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The Crossroad of Geostrategic Interests in the Arctic

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***Abstract*—The article is devoted to the analysis of the state and prospects of international cooperation of Russia, China and the United States in the Arctic. The authors consider the problems and contradictions that impede these countries in the search for agreement and interaction in this region. Special attention is paid to the issues of ensuring the environmental safety of the Arctic territory, the inadmissibility of its militarization, the preservation of the natural resources of the Arctic for future generations. The authors predict that in the future tensions in world politics over the sphere of influence in the Arctic zone will increase.**

Keywords—the Arctic; Russia; China; USA; ecological balance; non-renewable natural resources; ecosystem; international cooperation; geopolitical interests; military confrontation

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, in the context of globalization, the exhaustion of non-renewable natural resources by mankind, the advancement of China to the forefront as one of the leading actors in the system of international relations, world politics interest in the Arctic has noticeably increased. Russia's desire to regain its former positions in this region lost in the 90s of the last century, China's growing interest in the Arctic issues from year to year and its projects successfully implemented in this zone cause rejection from the United States. A number of works by Russian and foreign researchers are devoted to the subject of the intersection of the geopolitical interests of Russia, China and the United States in the Arctic. The US and Russian policies in the Arctic in the last decade have been the subject of research in the works of Russian and foreign experts: Volodin D.[1], Krivolapov O.[2], Konyshev V, Sergunin A.[3] [4] [5], and others [6] [7] [11] [12] [13]. The recent research of China's policy toward the Arctic and relations with the countries of the region has acquired particular urgency. Among Western experts in this field is to highlight the works of Lucht H. [8], Conley H. [14] and others [7]. Among the Chinese researchers of the Arctic, the author has reviewed the works Jichang Lulu [9], Nong Hong [10].

II. RUSSIA VS. THE WEST IN THE ARCTIC

The Arctic, its natural resources, the upcoming process of their intensive development, the ecological situation in the Arctic zone became one of the priorities of the foreign policy of the three leading players in this region — Russia, China and the United States. In 2014, the State Program of the Russian Federation was adopted "Socio-economic development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation until 2020" [15]. In order to implement it, the Government of the Russian Federation has developed a "Strategy for the development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation and ensuring national security for the period until 2020" [16]. In 2018, the Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China published a document entitled "China's Arctic Policy", which contains the fundamental principles of Chinese politics in this region [17]. In 2013, the United States adopted the "National Strategy for the Arctic Region" [18].

In recent years, US political circles and their partners in the North Atlantic Alliance have been actively discussing the theme of Russian intervention in the Arctic, accusing Russia of militarizing the region. The weakening of the Russian positions in the Arctic zone in the 90s, the preservation and, in some cases, the liquidation of a number of military and civilian infrastructure, the massive outflow of the working-age population from the coastal areas adjacent to the Arctic, fully met the geopolitical interests of the Arctic Council member countries, so for the West as a whole. Russia's geopolitical opponents, represented by the United States and its allies, deliberately distort Russian policy in the Arctic. The Russian Federation as an Arctic state regains its national interests, which were lost by it in the 90s of the last century. Work on the reconstruction and construction of ten airfields located in the Arctic zone is entering the stage of completion. Among them, Severomorsk-1, an airfield on Alexandra Land Island (Franz Josef Land Land), which will have the technical capabilities to receive heavy IL-78 airplanes; Tiksi (Republic of Sakha (Yakutia); Rogachevo (Arkhangelsk region); Temp (Kotelny Island); also works are being carried out on the reconstruction of airfields Severomorsk-3 (Murmansk region); Vorkuta (Komi Republic); Naryan-Mar (Arkhangelsk region); Alykel (Krasnoyarsk Territory) and Anadyr (Chukotka Autonomous Region).

