



## Identity Politics and the Russia-Canada Continental Shelf Dispute: An Impediment to Cooperation?

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# **Identity Politics and the Russia-Canada Continental Shelf Dispute: An Impediment to Cooperation?**

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*The geopolitics of the Arctic region is viewed as a race for resources between coastal states. Yet, alarmist assessments are tempered by the reality that the most economically viable hydrocarbon reserves are entirely contained within the uncontested EEZs of the littoral states. Given this situation, confrontational rhetoric coming from Ottawa and Moscow seems not only troubling but peculiar. This article attempts to explain this peculiarity. It argues that leaders in both states seem willing to emphasise the ideational salience of disputed space to domestic audiences while downplaying their cooperative track record. The article finds mixed evidence of the instrumental use of national identity politics in Arctic issues, which often conflate distinct elements of Arctic geopolitics. While this dynamic has not yet prevented cooperation over disputed boundaries, perpetuation of these narratives may erode domestic support for dispute settlement.*

## INTRODUCTION

Arctic geopolitics is attracting greater scholarly attention due to concerns about the impact of climate change on circumpolar regions and the political repercussions of a changing North. The three pressures of accessibility, resources and sovereignty are creating new uncertainties for the region's geopolitics.<sup>1</sup> An oft-cited source of political uncertainty is numerous overlapping claims to “resource rich” ocean space.<sup>2</sup> In addition to overlapping claims in the Beaufort, Lincoln and Barents seas, the deadline for states to make claims to extended continental shelves is fast approaching. Russia is

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preparing to re-submit its claim to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental shelf (CLCS) and Canadian and Danish submissions are due in 2013 and 2014 respectively. Climate change has highlighted the importance of making the Arctic “legible”, by making claims to the extended continental shelf as resource exploitation on the Arctic seabed appears more feasible.<sup>3</sup> The efforts by coastal states to map the extent of their continental shelves has heralded a new phase of Arctic geopolitics focused on extended claims to jurisdiction that some view as a ‘race’ for resource rights.<sup>4</sup> This ‘race’ perspective is fuelled by the US Geological Service’s conclusion that “the extensive Arctic continental shelves may constitute the geographically largest unexplored prospective area for petroleum remaining on Earth”.<sup>5</sup> However, there is good cause for optimism about the outcome of disputed Arctic boundaries. Arctic states have a track record of cooperation over boundary issues and there is an established legal process for making claims to extended continental shelves, which by all accounts is being followed.<sup>6</sup> For example, Russia and Norway recently concluded a delimitation agreement in the long disputed Barents Sea.<sup>7</sup>

Coastal state behaviour reflects both perspectives. Policymakers in Canada and Russia have highlighted the cooperative nature of their approach to Arctic issues while simultaneously asserting their claims rhetorically and physically. Russia’s posture is seen as an extension of the importance of Arctic resource development in the Russian political economy.<sup>8</sup> While Canada’s cooperative track record in maritime boundary delimitations is encouraging, these agreements are predominantly with Canadian allies such as Denmark and the United States.<sup>9</sup> From a theoretical perspective, whether based on complex interdependence or as a reflection of the democratic peace, this is not surprising.<sup>10</sup> The emerging dispute over extended continental shelves however, poses a more potent challenge. While some of the claimant states are allies – Canada, the United States and Denmark – they are also former Cold War enemies of Russia, a claimant to the ‘resource rich’ seabed, whose foreign policy has taken an assertive turn.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, the bulk of proven resources in the Arctic are located within the recognised Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of coastal states with the most economically viable sites closest to shore. This situation then begs the question; why do Canada and Russia make bellicose claims to sovereignty that downplay ongoing cooperative processes and which inflate the urgency of Arctic jurisdictional issues? This article argues that policymakers in Ottawa and Moscow derive a degree of domestic political utility from the issue of disputed boundaries. This utility is derived in part from national identity building projects that could undermine cooperative processes over the long term.

