


Arctic and North. 2022. No. 47. Pp. 119–135
Original article
UDC 327(98)(045)
doi: 10.37482/issn2221-2698.2022.47.142

Main Theoretical Approaches in the Arctic Policy Studies *

Sergey D. Nabok ¹, Cand. Sci. (Hist.), Senior Lecturer

¹ Saint Petersburg State University, ul. Universitetskaya naberezhnaya, 7–9, Saint Petersburg, 199034, Russia

¹ naboks@inbox.ru , ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7879-8014>

Abstract. The article identifies and analyzes the main theoretical approaches used in the studies of international relations and politics in the Arctic. Contemporary studies of the Arctic use elements of several main approaches in the field of international relations: realism, liberalism, social constructivism and global governance, as well as some others. The theoretical alternative between realism and liberalism manifests itself primarily in the issues of Arctic security. Liberalism and the concept of global governance play an important role in explaining the multilevel and multi-actor nature of political processes and governance in the region. Social constructivism contributes to the understanding and functioning of Arctic political narratives. However, in most cases, they exist in the form of implicit assumptions rather than as systematically developed and substantiated models. The theoretical differences are mainly related to the definition of units and levels of analysis, particularly the role of states and other types of actors, and the nature of the relationship between them. Despite the fact that realistic approaches considering Arctic politics as inevitable competition of states in the logic of “zero-sum games” remain quite common, the general tendency is to search for more complex theoretical models that recognize the diversity of actors involved in Arctic processes, as well as the possibility of cooperative relations.

Keywords: *Arctic, international relations, world politics, theory, realism, liberalism, social constructivism, global governance, regime complex, new regionalism, paradiplomacy*

Introduction

In the scientific study of international relations, international political processes and management systems, the role of theory is characterized by two specific features that distinguish it from other social disciplines. Firstly, the actual political analysis used in the study of specific issues, such as state policy, inter-state relations, or international institutions, rarely relies on a well-defined set of concepts and propositions that establish key relationships between the phenomena under study, is ad hoc in nature, and claims to generalize conclusions. Although theory is an indispensable element of scientific discourse, its factual usefulness in political analysis is insignificant, and theoretical provisions (which are hypotheses in the epistemological sense) are often accepted as implicit suppositions, without reflection and critical analysis.

Secondly, as F. Chernoff notes, the prescriptive component is extremely important in the theory of international relations: although some theories seek to describe only the interrelations of phenomena, theoretical analysis often goes beyond a strict description and explicitly or implicitly

* © Nabok S.D., 2022

For citation: Nabok S.D. Main Theoretical Approaches in the Arctic Policy Studies. *Arktika i Sever* [Arctic and North], 2022, no. 47, pp. 142–163. DOI: 10.37482/issn2221-2698.2022.47.142

ly formulates certain political goals and normative criteria used to evaluate a certain actual or hypothetical course of action [1, p. 3–4]. The latter leads to the fact that political theory acts as a discursive justification of a certain political model and as a basis for a political narrative that legitimizes a certain course of action.

Let us consider, for example, a simple theoretical statement, corresponding to the position of the realist paradigm: “The only type of actors whose actions matter for international politics and international relations are states”. Taking this statement as an implicit assumption focuses political analysis exclusively on the actions and decisions taken by the highest levels of state power, without even allowing the question of the possible role of non-state actors. If such political analysis is faced with the need to explain the behavior of non-state actors (for example, NPOs), they will be interpreted either as insignificant or as instrumental, that is, as tools of state actors’ decisions. If this theoretical premise becomes the basis for policy-making, the consequence is that any meaningful processes in international relations have to be interpreted as resulting from the decisions of state actors. Any actions of non-state actors are construed as being inspired by the governments of other countries, and the actors themselves are deprived of subjectivity, including in a practical political sense.

Such uncritical acceptance of theoretical propositions and the failure to distinguish between descriptive and prescriptive elements of theory have important negative consequences for both the scientific study of political processes and political practice. In a practical sense, this incorrectly evaluates information, makes erroneous decisions, and narrows the range of available behavioral strategies. In analytical terms, the focus of attention is distorted and the risk of misinterpretation of the observed phenomena increases. For example, the systematic efforts of China to influence the regional policy in the United States [2, de La Bruyère D., Pikarsic N.] in case of uncritical acceptance of the postulate of the state as the only actor in the world political arena should be recognized as meaningless and not having rational justification.

These problems of the theory of international relations are also typical for the study of the Arctic. The authors of publications citing the results of empirical research and political analysis do not always rely on clearly formulated theoretical positions and analytical models, and the descriptive characteristics of the subject under study (for example, the Arctic strategy of a particular state) are explicitly or implicitly based on the adoption of certain political goals, in accordance to which the situation and decisions are evaluated. At the same time, explicitly formulated theoretical provisions play an important role both in scientific research and in formulation of practical recommendations. Theory performs several important functions: defines the focus of research and the specific subjects to be studied and analyzed; establishes the content and relationships between key variables used for explanation and prediction; allows to evaluate alternative mechanisms for achieving political goals (without a priori determination of these goals).

The purpose of this article is to identify and analyze the key theoretical models and approaches that are de facto used in modern research on Arctic international politics and governance.