The West is concerned about the development of the Russian nuclear fleet, which received in 2017 the newest icebreaker Sibir, capable of overcoming ice of three meters thickness. Russia established a joint strategic command in Severomorsk on the Barents Sea and formed an Arctic

brigade. The construction of a new icebreaker fleet is underway. Currently, the Northern Fleet includes 35 submarines and 50 warships. The return of lost positions in the Arctic by Russia is met with opposition from the United States and its allies. Presidential adviser on national security, J. Bolton, speaking to alumni of the Coast Guard Academy in May 2019, called on them to lead the way to "restoring American leadership in the Arctic ..., providing the United States with an opportunity to challenge the growing Russian military influence and pushed back China's illegal claims for "near-arctic" status, as well as its use of debt diplomacy against the Arctic countries" [19]. Over the past few years, NATO countries and, above all, the United States have noticeably stepped up efforts to build up a military-political and economic presence in the Russian sector of the Arctic. Along with purely military methods, they use a whole arsenal of much more hidden, but equally effective methods, including increasing the powers of existing international Arctic organizations and committees to please themselves, conducting well-funded basic and military applied research in the region, expanding study areas, including through the inclusion in their composition of the exclusive economic zone of Russia. In 2018, England, having an observer position in the Arctic Council, deployed 800 commandos in Norway (special units of the British army — AB). In 2019, their number is expected to increase to 3,000 troops [20]. The number of American Navy SEAL increased in Norway in two times (the division for performing special-purpose operations is A. B.). A group of 700 Special Forces moved from Trondheim to the province of Troms, 500 kilometers from the Russian border. Western countries are persistently and methodically trying to completely oust Russia not only beyond the entire Arctic region, but also to limit its access to the sector of the Arctic that historically belongs to it. In 2018, the United States, after a twelve-year break, reactivated its military air base, Keflavik (Iceland). During the Cold War, more than 3,000 US military troops were stationed in Keflavik to track Soviet submarines. In 2017, the US Congress allocated $ 17.4 million to modernize the base. The American military-political leadership motivated the decision to reanimate the airfield in Keflavik because, allegedly, the capabilities of the Russian Navy have noticeably increased in recent years, and the geography of their naval expeditions has expanded. The launch of new Russian submarines is of particular concern to the United States and its NATO allies [21].

III. Ecological Problems of the Arctic and Ways of Their Solution

In addition to ensuring national security in the Arctic, Russia faced other equally serious problems, primarily in the field of ecology. President of the Russian Federation V. Putin, speaking at the plenary meeting of the V International Arctic Forum "The Arctic: Territory of Dialogue", noted that since 2012, since the beginning of the so-called "general cleaning" of the Arctic zone, more than 80 thousand tons of waste have been removed and recycled" [22]. According to the State program of the Russian Federation "Socio-economic development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation" [15] and "Strategy for the development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation and national security for the period up to 2020" [16], approved by the head of state, the removal of solid waste must be completed by 2020. In order to implement this strategy, the Ministry of Defense of Russia has developed and approved a "Roadmap for the Elimination of Environmental Damage Caused by Activities in the Territory of the Russian Ministry of Defense in the Arctic Zone". With considerable confidence, it's possible to assume that this project is unlikely to be implemented. Accurate data on the volumes and places of accumulation of solid waste (industrial and household waste) in the Arctic is absent in Russia so far. According to Russian independent environmental experts, up to four million tons of industrial and construction waste, as well as up to 12 million iron barrels are found in the coastal zone of the Arctic Ocean alone[23].

Another equally important problem for Russia is the development of the natural resources of the Arctic zone, primarily hydrocarbon deposits. According to R. Samsonov, head of the Gas and Arctic section of the Energy Center of the Skolkovo Business School, Russian equipment will not soon meet the entire list of international technological standards needed for offshore drilling in the Arctic zone [24]. According to domestic and foreign experts, one of the main problems of Russian oilfield services companies is the lag behind foreign enterprises in the technologies used. Foreign companies use high-tech equipment, invest in research and development, and attract highly qualified specialists. In the medium term, one should not expect from Russian oilfield services companies such technologies that meet the standards for work on the shelf and in permafrost conditions. Large investments and at least 5-7 years are required for the development of drilling technologies on the shelf in case of trying to do it without Western companies [24].

A technological breakthrough is needed for the development of hydrocarbon deposits in the Arctic. In our opinion, at the current pace of development of the Russian economy, this problem cannot be solved. According to reputable Russian researchers, for the renewal and commissioning of new production capacities, it is necessary to grow the Russian economy for a long time at a rate of at least 6-7 percent per year [25]. In June 2019 the World Bank (WB) reported a record growth in the Russian economy in 2018. According to the World Bank, last year the Russian economy reached a six-year high with a rate of 2.3 percent. [26].