This article explores the impact of national identity politics on the disputed continental shelf between Canada and Russia and finds evidence of the instrumental use of identity politics by Ottawa and Moscow. However, this has not yet impeded cooperation between Arctic states. Nevertheless, given

that politicisation of maritime disputes can impede cooperation, policymakers in Ottawa and Moscow may consider re-thinking the role of the Arctic dispute in domestic electoral politics and nation-building rhetoric. The article first outlines the theoretical basis of the expectation that national identity can exacerbate maritime boundary disputes. This relationship itself is controversial as most analysts view maritime disputes to be less salient than territorial disputes, and thus less likely to engender the same level of domestic attachment.<sup>12</sup> The article then explores how Russian and Canadian elites have communicated the stakes and threats to their respective Arctic claims to their constituents. While existing approaches have cataloged the domestic construction of the Arctic in Canada and Russia, this paper explores how these signals are interpreted by the other.<sup>13</sup> The penultimate section weighs the empirical record against three indicators of behaviour to assess whether national identity issues are impeding cooperation over Arctic boundary issues. This article seeks to contribute to debates about the trajectory of Arctic geopolitics using insights from International Relations to explore the inter-state impact of the construction of the Arctic region. Rather than beginning from the outside – by exploring the geographical origins of Arctic “spatial re-ordering”, this paper explores how two Arctic states have constructed the stakes in a key issue in Arctic geopolitics with reference to the other and assesses the implications for future dispute management.<sup>14</sup>

### National Identity, National Sovereignty and Disputed Maritime Boundaries

Despite the purported declining salience of territory in contemporary geopolitics, space remains important to rulers and to the ruled the world over, not least because of the appeal of territorial nationalism.<sup>15</sup> According to the conflict studies literature, disputed territory lies at the heart of most international conflicts.<sup>16</sup> Territory is salient to policymakers for tangible reasons, such as resource wealth, as well as intangible reasons, such its role in creating a sense of belonging among a people. Disputed space provides a variety of functions to state leaders that include not only economic or strategic functions, but also functions associated with state or identity building.<sup>17</sup> The value leaders place on these functions can determine whether states pursue cooperative or confrontational means to achieve their objectives. In some cases domestic functions can trump compelling strategic or economic rationales to cooperate.<sup>18</sup> Assessing the influence of national identity on foreign policy is challenging for a variety of definitional, methodological and empirical reasons. National identity is conceptually fluid, difficult to measure, and its direct impact on leaders’ decision making process nearly impossible to observe.

The exercise is somewhat simpler when one is trying to observe the relationship between national identity and state posture towards disputed

national territory however. National territory is engrained into national consciousness; threats to territorial integrity can be clearly conceptualised within the self-other distinction. Publics feel a strong attachment to national territory because it provides the container within which the 'nation' resides.<sup>19</sup> On issues of territorial integrity therefore, the impact of national identity on foreign policy is similar to the impact of public opinion on foreign policy.<sup>20</sup> National identity informs a society's perception of its environment and by extension the parameters of its domestic and international interests.<sup>21</sup> Polities are more likely to mobilise when confronted with a slight to their territorial identity and, according to some authors, this can constrain leaders' policy options vis-à-vis a disputed boundary due to audience costs and associated political consequences.<sup>22</sup> While the material value of disputed territory is certainly one reason for this, the intangible value of territory and the role it plays in a nation's sense of self can reduce the incentives for cooperation and may increase incentives for conflict over a given territorial dispute.

This relationship is considerably less obvious in the maritime domain, particularly for international lawyers who consider territory and maritime space to be distinct concepts. Likewise critical political geographers have noted the binary social construction of land and ocean space.<sup>23</sup> An island is clearly part of one's state, but an EEZ is a far more abstract concept of state sovereignty. According to one study, "Territorial issues are generally salient for both tangible and intangible reasons, whereas maritime and river issues generally lack the intangible dimension and are less salient overall".<sup>24</sup> However, when the international community created the pretext for expanded state authority over maritime areas under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a trickle of claims to maritime domains became a flood. This expansion of state jurisdiction seaward is both geographic – states have made claims to a greater percentage of the world's oceans, and substantive – states have adopted the widest possible interpretation of their jurisdictional entitlements.<sup>25</sup> As illustrated below one side effect of the "territorialization" of ocean space is the extension of national identity over it.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, under some conditions disputes over maritime boundaries may evoke similar emotional attachment as land disputes.