Realism and liberalism in Arctic security studies

The two main issues concerning which alternative theoretical perspectives have emerged in Arctic studies relate to the definition of the role of state actors and the predominant nature of the relationship between them. Traditionally, realism and liberalism are considered as the two main paradigms in the theory of international relations [1, Chernoff F.]. The paradigm of realism, in a greatly simplified form, assumes that the main actors in international relations are states that struggle for domination with other states. The objective interests and motivation of states remain unchanged and are associated with ensuring and strengthening their own security and position in the world hierarchy. The liberal paradigm, recognizing states as important actors, asserts that absolute advantages derived from actions in the international arena are more important than relative ones, hence the preference for states to behave in a predominantly cooperative manner which can ensure mutually beneficial development in the logic of “nonzero-sum games”. However, since the general logic of political liberalism requires a limited role for state intervention, this theory also allows for a possible role for other types of actors — non-state actors — and limits the violent consequences of anarchy in international affairs through the development of international institutions and regulatory regimes.

Although these paradigms, as well as their contemporary versions — neorealism and neoliberalism — include many specific theories that are not restricted to the above theses or even represent a broader view, for example, of the state interests or the role of non-state actors. Such a simplified understanding is nevertheless useful to identify common motives and alternatives found in Arctic security research. In Arctic studies, the difference between the realist and liberal traditions is most pronounced in the area of security. In a narrow sense, security in international relations can be understood as the absence of military conflicts threatening the state borders. This interpretation is more consistent with the logic of the realism paradigm. Later, a purely military understanding of security was extended to include the ability of states to pursue their interests in the international arena not only by military, but also by diplomatic means. However, as S. Tarry points out, over time, this understanding of security became perceived by many researchers as insufficient, and was expanded by two assumptions reflecting the logic of the liberalism paradigm [3]. The first one was to expand the types of threats and sectors to which the concept of security was applied at the expense of economic, environmental and social problems that threaten the state, especially in Third World countries. The second assumption challenges the idea of the state as the only or main object of security studies and includes individuals, the entire human civilization and the environment.

The theoretical alternatives given by the “traditionalist” and “non-traditionalist” interpretations of security, as shown by B. Padrtova, proved to be fully applicable to the Arctic [4]. According to the logic of the traditionalist approach, security in the Arctic should be considered, first of all, as a reflection of the military-political confrontation between states. Moreover, it follows from the general logic of the realistic paradigm that the states with the greatest resources and capabilities have the biggest influence on the entire system of international relations in the region. Russia and the USA are claiming to be such states in the region, and therefore the Arctic system of international relations should be analyzed through the prism of geopolitical confrontation between the two “great powers” [5, Hough P; 6, Huebert R., 7; Goltsov A.G.; 8, Konevskikh O.V.]. Undoubtedly, attributing a broader theoretical position to authors who study security issues only on this basis is not entirely justified. However, in the absence of a more general theoretical framework, such a traditionalist view provides a well-defined logic of political analysis, which focuses on the militarization of the Arctic and the role of the geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the United States, and this logic is reflected in the public narrative of the “New Cold War” in the region. An interesting implication of the traditionalist approach, illustrating the practical, normative dimension of international relations theorizing, is the justification for China’s role in the Arctic, which follows directly from the recognition of its status as a “great power” [9, Li X., Peng B; 10, Kopra S.; 11, Pincus R.]. We should also note that in the logic of traditionalist political theory, international systems are built precisely around the interests and strategies of specific nation-states, rather than blocs or alliances. Therefore, the role of NATO or the EU in this theoretical model should be seen as secondary and derived from the interests of the most influential state actors.

One of the main problems of the traditionalist approach is the fact that, despite the widespread public narrative of “geopolitical confrontation” in the Arctic, the region is de facto characterized by an extremely low level of conflict and a predominantly pragmatic and cooperative nature of international relations. It is worth noting that the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, which regularly monitors conflicts in the world, included only one purely regional conflict (between Russia and Norway) in its latest barometer and gave it a score of only 2 out of 5, while 53 conflicts were recorded in Europe alone in 2020¹. While traditionalist interpretations of security issues in the Arctic are as relevant as ever, they are not on the whole dominant and are giving way to broader theoretical approaches. Most authors recognize the exclusive significance of economic interests in the analysis of international relations in the region, as well as the environmental and climate agenda and social development of the population of the region, which corresponds to the logic of the “expanding” version of non-traditionalist approaches to security [12, Konyshev V., Sergunin A.; 13, Weber J.; 14, Heininen L.; Exner-Pirot H.; Barnes J.; 15, Gjørv

¹ Conflict Barometer 2020. Heidelberg: HIIK, 2021. URL: https://hiik.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ConflictBarometer_2020_2.pdf. Pp. 59-60 (accessed 20 October 2021).

G.H., Lanteigne M., Sam-Aggrey H.]. However, there are significant differences on the issue of key actors.

Despite the acknowledgement of the multidimensional nature of security, a number of studies advocate the unconditional priority of not just state actors, but precisely the “great powers”, which, due to their position and resources, are responsible not only for the political and military stability, but also for other aspects of security important for the international system, including addressing environmental and climatic problems and ensuring sustainable development in the Arctic [10, Kopra S.; 11, Pincus R.]. An alternative view is based on the concept of “middle powers”, which states that the leading role in maintaining international order, peace and cooperative relations is played by countries that are sufficiently developed economically and institutionally, have a high reputation, but do not have exceptional economic and military power and geopolitical ambitions [16, Behringer R.M.; 17, Carr A.]. According to this concept, the middle powers are most interested in maintaining an international order based on rules, as well as diplomatic ways to resolve contradictions between states and find a basis for cooperation.