IV. National Interests of China in the Arctic

The strategic interests of China in the Arctic are due to a number of factors. The political will of Beijing to influence the development of the Arctic zone is determined by the desire to have access to the resource base of the region, taking into account the enormous hydrocarbon reserves in the Arctic, which according to the US Geological Survey (USGS) estimates for 2008 potentially amount to 413 billion barrels of oil equivalent or 22% of the total resources of traditional hydrocarbons in the world [27]. The factor of trade and economic importance plays an important role in view of the transport potential of the Northern Sea Route,

which is designated as one of the three main sea route within the framework of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative [28]. According to the provisions of a comprehensive policy paper on the Arctic, China, taking part in solving the problems of the Arctic zone, gives priority to scientific research, the importance of environmental protection, rational use of the natural resources of the region and pledges to maintain a peaceful, secure and stable Arctic order [17]. China is actively promoting scientific expeditions and research in the Arctic. It is actively involved in interdisciplinary research, including Arctic geology, geography, ice and snow, hydrology, meteorology, sea ice, biology, ecology, geophysics, and sea chemistry. The confirmation of China's research interests and international cooperation in the Arctic is the signing in 2013 in Shanghai of the Cooperation Agreement of the Polar Research Institute of China and a number of Chinese institutions with six research institutions from the Nordic countries [29]. The Chinese side is actively involved in monitoring and assessing local climate and environmental changes, and conducts multi-level and multi-domain continuous observations of the atmosphere, sea, sea ice, glaciers, soil, bio ecological nature and environmental quality through the creation of an Arctic observation system, the construction of joint research (observation) stations, as well as the development and participation in the Arctic Observation Network [17]. China seeks to improve its capabilities in the field of expeditions and research in the Arctic, to strengthen the construction, maintenance and operation of research stations, ships and other support platforms in the Arctic, and to promote the construction of icebreakers for scientific purposes. It supports and encourages research in the Arctic, constantly increasing investment in research, creating modernized research platforms and increasing the potential and level of research in the Arctic. China is also working to strengthen personnel training and public awareness about the Arctic, supports higher education and research institutions in training specialists specializing in the natural and social sciences in the Arctic, creates centers for the popularization and education of science, and publishes cultural products in the Arctic to improve public knowledge. China actively promotes international cooperation in the field of Arctic research, contributes to the creation of an open and comprehensive international network for monitoring the Arctic environment, and supports pragmatic cooperation using such a podium as the International Committee on Arctic Science. China encourages the development of environmentally friendly polar technical equipment, actively participates in creating infrastructure for the development of the Arctic, encourages modernization of equipment in the field of deep-sea research, search for the ice zone, as well as observations of the atmosphere and biology, and also promotes innovation technologies in the Arctic drilling and oil and gas, development of renewable energy sources, navigation and monitoring in ice zones, as well as in the construction of new type icebreakers [17].

Chinese companies are involved in mining in Canada and Greenland. However, a number of Arctic states are distrustful of China. In 2011, the Alting of Iceland (Legislature – A.B. O.K.) put a veto on the sale of a 300 sq. M. km in the northeast of the country of the company "Zgongkun Group". In 2014, Norway refused to sell this company a 217 square meter plot. km on the island of Svalbard. Denmark in 2016 rejected the proposal of the Chinese side to buy an abandoned naval base in Greenland. Western experts believe that global warming and the melting of Arctic ice contribute to the consolidation of Russia's position. According to estimates by the US Geological Survey, about 30 percent of unexplored natural gas deposits and up to 13 percent of unexplored oil deposits are concentrated in the Arctic region [30]. Reducing glacial areas will facilitate their extraction. Experts predict that by 2030, the Northern Sea Route could be a promising alternative to the Suez Canal as a route for transporting goods from Asia to Europe, since the delivery time will be reduced by 40 percent.