Disputed space, whether land or maritime, challenges both internal and external conceptions of national identity. Internally, maritime disputes intersect with national identity in two ways. The first is that elites may use national identity instrumentally to legitimise their rule by creating crises or otherwise promoting the "mobilization of antagonism".<sup>27</sup> Elites may draw on historical myths of persecution at the hands of rival claimants in order to strengthen their domestic political standing. This in turn can generate a reciprocal, grassroots pressure on elites to ensure that they adequately advocate on behalf of the people on the basis of widely held beliefs by citizenry.<sup>28</sup> These two processes also have international consequences. Elite-driven mobilisation necessarily demands a forceful statement of a state's claim to a given

territory which in turn requires an admonishment by the rival state. This can fuel grass-roots nationalist sentiments in the claimant state and can place pressure on elites to adopt a hard-line stance when they would otherwise prefer to pursue other foreign policy prerogatives. This domestic climate militates against cooperation. Maritime boundary disputes also challenge the external conception of national identity in as much as they can challenge a state's sense of self and its interpretation of the identity of rival claimants. In either case, national identity can complicate or undermine efforts at cooperation because these efforts must satisfy the external identity of what a state is and who it is negotiating with, as well as the internal identity of being seen to act in the interest of the state's sense of self.

These dynamics are evident in maritime boundary disputes the world over, particularly in East Asia. Tokyo has tacitly supported efforts by Japanese nationalists to land on the Japanese controlled Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, and has conferred official recognition on lighthouses they have constructed. Beijing by contrast has vocally supported efforts by Chinese nationalists to land on the islands and protested Japan's detention of these activists in 2004. Similarly, over two weekends, Hanoi permitted popular anti-Chinese protests outside the embassy in Hanoi and the consulate in Ho Chi Minh City following China's inclusion of the disputed Paracel islands into its "Sansha" administrative region.<sup>29</sup> This populism is not limited to central governments. Shimane prefecture in Japan, which claims Japanese provincial authority over the South Korean occupied Tokdo/Takeshima islets, has declared 22 February "Takeshima Day", a public holiday. South Korea routinely issues stamps depicting the islets and has named its new amphibious warfare vessel the *ROKS Tokdo*. Most curiously, the mayor of Tokyo, outspoken nationalist Shintaro Ishihara, has given Okinotorishima, an islet 1,740 km south of Japan, a Tokyo street address. Unsurprisingly, these states have found it difficult to negotiate boundary agreements under such circumstances.<sup>30</sup> In light of research suggesting that Russian and Canadian leaders have been engaged in similar behaviour, the next section explores how the extended continental shelf issue have been articulated by Ottawa and Moscow and how these constructions have been perceived by the other.

### National Identity and Arctic Boundaries in Canada and Russia

For much of the Cold War, the Arctic served as a theatre for superpower posturing rather than as an issue of discord between states. Forward thinking states employed a variety of justifications, including sector theory, historic waters or straight baselines, to ensure their claims to the Arctic would be defensible under the emerging ocean regime.<sup>31</sup> Arctic maritime boundary disputes became more pressing after UNCLOS entered into force in 1994. While the EEZ was arguably already customary international law, and Arctic states were well on their way to claiming EEZs, a less obvious source of discord

was the potential for overlapping claims to extended continental shelves. Under Article 76, states are entitled to claim an extended continental shelf, beyond the standard 200 nm, up to a distance of 350 nm or 100 nm from the 2500 m isobath, if the shelf meets certain geological conditions. Nevertheless, disputes over claims to this part of the ocean always seemed distant, not least because of the enormous scientific hurdles that needed to be overcome. However, an analysis of Canadian and Russian behaviour towards this potential dispute reveals that policymakers in both states are characterising the challenges in the Arctic region as challenges to national identity.