Applying this theory to the Arctic region seems quite natural. With the exception of Russia and the United States, all other Arctic countries can claim the status of “middle powers”, and Canada is considered to be a textbook example of one. Academic publications tend to use the concept of middle power when describing the foreign policies of individual countries: both Arctic and non-regional [18, Dolata-Kreutzkamp P.; 19, Kim E., Stenport A.; 20, Østhagen A.; 21, Rosamond A.B.], as well as in the analysis of the formation of alliances, which are considered the strength of such countries [22, Watson I.].

One of the most interesting theoretical constructs developed within a non-traditionalist approach to security and applicable to the analysis of the Arctic has become the theory of regional security complexes (RSC). This theory, based on the general assumption that any country views its security primarily in terms of its relations with its neighbours, justifies the exclusive role of small and medium-sized states in formation of a regionally-centric view of security problems [23, Buzan B., Waever O.]. Moreover, considering states as the main actor, it proceeds from the interpretation of security, based on the social constructivist paradigm: the latter reflects what the states themselves attribute to their threats and security areas, and in the regional aspect, especially for medium and small states, such problems are not limited to military security, but include economic, social and environmental aspects. As the analysis of B. Padrtova showed, the application of the RSC theory to the Arctic has its own specifics [4, p. 32–34]. Unlike the standard RSC model, the borders of the region cannot be defined as the borders of the Arctic states, and the leading Arctic countries, especially Russia and the United States, can refer to different regional complexes. At the same time, the Arctic is characterized by an anarchic regime of governance, multipolarity and the predominance of pragmatic and cooperative relations, accompanied by an increase in tension in certain areas. Far from being an explanatory model, the RSC theory sets the key directions for the

analysis of regional international relations. Its main theoretical limitations are related to the problem of defining the Arctic borders, underestimating the strategic importance of relations and threats posed by geographically distant countries, as well as the limited nature of the “state-centric” view of security.

The second direction in modern non-traditionalist approaches to security partly solves these problems, abandoning the primacy of the state as the only type of actors that deserves attention as an object of analysis. This direction is largely a logical development of the “expansive” theory of international security. Military security is the exclusive responsibility of states, and the focus on military security naturally makes them the main reference object of the theory. However, a shift in attention to economic, environmental and social aspects provides opportunities for a more active role of other types of actors [14, Heininen L. et al.]. After the end of the Cold War, the military importance of the Arctic began to decline, albeit unevenly and with some reverse trends, and the main areas of cooperation and cooperation were environmental issues, scientific and monitoring activities, and, to a lesser extent, economic cooperation and social development. Such a profile of cooperation contributes both to the de facto activation of non-state actors (international organizations, indigenous associations, companies, scientific institutions, regional and global NGOs, etc.), and to the greater willingness to include them in political analysis as a legitimate and important category of actors with their own security interests and resources.

Non-state actors in the Arctic: paradiplomacy, new regionalism, global governance

The tendency of liberalism to recognize the role of non-state actors in Arctic research has been reinforced by a shift of attention away from security issues (even broadly understood) to a wider range of issues of international interaction and governance in the Arctic region. One striking example of this shift away from the primacy of state actors is the active use of the concept of paradiplomacy in Arctic studies. The theory of paradiplomacy claims that the subnational level of government and subnational actors (including non-state actors) play a relatively independent role in the formation of international relations and can influence them through horizontal interregional interaction [24, Kuznetsov A.S.]. As an example of the application of the concept of paradiplomacy, M. Ackren compares paradiplomacy in the Arctic with the traditional channels of diplomatic relations [25, Ackren M.]. Considering it as a response to globalization processes, the author identified three levels of governance, where regional Arctic actors participate in paradiplomatic relations:

- economic cooperation aimed at attracting foreign investment and developing export markets (first of all, these efforts relate to fishing and the mining industry);
- cooperation in non-economic areas: environmental protection, cultural contacts, formation of a common Arctic identity;

- interaction in the legal field in order to participate in international agreements and organizations.

However, the ratio of diplomacy and paradiplomacy in the activities of different countries varies significantly. A selective analysis by M. Ackren has shown that in some cases, regions (for example, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Nunavut) received significant autonomy (including participation in international activities) and actively use it: they participate in international organizations, conclude agreements, establish foreign representations. However, in other cases, the regions, participating in paradiplomatic activity, are de facto an instrument of state policy and interstate relations, as in the case of Russian—Norwegian cooperation in Svalbard. This allows us to argue that the theory of para-diplomacy in relation to Arctic cooperation cannot be considered as a completely independent type of political processes and should take into account both the nature of interstate relations at the highest level and the nature of the “center-regions” relations within each state.

Another theoretical interpretation of the role of subnational actors in Arctic politics is based on the concept of new regionalism. This approach introduces the concept of the degree of regionalization, that is, the degree to which a certain geographical area can be considered as a political region. Some variations distinguish up to five different levels (regional space, regional complex, regional society, regional community, regional state), reflecting the growth of integration and interdependence of states. According to S. Knecht, the Arctic, being in many ways a unique region, is characterized by a gradual movement from simple cooperation to full-fledged integration, in which the evolution of the Arctic Council plays a key role².

