the United States to different extents and in different ways based largely on the historical precedent that was first set during World War II.

Realism also explains why America’s allies in the Arctic still fear the United States. Despite the institutions and trust that has developed between the United States and its NATO partners, the relative material advantage of America makes these states wary. This wariness has been decreased by factors liberals point out. Specifically, the shared value in democratic governance between these other countries and the United States, the use of international institutions to peacefully settle disagreements between the United States and these countries, and international trade that occurs between these countries and the United States have increased cooperation.

However, liberalism does not explain why other democratic states in the Arctic (Canada especially) have attempted to limit the United States’ presence in the Arctic as much as they have and why the United States has let these other countries do so to such a great extent. It is clear that the other countries have feared America’s superior strength would make it impossible for them to push America out of their territory if America’s benign intentions towards them changed. However, it is also clear that many Canadians, specifically, have come to believe that Canada is the rightful “owner” of the Arctic and that American leaders have demurred to Canada’s assertions of primacy in the Arctic because they have not cared about the region as much as their Canadian counterparts have. This explains why it was Canada, and not the United States, that instrumentally constructed the Arctic Council in the vacuum that followed the Soviet Union’s collapse.

Furthermore, despite liberal assumptions of how international relations should play out, America has been unable to formally incorporate democratic Sweden and Finland into its
security community in the Arctic. Instead, these two countries’ historic identities as neutrals and their unique experiences during World War II have made them resistant to officially ally with NATO. Instead, the two countries’ role as neutral territorial buffers between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War have made them only slowly and grudgingly move towards cooperation with NATO as the Russian threat to them has increased and they have economically integrated with Europe.

This dissertation shows that constructivism provides more explanatory weight than these other two approaches when looking at America’s and Russia’s willingness and capability to expand their respective spheres of influence into the Arctic. Constructivists include domestic politics and the historical evolution of state identities and interests as factors that explain a state’s behavior. I make it clear in this dissertation that these two states’ behaviors have been shaped both by their unique material circumstances and their unique domestic institutions, identities and interests. These unique circumstances and unique constructions have given Russia a larger presence and a greater capability to operate in the region than the United States and have bequeathed on its leaders a very materialist and nationalist conception of the region. On the contrary, American leaders have been institutionally constrained by America’s polar allies, America’s economic institutions, the strengthening native and environmental lobbies, and the country’s lack of identity as an “Arctic state.”

4. Agency, Contingency, and Path Dependence

In conjunction with the path dependent nature of regional relations and institutional development that my dissertation highlights, it also shows how extra-regional events and entrepreneurial agents have changed the respective country’s construction of the Arctic over time and altered the country’s capability and willingness to expand into the region.
Indeed, without the extreme agency of William Seward and Baron de Stoeckl, the United States would not have acquired Alaska. In turn, if the United States had not acquired Alaska at the critical juncture it did, America’s and Russia’s subsequent behavior in the Arctic would have been different. It is possible that without this event the United States would be even more reluctant to assert itself in the Arctic now and that Russia would be even more assertive. Likewise, if the Bolsheviks had been defeated, as they almost were during the Russian Civil War, Russia’s subsequent economic interest in the Arctic would likely have been more muted and its relationships with its neighbors more friendly. Furthermore, if Japan had beaten the Soviets at Khalkhin Gol, the Soviets had fallen to Germany at Stalingrad, OPEC had not decided to embargo Western countries, and the Exxon Valdez had not spilled oil all over Alaska’s coasts, the construction of the Arctic and Russia and America’s interests in the region would be much different than it is now. Finally, if not for the agency of Gorbachev to de-securitize the Arctic and Putin to re-securitize it now, Russia may not be so interested in expanding its sphere of influence in the Arctic and America might not be so neglectful of the Arctic.

In sum, contingency and agency make it impossible to accurately predict the future of regional relations because contingency and agency can alter a country’s interests, institutions, relations, and material power in a way that generalizable theories of international relations cannot predict. However, a “deep dive” into history, and an attempt to process trace different relevant factors, can explain how relations are constructed and the likely choices states will make based on the material capabilities they have and the unique political and institutional constraints they are under. It is the best that a political scientist studying international relations can hope to achieve.
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