Historically, Arctic issues have existed on the periphery of Canadian politics. The most visible challenges to Canadian Arctic claims, the *Manhattan* and *Polar Sea* voyages through the Northwest Passage (NWP), have originated from the United States. The public reaction to these was so visceral that in both cases Ottawa responded with efforts to reinforce the Canadian presence in the High North, only to cut these projects from the next budget once voter outrage subsided.<sup>32</sup> The Liberal government of Paul Martin engaged in a small diplomatic spat with Denmark over Hans Island in 2005. Arctic sovereignty has become dramatically more dominant in the Canadian political discourse under Prime Minister Stephen Harper. This is not to dismiss the legitimate urgency of climate change in the Arctic and the associated challenges for Northern communities.<sup>33</sup> However, these challenges have been amplified and cast in the language of 'sovereignty' for political purposes. During the 2006 federal election campaign Stephen Harper was able to undermine the traditional Liberal charge that the Conservative Party was pro-American by amplifying the threat to Canadian Arctic sovereignty posed by American nuclear submarines passing under thawing Arctic ice.<sup>34</sup> Conservative campaign documents from 2006 stressed the development of an "independent capacity" to defend its national sovereignty and security, including "the Canadian Forces' capacity to protect Canada's Arctic sovereignty and security."<sup>35</sup> Harper used his first press conference as Prime Minister to reiterate this American threat to Arctic sovereignty, which, combined with developments elsewhere in the far north set the stage for the Arctic issue to be front and centre in Canadian political discourse.

Ottawa's argument that Canada's Arctic sovereignty was under threat seemed to be validated by Russia's well publicised mission to plant a flag on the Arctic continental shelf in August 2007. Combined with revelations that the summer of 2007 witnessed the lowest ever level of ice coverage in the Northwest Passage seemed to confirm the prime minister's message that Canada needed to 'use or lose' its Arctic sovereignty. This set the stage for a spending spree designed to bolster Canada's presence in the region as well as Stephen Harper's leadership credentials. The Throne Speech in October 2007 pledged not only to increase Canada's military presence in the High North, but also to map the continental shelf margin, which in turn raised the specter of oil and gas exploitation.<sup>36</sup> These initiatives built on promises in

July 2007 to build a naval facility in Nanisivik and the construction of six to eight offshore patrol ships that would enable the Canadian Coast Guard to maintain a physical presence in the Arctic for some portion of the year.

Initially, the Harper government's instrumental use of Arctic sovereignty was directed at the Northwest Passage, particularly aimed at concerns that ships would transit the thawing passage without Canadian permission. This was an attempt to tap into Canadian anti-American sentiment that is tied up with sensitivities about the North. Subsequent developments, such as the prominence of climate change concerns and the emergence of an apparently assertive Russia supported the government's tone. Russia's initial submission to the CLCS was rejected in 2001 and its efforts to complete the subsea mapping project reinforced the rhetoric from Ottawa. Canada's efforts to map the extended continental shelf ahead of its submission to the CLCS have thus been cast in terms of defending 'threatened' sovereignty. For instance, in announcing findings that the Lomonosov Ridge was attached to the North American continent, Minister of National Resources Gary Lunn stated, "The need to demonstrate our sovereignty in the Arctic has never been more important, which is why our government has made this research a top priority".<sup>37</sup> This statement also creates the false impression that Canada has sovereignty over its extended continental shelf, rather than limited jurisdiction over seabed resource exploitation. Likewise, Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon suggested that Canada's Polar Continental Shelf Program, designed to facilitate scientific research in the Arctic, was in fact reinforcing Canada's sovereignty by "occupying the territory".<sup>38</sup> However, no state currently contests Canada's sovereignty over its Arctic territory. What began as an electoral issue has become a project to re-assert Canada's Northern identity with Russia being cast as an 'other'.