A more complex version of the theoretical description of the role of non-state actors is presented in the approach of A. Sergunin, which is based on a combination of “new regionalism” and the concept of “global region” [26, Sergunin A.]. New regionalism proposes a rejection of the state-centric analysis of regional processes in favor of a multi-level and polycentric one, exploring the triple relationship between states, civil society institutions and private companies as the basis of international relations. The actions of subnational Arctic actors are considered precisely through the prism of this more complex system of relations, and not just within the framework of the “center-regions” relationship and inter-regional horizontal interaction. The Arctic, in turn, is considered as a “global region” — a region, for which the factor of territorial proximity and connectivity is not unconditionally decisive. The idea of global regionality suggests that the formation of the international regime in the region is under a significant influence, including supranational and extraterritorial relations, in which both state and non-state actors play their role.

² Knecht S. Arctic regionalism in theory and practice: from cooperation to integration? // Arctic Yearbook. 2013. URL: https://arcticyearbook.com/images/yearbook/2013/Scholarly_Papers/8.KNECHT.pdf. 20 p. (accessed 27 November 2021).

The greatest potential for the inclusion of non-state actors in the theory of international relations is currently represented by the concept of global governance. Theories of global governance combine descriptive and normative elements and reflect the idea of “governance without managers” in international relations, based not on a hierarchy of subordination, but on complex multi-level systems of agreements, formal and informal mechanisms for coordinating and reconciling interests between actors of different types [27, Rosenau J.N.; 28, Zürn M.A.]. Accepting the thesis of liberalism on the negative consequences of the excessive presence of the state, which is the main source of threats in international relations, the theory of global governance argues that the solution of many modern problems is transboundary in nature, while resources and capacities relevant for their solution are located not only in the state, but also in other actors. Depending on the scope of analysis and theoretical perspectives, particular attention may be given to global NGOs, transnational corporations, regional and municipal authorities, local civil initiatives, international organizations, etc. These resources and capabilities may include collective willingness to act, competencies, social and symbolic capital, and, less frequently, financial and organizational capabilities. Of particular relevance to global governance issues are the processes of cross-border and cross-level transfer of knowledge relating to a specific problem.

Considering the lack of a unified international legal regime in the Arctic and the predominantly coordinated nature of the main institutions, such as the Arctic Council, the application of global governance theory to the analysis of politico-governance processes in the region looks promising. However, it is rarely used systematically and explicitly as a tool for analysis and explanation. One of the few examples of the opposite is the work of R. Bertelsen, who analyzes the positive role of transnational scientific relations and exchanges in compensating for new lines of tension in the region [29, Bertelsen R.G.]. A look at these conflict relations from the perspective of global governance reveals an alternative system of processes and institutions based on an intensive exchange of scientific and expert knowledge in different fields and the cooperation between the academic sector, business, civil society and governmental structures based on it. Since scientific knowledge is of particular importance in the complex Arctic region, the results of such multi-level and intersectoral cooperation influence decision-making, the system of international relations in the Arctic has certain features of global governance. A number of researchers point to the features of the Arctic Council (consensual nature of decision-making, multi-level interaction, active participation of non-state actors) as corresponding to the general principles of global governance [30, Wehrmann D.; 31, Chater A.]. In some cases, this concept is used in a more specific way, in particular, to justify China’s more active involvement in the Arctic management [9, Li X., Peng B., p. 204–206; 32, Jiang Y.].

Finally, the concept of the regime complex used by O. Young for the Arctic region is close to the logic of global governance [33, Young O.R.; 34, Young O.R.]. It is based on the idea of the “integration/fragmentation” continuum as the main variable that characterizes the international re-

gime or approaches to solving international problems. At one pole of this continuum is the creation of well-integrated hierarchical systems with a developed bureaucratic organization and a formal legal basis. In the Arctic, the basis of such a regime could be the creation of a comprehensive treaty. At the opposite side of the continuum is a fragmented set of largely unrelated initiatives, programs, agreements developed independently and aimed at solving individual issues (for example, the regulation of fisheries in a certain area, pollution monitoring, cultural cooperation etc.). According to O. Young, both alternatives are unsuitable for characterizing the Arctic, and the regional management system should be defined as a regime complex. Such complex is a set of several regimes (elements) related to a particular problem or region, which are connected to each other in a non-hierarchical way, and which interact with each other, exerting mutual influence [33, p. 394]. The applicability of the idea of a regime complex in Arctic is due to the fact that the region has historically developed a set of distinct elements, which ensured international cooperation in resolving specific issues and proved their usefulness. Some of these elements are quite general (UNCLOS, Polar Code, Arctic Council), others are more focused on issues in the areas of shipping, tourism, oil and gas, fisheries, rescue operations, protection of ecosystems and the rights of indigenous peoples, scientific cooperation, arms control. Although the Arctic Council has limited capacity for direct management and binding decisions, it serves as an important platform for coordination and exchange between the individual programs and mechanisms.

While the concept of a regime complex is not identical to the idea of global governance (as it refers primarily to regulatory mechanisms), they can be considered as part of a general theoretical model that represents international processes as a kind of network of institutions and mechanisms that bring different types of actors together to solve common problems without overarching binding rule systems and hierarchical structures. Nevertheless, the potential of such a theoretical approach to the description and analysis of the Arctic policy remains largely unrealized, and many of its proponents use it more as a normative rather than an analytical model or explanatory theory.