The 2008 Conservative campaign platform promised to defend Canadian Arctic sovereignty, pledged to "assert Canada's rights over our Arctic waters", and characterised the resource wealth of the Arctic as "key strategic assets".<sup>39</sup> A year later the government published an Arctic policy document that stressed the importance of the Arctic to Canadian national identity, the threat posed by the foreign shipping through a thawing Northwest Passage, the importance of the region's resource wealth and the urgency of these challenges in light of growing international interest in the Arctic.<sup>40</sup> There has clearly been a shift in how Canadian leaders have constructed Canada's Arctic interests under the Harper government, notwithstanding developments outside the domestic political arena. An integral part of this message is the conflation of different 'threats' to Canadian Arctic sovereignty into a threat to the Canadian national identity.

Similar dynamics exist in Russia where leaders have been far more explicit in their attempts to use the Arctic dispute for identity-building purposes. The North has an established presence in the Russian national identity. There is a dimension of frontier thinking in Russian attitudes towards the

North. The notions of being a “resource power” are long-standing themes in the Russian identity. Russian policy towards the North is by extension couched in the language of national sovereignty, the defence of which is vital. This posture towards the Arctic is an extension of Russia’s historical fascination with the North, which preoccupied both Imperial and Stalinist Russia. Driven by the notion of *osvoenie*, the drive to master forbidding places, Stalin’s attempt to industrialise and develop the North was a way to gain advantage over the West while cultivating myths of Soviet Arctic glory.<sup>41</sup> This drive to succeed in the North resonates in Russia today. According to Franklyn Griffiths, the Russians are a “northern people” and are thus more inclined to incur the risks and costs associated with Northern development while others view the North as a safe haven for Russian development efforts as Moscow becomes more cooperative with neighbours on other frontiers.<sup>42</sup>

Russian leaders have nurtured these nationalist myths that surround Russian history in the North. The declining relevance of Marxist-Leninism as a state ideology has opened the door for nationalism to be used as a nation-building tool.<sup>43</sup> According to Pavel Baev, contemporary Russia’s expansive posture towards the Arctic is part of an identity-building project designed to renew Russian patriotism.<sup>44</sup> Moscow has renewed this effort following a steady stream of foreign policy failures on Russia’s periphery, particularly the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and NATO’s expansion eastward. Expanding jurisdiction over the Arctic resonates, therefore, as compensation for lost territories following the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>45</sup> The clearest example of Russian grandstanding on the Arctic issue was its dramatic effort to plant a Russian flag on the Arctic seabed. The effort was led by Artur Chilingarov, deputy speaker of Russia’s lower house and a high-profile Russian polar scientist and explorer, and was laden with rhetoric aimed at drawing international attention to the Russian legal position. This incident illustrates the domestic political salience of these messages to Russians as Chilingarov was running for political office at the time of his trip to the ocean floor. Likewise, in 2008 the Russian Security Council held a meeting in the Franz Joseph islands to demonstrate their resolve to protect Russian territorial integrity.<sup>46</sup> Policy elites are thus framing Arctic issues in terms of threatened national sovereignty and identity.

The Russian preoccupation with Arctic resource development reinforces this narrative. Vladimir Putin’s devotion to Russia’s Great Power resurgence, driven by its status as a ‘resources superpower’, links the North to the future viability of the Russian state and echoes the old Stalinist myths.<sup>47</sup> Russians anticipate that climate change will make the Arctic more accessible for resource exploitation.<sup>48</sup> Russian leaders view this as an unqualified positive development for the Russian state as, according to Nikolay Patrushev, the Arctic “must become the main strategic resource base of Russia.”<sup>49</sup> The bulk of the Arctic shelf, and by extension the bulk of Arctic hydrocarbon resources, are under Russian jurisdiction which is important for an economy

that relies heavily on the resources sector. Moreover, offshore hydrocarbons in the Arctic will become more important as fields in Siberia and Northern Russia decline.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, Russian threat perceptions are exacerbated by its perceived geopolitical encirclement by America and its NATO allies.<sup>51</sup> The Russian reaction to the near universal condemnation from other Arctic states, all NATO members, of Russia's first submission to the CLCS, as well as in response to Chilingarov's expedition, speaks to the ingrained Russian suspicion of the West. Russia's foreign policy has always been determined with reference to its identity vis-à-vis the West.<sup>52</sup> This suspicion extends to accusations of bias on the part of the CLCS.<sup>53</sup> Suspicion of NATO's intentions for the Arctic is deeply engrained in Russian security and defence circles.<sup>54</sup> According to one Russian perspective, "What unites all Western Arctic states is their rejection of Russia's intention to extend its economic zone northward by over a million of square kilometers by proving that the Lomonosov and Mendeleev ridges are part of our country's continental shelf".<sup>55</sup> Given that the bulk of Arctic resources are located beneath uncontested Russian EEZs, the 'threat' posed by other Arctic claimants to Russia's Northern resource base is clearly inflated. This internal dimension of national identity may have external links as, according to analysts at RAND, Russia is pursuing a "prestige seeking" foreign policy.<sup>56</sup>

This is not to suggest that the citizens of Russia are prone to mobilisation to conflict as part of a national unification project.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, William Zimmerman has argued convincingly that the Russian population, at least during the 1990s, was resistant to mobilisation in support of international conflict. Indeed, the Russian populace was far more isolationist than policymakers in Moscow.<sup>58</sup> However, based on existing debates among Russian political elites about the nature of the Russian state ideology and state identity, the Arctic has a place in the formation of a Russian national identity as a Northern, resource-rich, great power.<sup>59</sup> While Russian national identity remains uncertain, as was intimated by Medvedev in May 2010, the role of the Arctic in the formation of an identity that is consistent with the interests of policymakers and state energy companies will be hard for Moscow to resist.<sup>60</sup> This process is thus an extension of ongoing tensions between the Russian state and the Russian national identity.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the Russian people may be mobilised on certain issues and not on others. Zimmerman found the Russian people were the most likely to be mobilised on issues of territorial sovereignty and economic security; both of which obtain in the current Arctic narrative from Moscow.

### Have Identity Politics Impeded Cooperation?

The above section illustrated that policymakers in Ottawa and Moscow are using Arctic issues instrumentally by trying to create and exploit domestic

insecurities about Arctic boundary challenges.<sup>62</sup> Specifically, potential challenges to Arctic sovereignty are being cast in terms of threats to national identity. While coastal states have the legitimate right to pursue material policy objectives in the Arctic region, the discussion above reveals that Canada and Russia are casting these interests in ideational terms. The effect has been the conflation of many aspects of Arctic issues under the rubric of interests deemed 'vital' to national wellbeing and to national identity. Despite the remoteness and as yet hypothetical nature of their overlapping continental shelf, both have constructed threats to this process. If, as the conflict studies literature expects, this were to militate against cooperation, how could this be observed empirically? This section weighs the empirical record against three indicators of the impact of national identity on maritime boundary disputes. These indicators are based on the theoretical expectation outlined above that the linkage of national identity to a maritime boundary dispute will harden state policy and result in: a militarisation of the surrounding sea area, a reluctance to pursue cooperative measures and a stricter enforcement of coastal state jurisdiction.<sup>63</sup>

First, the marriage of national identity to a given maritime boundary issue makes it more likely that a claimant state will assert its claim using military means. This can be as benign as symbolic efforts to reinforce a sovereignty claim such as showing the flag or as belligerent as asserting one's sovereignty through the use of military force. Danish and Canadian visits to disputed Hans Island represent the lowest end of this spectrum. With regard to the Canada-Russia relationship, there has been a resurgence of military activity on both sides. As noted above, strengthening Canada's military capability in the North has been a cornerstone of Harper government policy. The Canadian Forces now hold annual "sovereignty" exercises in the North which have been interpreted by some Russian analysts as an assertive turn in Canadian policy designed to militarise the Arctic.<sup>64</sup> This is striking because these exercises are preoccupied with policing and search-and-rescue scenarios occurring in Canadian waters within its Arctic baselines. However, recent iterations have included joint exercises with American and Danish forces and have not yet included Russia.