Social constructivism and other approaches

The theoretical alternatives described above are most often found in recent political studies of the Arctic, although often in an unsystematized and implicit form, reflecting the logic of the most general approaches in international relations. However, a number of works also use other theoretical models, in particular, social constructivism. In the field of public policy and international relations, constructivism differs from both realism and liberalism as it does not recognize the “objective” interests and identity of the state and claims that they are the object of “negotiations” of various interested parties, subject to conjunctural influences and social factors, not reducible to materialist (economic, military) factors and reflecting the sphere of public, shared perceptions and norms. In Arctic studies, the constructivist paradigm manifests itself to the greatest extent in the analysis of the political identity of various groups and actors (states, international

organizations, Arctic regions, indigenous peoples, etc.), as well as political narratives that various actors use to form — formation and promotion of a specific world view and justification of certain decisions.

One of the most interesting and striking examples of a “conflict of interpretations” is the difference between the political discourse of securitization and militarization, which plays a key role in the political narratives of public policy (especially in Russia and the United States), and the discourse of local communities, where ideas of problem-oriented cooperation across borders to protect their socioeconomic interests, habitat protection and self-government play a key role [35, Shadian J.M.]. Another example of a constructivist approach is the use of frame theory by R. Pinkus and S. Ali to analyze the formation of Arctic discourse and its impact on Arctic diplomacy [36, Pinkus R., Ali S.H.]. Analysis of the content of media devoted to Arctic affairs in the English-language political sphere allowed R. Pinkus and S. Ali to trace how current topics and trends are interpreted in terms of conflict, setting the appropriate public perception of various aspects of Arctic policy, whether it is the development of the region (“battle for the Arctic”), international relations (“Cold War”) or oil production (conflict between oil companies and environmentalists).

Narratives describing the Arctic as the province of Arctic states or, conversely, as a “common heritage of mankind”, emphasizing its exceptionalism or inclusion in a more general context of world politics, framing it as a privileged area of competition or cooperation and as the sphere of responsibility of great or middle powers or international organizations, are per se part of international relations [37, Auerswald D.P.]. Whereas the more traditional theoretical models have to look at such narratives purely from an instrumental point of view — as part of the explicit strategies of states carrying out a legitimating function — constructivism starts from a more complex system of factors determining their content and dynamics. Since narratives, as well as group identity, belong to the symbolic sphere, any actors and systems of social relations that influence their content and distribution can also influence political processes. For example, the spread of the “green” agenda in a democratic society forms a public demand, to which the government cannot fail to respond in determining the priorities of the Arctic policy and position in interstate negotiations. Similarly, the declarative recognition at the level of the Arctic Council of the rights of indigenous peoples in the definition of Arctic policy sets certain frameworks, or frames of perception, which state actors, for whom a Westphalian worldview and securitization discourse are preferable, are forced to take into account, among others. Therefore, the constructivist approach, in our opinion, has significant potential, primarily for expanding analytical capabilities in the study of factors influencing domestic and foreign Arctic policy, international relations and the regime of governance in the region.

In addition to constructivism and other approaches described above, other theoretical orientations, approaches and models can also be found in Arctic studies. For example, S. Cole, S. Izmailkov and E. Sjoberg described the prospects for applying game theory to identify sources of

conflict and the best ways to resolve them in such areas as the extraction of natural resources (in particular, fishing) and environmental regulation in the Arctic [38]. Game theory has been used fairly regularly in the history of international relations studies, but its use in the Arctic is surprisingly rare. According to the authors, many Arctic problems are typical situations of the “tragedy of the public domain”, in which the general availability of a resource leads to its depletion and, ultimately, is bad for all players. The authors believe that game theory can help create compensation mechanisms for the use of common resources, as well as improve the quality of their management through more efficient dissemination of information between the “players” (the key role is assigned to the Arctic Council). However, it should be noted that in this work, game theory is used more as a heuristic; the formal apparatus and the corresponding operationalization of specific Arctic problems are not given by the authors. In addition, game theory can be viewed more as a formal branch of political analysis in the logic of the realism paradigm.

Key issues in the theory of international relations in the Arctic

Summarizing a brief review of the theoretical approaches actually used in modern publications on international relations and governance in the Arctic, we can conclude that they form a very heterogeneous, but rather superficial and fragmentary basis for political analysis. For the most part, they reflect general discussions in the theory of international relations, especially concerning the role of the state and other actors as well as the nature of the relationship between them (conflict or cooperation). In most cases, such approaches are not so much theories formed by a coherent set of logically connected propositions explaining and predicting a range of phenomena and systematically subjected to empirical verification, as analytical tools the authors use to describe the object of study and determine the focus of attention and which are strongly contextualized. Mixing descriptive and normative aspects of theory is a typical problem. Many promising theories and approaches have only limited development and their potential remains largely unrealized. In most studies of Arctic policy, however, there is no clearly formulated set of theoretical assumptions and arguments that would determine the logic of political analysis.

As an alternative view on the state of theoretical understanding of political processes in the Arctic and generalization of key conclusions and provisions, it is advisable to use the list of eight main questions proposed by F. Chernoff that determine the most important differences in theoretical approaches [1, p. 41–46]. Let us consider each of these questions in relation to the research of the Arctic.