For its part Russia has resumed Cold War-style patrols of Arctic airspace using its TU-95 Bear strategic bombers. While these were routine during the Cold War and consistent with international law, they have domestic political salience in both states. In the Russian mindset they are consistent with Russia's posture as a great power, while in Canada they have been received with irritation and hostility by elected officials. According to Defense Minister Peter Mackay: "When we see a Russian bear approaching Canadian air space, we meet them with an F-18. We remind them . . . that this is Canadian sovereign air space, and they turn back".<sup>65</sup> Likewise, Russia's Northern fleet has become more active. In July 2008 Moscow announced the resumption of naval patrols near Danish and Norwegian defence zones in the Arctic.

Importantly, these efforts remain at the lower end of the spectrum. There have been no reports of military posturing such as exchanges of fire or 'strafing' between Russian and Canadian forces, nor have these forces targeted one another or deliberately shown the flag in disputed areas the other finds politically sensitive. Elites in both states appear to view military power as a necessary expression of their status as an "Arctic power." There is thus a moderate degree of evidence of this indicator.

Second, states are less likely to compromise in disputes where national identity is at stake. Formal delimitation negotiations over the extended continental shelf are impossible until all claimants have made their submissions to the CLCS and it has ruled on the technical merits of each. The CLCS currently has a twenty-seven-year backlog, so it will be some time before the submissions will be evaluated. Nevertheless, officials from all three states have met and discussed the basis of their claims. Furthermore, there is evidence of joint research efforts between Canada and Denmark, as well as rumors of a trilateral submission to the CLCS with Russia.<sup>66</sup> This is a significant departure from past public statements from both parties. Paradoxically, these cooperative trends have progressed despite the nature of public statements from policymakers. The Illulissat Declaration, issued by all five Arctic coastal states in May 2008, states their commitment to employing the law of the sea to delimit maritime boundaries. This commitment was reiterated March 2010.<sup>67</sup> While there is no overlapping extended continental shelf boundary between the three in the absence of Canadian and Danish submissions, these talks indicate that national identity politics has not limited to the appeal of cooperation. There is no evidence of this indicator.

The final indicator expects that states will adopt a stricter interpretation of international law to assert their jurisdictional entitlements when national identity is at stake. For example, Canada has adopted both practical and symbolic efforts to restrict navigational rights in the Northwest Passage. Canada has extended the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act (AWPP) to 200 nm and now requests that all vessels inform Canadian authorities when they enter the area. There have also been efforts to symbolically claim Canadian sovereignty over the NWP. In December 2009, the Canadian parliament passed a bill renaming the NWP, the "Canadian Northwest Passage", with almost unanimous support. This effort to restrict navigational rights by symbolically reinforcing the Canadian position on the NWP is further evidence of an effort by policymakers to link the Arctic with Canadian national identity. Russia by contrast is somewhat more accommodating to international shipping through the Northern Sea Route, although it insists on granting permission, and commercial vessels pay for their escort by Russian icebreakers. While these attempts to restrict navigational rights are not related to the 'other' narrative, they reinforce the ambiguously defined 'Arctic threat' narrative advanced by both Ottawa and Moscow. There is thus a moderate degree of evidence for this indicator.

## IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Have national identity politics impeded cooperation between Canada and Russia over the extended continental shelf? The discussion above reveals a mixed record. The article found evidence of a top-down identity building process in both Moscow and Ottawa. In Canada it appears that elected officials are prepared to inflate threats and conflate distinct Arctic issues when the opportunity arises. Furthermore, they also seem content to downplay the degree of cooperation between Canada and Russia on seabed mapping. During his tour of northern settlements in April 2010 Canadian Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon chose not to dwell on reports that Canada and Russia had met annually since 2007 to discuss cooperation on seabed mapping. Instead he opted to condemn reports that Russian paratroopers planned to land on the North Pole, arguing the move did not affect Canada's sovereignty claims.<sup>68</sup> Likewise, Russian leaders have been at pains to stress the importance of the Arctic to Russia's future viability as well as its status as the leading Arctic state. Policymakers in both states therefore seem prepared to use Arctic issues to improve their domestic political standing.

However, there is little evidence that this has thus far impeded cooperation. There has been no overt effort on the part of any policymaker to demonise other claimants, or to anyway suggest that conflict over the Arctic is inevitable. Moscow has been most assertive in its rhetoric on the North. Russia's National Security Strategy, published in May 2009, argued that tension over natural resource-rich areas was a source of potential conflict in the future. It also noted several regions, including the Barents Sea and parts of the Arctic, as well as the Caspian Sea, where regional rivalries over natural resources could increase.<sup>69</sup> While international media focussed on the more hawkish aspects of the strategy, the official press release drew attention to passages that explicitly denied a Russian interest in militarising the Arctic.<sup>70</sup> One Russian newspaper editorial criticised the decision to hold a Security Council meeting in Franz Joseph land as a publicity stunt, and highlighted the softer aspects of Canadian Arctic policy.<sup>71</sup> Thus, there is evidence that segments of the Russian media and leadership view cooperation as the road forward.

Paradoxically, while policymakers have clearly used Arctic sovereignty disputes for instrumental purposes, this has not been to the exclusion of cooperative rhetoric or practices. There has been considerable progress on bilateral cooperation, most notably joint mapping efforts. Cooperation in this context is partly driven by simple costs and benefits; it is expensive to conduct continental shelf mapping. Canadian officials have recently appeared more sanguine about the prospects of cooperation with Russia, even as they continue to criticise its posture towards Arctic issues. For example, Canada's Arctic foreign policy document prioritised the resolution of outstanding boundary disputes.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, the primary message from

Foreign Minister Cannon's subsequent visit to Moscow was more hard-line as he expressed confidence that Canada's claim to the Lomonosov ridge would prevail over Russia's.<sup>73</sup>

There are several possible explanations for this paradox. First, a boundary negotiation between claimants to the Arctic shelf is decades away due to the backlog at the CLCS. As a result Russian and Canadian leaders may be willing to engage in functional cooperation while indulging in a different domestic political narrative for short term electoral gain.<sup>74</sup> Second, it could be that cooperation persists because the resource wealth in the extended continental shelf remains unknown due to the significant technological hurdles to production and transportation as well as the fact that any boundary negotiation is decades away. Third, the fact that both are active members of the Arctic Council may explain why the instrumental use of identity politics has not eroded the functional cooperation between the two. Although security and boundary issues are beyond the purview of the Arctic Council's mandate, most accounts of the Council's work suggest a growing climate of cooperation between member states, Permanent Participants and associated organisations.<sup>75</sup> In this view, Canadian and Russian leaders clearly understand each other's position regarding the continental shelf and may be confident that their domestic narratives are not misconstrued by policymakers in the other.

However, these conditions could be temporary. The day will come when Arctic states will begin boundary negotiations and technological barriers to Arctic resource development will not hold forever. In this context, the perpetuation of an elite driven identity building project based on threats to maritime claims in the Arctic could impede cooperation if it germinates and is picked up by at the popular level. Russian grassroots nationalism is subsumed within a larger narrative of Russian great power identity, and these sentiments are directed at Western states as a whole; the United States and NATO in particular. A state-backed patriotic education campaign initiated in 2001 seeks to renew Russian patriotism defined through militaristic and historical metaphors.<sup>76</sup> In Canada the Arctic issue will likely endure as the Conservative Party seeks to redefine Canadian national identity away from traditional Liberal Party foreign policy values like peacekeeping and human security.<sup>77</sup> Recent polling data found significant support for a hard line on Arctic issues from Canadians and a mistrust of Russian in dealing with Arctic issues.<sup>78</sup> This is consistent with previous polls that showed that over half of Canadians viewed Russia as the primary challenge to Canada's Arctic sovereignty.<sup>79</sup> If allowed to fester for the decades until a boundary negotiation with Russia is prepared for ratification, this sentiment could undermine cooperation in the high Arctic. That policymakers prefer to perpetuate an identity-building project that could exacerbate tensions in the longer term, rather than advertise the cooperative nature of bilateral interactions, is troubling. A policy recommendation that follows from this analysis therefore is

to decouple Arctic boundary issues from national identity, particularly before claimant states commence negotiation on boundary issues.

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## NOTES

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