1. Level of analysis (What type of actors or other units of analysis are best suited to explain global politics?)

In many cases, the analysis of the various problems of international relations in the Arctic is limited to considering the level of the state. However, this cannot be considered a theoretical necessity or inevitability. The idea of the state as the only entity influencing the international situa-

tion and trans-border problems was formed at a time when the state was the main center of concentration and mobilization of resources important in the international arena. Nevertheless, this is obviously not the case in modern society and world politics. Large corporations have resources, opportunities and interests that have not just international, but global significance and effects. The largest NPOs also have symbolic and organizational capital that allows them to influence policy in certain areas. The growing importance of knowledge as a resource necessary for making rational decisions determines the possibilities of independent centers of expertise and research. It is obvious that any category of actors that have their own interests and resources to influence a particular sphere of world politics or a problem area should be considered as a legitimate object of analysis.

Numerous Arctic studies show the usefulness of analyzing various non-state actors: international organizations, non-governmental structures, regional authorities, companies, etc. Even at the formal institutional level, states recognize the independence, for example, of associations of indigenous peoples, which have formal status (and opportunities for influence) in the Arctic Council. Obviously, a priori limitation of the focus of attention to state actors is associated with high risks of misjudgment and ignoring potentially important factors influencing regional policy. It can be argued that the question of which categories of actors are factors in Arctic politics is essentially an empirical rather than a theoretical one. Any object capable of political action, having its own interests, goals and resources sufficient to significantly influence the Arctic processes, should be included in the analysis.

2. State unitarity (Should we accept states as integral actors and ignore the complex structure of the state system in the study of international relations?)

The recognition of non-state actors as potentially significant for international processes becomes a prerequisite for taking into account the complex internal structure of the state. In the case of Arctic policy, there are good reasons for highlighting the sub-national level of government as a legitimate object of analysis. First of all, this concerns regional authorities and local communities that are able to lobby for political interests at the state level and directly participate in international politics through paradiplomacy or involvement in international organizations. The specificity of the Arctic regions of nation states and the high level of interregional differences within them (especially in large countries) is an objective prerequisite for recognizing the relative autonomy of the subnational level. In a more general sense, it is advisable to proceed from the multi-level nature of interactions in the analysis of international Arctic policy. Although the level of states is the main one, understanding of international processes will be incomplete without taking into account, the subnational level (the northern regions of the Arctic countries, as well as their influence on national policy), and the place and role of the entire Arctic region in global context.

3. Rationality of states (Are the actions of states and leaders in the international arena subject to the principle of rationality, that is, based on the choice of the most effective way to achieve the goal?)

The notion of the rationality of political actors is an important methodological principle, in the absence of which consistent analysis and forecast of political actions are almost impossible. The highly formalized decision-making structure of institutional actors suggests that impulsive, irrational actions are difficult to implement even in the presence of such personal factors at the individual level. At the same time, the adoption of the principle of rationality does not mean that political decisions are made on the basis of a general and universal picture of the world. The mechanisms of coordinated worldviews and objective descriptions of the Arctic processes should be considered as the basic precondition for describing interstate relations (and, more broadly, relations and interactions of all actors) in a general logic of rational action (in which actors share the same understanding of their mutual goals and interests).

4. State interests and identity (Are the preferences and interests of the state or other actors considered as stable and fixed?)

The example of the security issue shows that states and other actors can change their understanding of their political identity and foreign policy priorities, although such changes vary considerably. The fact that “great” and “medium” powers demonstrate pronounced differences in the priorities of security and international cooperation, as well as a sharp increase in the interest of most developed countries in the climate agenda, also seems to be evidence of a more dynamic and complex view of the interpretation of national interests and identities.

5. Conflicts (Should public policy and interests be seen in terms of inevitable competition and preparation for conflict?)

Although the Arctic conflict narrative is widespread in the public sphere and found in policy analysis, it can hardly be considered as a justification for the theoretical logic of classical realism. The latter is applicable only in a situation where states are accepted as the only actor on the world stage, are unitary and compete for limited resources. However, for modern international relations in general, and in the Arctic in particular, such situations are not the only possible ones, and the existence of a large number of actors of different types and levels, as well as the presence of common, transboundary and global problems, make the logic of zero-sum games inapplicable as a universal explanatory mechanism. In addition, from an empirical point of view, the Arctic remains a zone of predominantly cooperative relations, demonstrating the practical readiness of states to cooperate. At the same time, the presence of situations of direct conflict of interest, which can be described in terms of zero-sum games (for example, the definition of intra-Arctic borders or sovereign rights to develop resources), is beyond doubt and should be taken into account. Theoretically, it is more correct to talk about the presence of problem areas and situations in the Arctic that (objectively) structure relations in a more conflicting or more cooperative way.

6. *Overcoming anarchy (Should anarchy in international affairs be considered by analogy with anarchy in a separate society, and are conflicts and wars its inevitable consequence?)*

The weak institutional organization of the Arctic governance, as well as the absence of a single and comprehensive international legal regime, corresponds to the idea of the predominantly anarchic nature of international relations in the region. However, as noted above, this does not prevent the formation of a predominantly peaceful, cooperative nature of interaction and resolution of contradictions in the region. The theory of global governance substantiates the possibility and mechanisms for maintaining non-violent interaction in solving international problems without creating binding institutions and mechanisms based on the use or threat of force.

7. *Linking moral principles and theory (Should normative principles be included in theory along with descriptive ones, and if so, in what way (as part of the description of society or as prescriptive statements?)*

The theoretical description of cause-and-effect relationships and mechanisms underlying the development and implementation of the Arctic policy, international relations, the interaction of various actors, the formation of international institutions, etc., should be clearly separated from the characteristics of normative models of foreign policy or the system of international relations. The normative dimension of theory should be autonomous and independent of the descriptive dimension, but this is possible when the normative criteria for evaluating political goals, means of achieving them, and expected consequences are clearly defined.

8. *The role of international institutions (Are international institutions seen as having no real value and power, as a means to increase the effectiveness of policies, or as the main source of legitimacy for certain policies, particularly, in the use of force?)*

The fundamental acceptance of non-state actors as a legitimate unit of analysis means recognition of the relative autonomy of international organizations as well. The principal justification for their inclusion in the theory of Arctic international processes is based on the key ideas of the principal-agent theory [39, Hawkins D.G. et al.]. State participation in the work of international organizations implies the delegation of certain powers to them. Even if such representation is assumed to be fully controlled and included in the centralized system of government decision-making, the agent has the potential to play an independent role, in particular by managing information flows, developing its own international social capital, etc., and such a role can be effective even in the case of pro-organizations with very limited formal powers, such as the Arctic Council.

The need to take into account the specifics of the Arctic context when answering the key general questions of the theory of international relations makes it relevant to develop framework theoretical concepts suitable for studying a wide range of Arctic political and managerial processes. A consistent and systematized set of theoretical perspectives on the Arctic, however, has yet to be developed, and the theoretical underpinnings used are often implicit and vague.

Conclusion

Elements from most of the key theoretical perspectives on international relations, both traditional (realism, liberalism) and more recent (social constructivism, global governance, etc.), can be identified in current Arctic political studies. However, their respective theoretical assumptions are usually adopted implicitly, without explicitly identifying key proposals and theoretical logic, which limits the scope for analysis and the search for alternative explanations of Arctic processes and phenomena. Frequently, theoretical assumptions that are implicitly accepted are politically conditioned or dependent on the problem area under study. For example, studies of security, understood in a narrow military-political sense, tend to rely on the paradigm of realism, accepting the postulates of the state as the only object of attention and a unitary actor, as well as the predominantly competitive nature of relations between states. Such theoretical position limits the possibility of explaining the numerous facts of successful cooperation in the Arctic, including the active participation of non-state actors.

In turn, the concept of global governance, which analyzes the solution of trans-boundary problems based on multi-level and non-hierarchical relations of cooperation and coordination, successfully reflects some specific features of governance in the Arctic (lack of a comprehensive legal regime, institutional features of the Arctic Council as the main international mechanism), seems unsuitable for analysis of policies and strategies of individual actors, especially states, which are carried out in the logic of “zero-sum games”. Overcoming the limitations of individual theoretical orientations is possible through more integrative framework models, based on the recognition of greater flexibility and variability in determining the key actors, their levels of action, the nature of the relationship between them, and, most importantly, the recognition of the diversity of problem areas, within which interaction takes place.

References

1. Chernoff F. *Theory and Metatheory in International Relations: Concepts and Contending Accounts*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 223 p.
2. De La Bruyère E., Picarsic N. *All Over the Map: The Chinese Communist Party's Subnational Interests in the United States*. Washington, FDD Press, 2021, 32 p.
3. Tarry S. 'Deepening' and 'Widening': an Analysis of Security Definitions in the 1990s. *Journal of Military and Security Studies*, 1999, vol. 2, no. 1, 13 p.
4. Padrtova B. Concepts of Security Reflected in Theories — Traditionalists vs. Non-Traditionalists. In: *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security*. Ed. by G.H. Gjørv, M. Lanteigne, H. Sam-Aggrey. London; New York, Routledge, 2020, pp. 29–42.
5. Hough P. *International Politics of the Arctic. Coming in from the Cold*. London, Routledge, 2013, 194 p. DOI:10.4324/9780203496640
6. Huebert R. A New Cold War in the Arctic? The Old One Never Ended! In: *Redefining Arctic Security: Arctic Yearbook 2019*. Akureyri, Arctic Portal, 2019, pp. 75–78.
7. Goltsov A.G. Mezhdunarodnyy poriyadok v Arktike: geopoliticheskoe izmerenie [International Order in the Arctic: Geopolitical Dimension]. *Mirovaya politika* [World Politics], 2017, no. 4, pp. 44–55. DOI: 10.25136/2409-8671.2017.4.18211

8. Konevskikh O.V. Protivostoyanie Rossii i SShA v arkticheskom regione [Russia-US Confrontation in the Arctic]. *Aktual'nye problemy sovremennykh mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniy* [Actual Problems of Modern International Relations], 2016, no. 7, pp. 61–66.
9. Li X., Peng B. The Rise of China in the Emergence of a New Arctic Order. In: *The Global Arctic Handbook*. Cham, Springer, 2019, pp. 197–213. DOI:10.1007/978-3-319-91995-9_12
10. Kopra S. China, Great Power Responsibility and Arctic Security. In: *Climate Change and Arctic Security: Searching for a Paradigm Shift*. Ed. by L. Heininen, H. Exner-Pirot. Cham, Palgrave Pivot, 2020, pp. 33–52. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-20230-9_3
11. Pincus R. Three-Way Power Dynamics in the Arctic. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 2020, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 40–63.
12. Konyshov V., Sergunin A. Arktika na perekrest'e geopoliticheskikh interesov [Arctic at Crossroad of Geopolitical Interests]. *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya* [World Economy and International Relations], 2010, no. 9, pp. 43–53.
13. Weber J., ed. *Handbook on Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic: The High North between Cooperation and Confrontation*. Cham, Springer, 2020, 378 p. DOI:10.1007/978-3-030-45005-2
14. Heininen L., Exner-Pirot H., Barnes J., eds. *Arctic Yearbook 2019: Redefining Arctic Security*. Akureyri, Arctic Portal, 2019, 504 p.
15. Gjørsv G.H., Lanteigne M., Sam-Aggrey H., eds. *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security*. London; New York, Routledge, 2020, 462 p.
16. Behringer R.M. Middle Power Leadership on the Human Security Agenda. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 2005, vol. 40, pp. 305–342. DOI: 10.1177/0010836705055068
17. Carr A. Is Australia a Middle Power? A Systemic Impact Approach. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 2014, vol. 68, no. 1, pp. 70–84. DOI:10.1080/10357718.2013.840264
18. Dolata-Kreutzkamp P. Canada's Arctic Policy: Transcending the Middle Power Model? In: *Canada's Foreign and Security Policy: Soft and Hard Strategies of a Middle Power*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 251–275.
19. Kim E., Stenport A. South Korea's Arctic Policy: Political Motivations for 21st Century Global Engagements. *The Polar Journal*, 2021, vol. 11, iss. 1, pp. 11–29. DOI:10.1080/2154896X.2021.1917088
20. Østhagen A. Norway's Arctic Policy: Still High North, Low Tension? *The Polar Journal*, 2021, vol. 11, iss. 1, pp. 75–94. DOI: 10.1080/2154896X.2021.1911043
21. Rosamond A.B. The Kingdom of Denmark and the Arctic. In: *Handbook of the Politics of the Arctic*. Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2015, pp. 501–516. DOI: 10.4337/9780857934741.00036
22. Watson I. Middle Power Alliances and the Arctic: Assessing Korea-UK Pragmatic Idealism. *Korea Observer*, 2014, vol. 45, no. 2, pp. 275–320.
23. Buzan B., Waever O. *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 564 p.
24. Kuznetsov A.S. *Theory and Practice of Paradiplomacy: Subnational Governments in International Affairs*. London; New York, Routledge, 2015, 184 p.
25. Ackren M. Diplomacy and Paradiplomacy in the North Atlantic and the Arctic — a Comparative Approach. In: *The Global Arctic Handbook*. Cham, Springer, 2019, pp. 235–249. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-91995-9_14
26. Sergunin A. Subnational Tier of Arctic Governance. In: *The Global Arctic Handbook*. Cham, Springer, 2019, pp. 269–287. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-91995-9_16
27. Rosenau J.N. Governance in the Twenty-First Century. *Global Governance*, 1995, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 13–43.
28. Zürn M.A *Theory of Global Governance: Authority, Legitimacy, and Contestation*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, 313 p.
29. Bertelsen R.G. The Arctic as a Laboratory of Global Governance: the Case of Knowledge-Based Cooperation and Science Diplomacy. In: *The Global Arctic Handbook*. Cham, Springer, 2019, pp. 251–267. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-91995-9_15

30. Wehrmann D. Transnational Cooperation in Times of Rapid Global Changes. The Arctic Council as a Success Case for? In: *Arctic Yearbook 2020*. Akureyri, Arctic Portal, 2020, pp. 425–442. DOI: 10.23661/dp12.2020
31. Chater A. Change and Continuity among the Priorities of the Arctic Council's Permanent Participants. In: *Leadership for the North: The Influence and Impact of Arctic Council Chairs*. Cham, Springer, 2019, pp. 149–166. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-03107-7_9
32. Jiang Y. China's Role in Arctic Affairs in the Context of Global Governance. *Strategic Analysis*, 2014, vol. 38, iss. 6, pp. 913–916. DOI: 10.1080/09700161.2014.952938
33. Young O.R. Building an International Regime Complex for the Arctic: Current Status and Next Steps. *The Polar Journal*, 2012, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 391–407. DOI:10.1080/2154896X.2012.735047
34. Young O.R. Is it Time for a Reset in Arctic Governance? *Sustainability*, 2019, vol. 11 (16), 4497. DOI: 10.3390/su11164497
35. Shadian J.M. Navigating Political Borders Old and New: the Territoriality of Indigenous Inuit Governance. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 2018, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 273–288. DOI: 10.1080/08865655.2017.1300781
36. Pincus R., Ali S.H. Have You Been to 'The Arctic'? Frame Theory and the Role of Media Coverage in Shaping Arctic Discourse. *Polar Geography*, 2016, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 83–97. DOI: 10.1080/1088937X.2016.1184722
37. Auerswald D.P. Arctic Narratives and Geopolitical Competition. In: *Handbook on Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic: The High North between Cooperation and Confrontation*. Cham, Springer, 2020, pp. 251–271. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-45005-2_15
38. Cole S., Izmalkov S., Sjöberg E. Games in the Arctic: Applying Game Theory Insights to Arctic Challenges. *Polar Research*, 2014, vol. 33, no. 1. 23357, 13 p. DOI: 10.3402/polar.v33.23357
39. Hawkins D.G., Lake D.A., Nielson D.L., Tierney M.J., eds. *Delegation and Agency in International Organizations*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, 407 p. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511491368

*The article was submitted 05.12.2021; approved after reviewing 07.12.2021;
accepted for publication 12.12.2021.*

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.