China is building cooperation plans with all parties to build the "Polar Silk Road" through the development of Arctic sea routes. The Chinese side intends to participate in the construction of infrastructure for these routes and conduct commercial test flights in accordance with the law in order to prepare the ground for their commercial and regular operation. China also intends to participate in the exploration and exploitation of oil, gas, mineral and other non-living resources in the Arctic. China supports efforts to develop a legally binding international agreement to manage high seas fisheries in parts of the Arctic Ocean. He also supports the establishment of an organization for the management of fisheries in the Arctic or the adoption of other institutional measures based on UNCLOS. China intends to continue research of fish resources on the high seas in the Arctic, hopes to strengthen cooperation with its coastal states. He advocates transparent and reasonable exploration and use of Arctic genetic resources, as well as fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the exploitation of such resources. China is actively cooperating with the Arctic states in the development of tourism in the region and suggests developing a system to ensure the safety of tourists in the Arctic. China advocates low carbon tourism, ecotourism and responsible tourism and hopes to contribute to the sustainable development of Arctic tourism [17]. Interest in the Arctic is acquiring a national scale in China. In recent years, the number of citizens showing an interest in extreme tours has been growing in the country. Over 80 percent of the tourists on Russian cruise icebreakers are from China.

V. China's Experience on Ecology and the Possibility of Its Application in the Arctic

China has successfully met all the necessary targets planned for 2018. According to official data from China, air quality in China continues to improve. In 338 major Chinese cities, the air meets the necessary requirements in 79.3 percent of the days of the year. The main task of Chinese environmentalists in the near future will be the work of cleaning up "black and offensive" water bodies. China will also launch a project to restore the Yangtze River, improve the environment in the Bohai Sea and launch a campaign to improve water quality in rural areas [31].

The 13th International Ecological Civilization International Forum, held in April 2019 in Claremont (USA), highly appreciated the work of China in promoting the development of ecological civilization. According to Dr. John B. Cobb, Jr., a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Chinese government has achieved notable success in solving environmental problems. The forum participants came to the conclusion that China is steadily moving towards the formation of an ecological civilization [32].

One of the priorities of Chinese policy in the Arctic is environmental protection. China pays great attention to solving global environmental problems, faithfully fulfills its obligations to protect the environment. He is actively involved in improving the Arctic environment by enhancing environmental studies of Arctic activities and assessing its impact on the environment. China supports the Arctic coastal states in their efforts to reduce pollutants in Arctic waters from land-based sources in accordance with the relevant treaties and undertakes to raise awareness of environmental responsibility among its citizens and businesses. In order to effectively protect the Arctic marine environment, China is working with other states to increase control over sources of marine pollution, such as ship discharges, dumping into the sea, and air pollution. China attaches great importance to the sustainable development and protection of Arctic biodiversity. Conducts a scientific assessment of the impact on the ecological system of the Arctic caused by global climate change and human activity, enhances the protection of migratory birds and their habitats, organizes research on patterns of migration of migratory birds of the Arctic, enhances the adaptability and sustainability of the ecological environment of the Arctic, and promotes international cooperation in the protection of Arctic species fauna and flora. China is also serious about climate change in the Arctic. [17].

Measures to reduce emissions in China have a positive effect on the climatic and ecological environment of the Arctic zone. China seeks to study the exchange of substances and energy and mechanisms in the Arctic, to assess the interaction between the Arctic and global climate change, to predict the potential risks associated with future climate change for natural resources and the ecological environment of the Arctic. China advocates the protection and rational use of the region and encourages its enterprises to participate in international cooperation in the exploration and use of Arctic resources, making the most of their advantages in capital, technology and the domestic market. China believes that all activities related to the exploration and use of the Arctic must comply with such treaties as UNCLOS (the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 — A.B. O.K.) and the Spitsbergen Treaty (the Spitsbergen Treaty, signed on February 9, 1920 in Paris and defining the international the legal status of the Svalbard archipelago; currently, Russia and Norway, as well as general international law, support their presence on the archipelago, respect the laws of the Arctic states, which are designed to ensure adequate protection of the ecological environment of the Arctic and the interests of the indigenous peoples of the region [17].

China's experience in solving environmental problems can be used in the member states of the Arctic Council, including in Norway and Russia. Norway refuses to sign international environmental agreements. In 2016, at the session of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), representatives of 51 states supported the convention banning the dumping of mining waste into the sea. Norway is practically the only country that refuses to sign this document. For nearly half a century, the Norwegian side has been practicing the dumping of hazardous chemical dumps of mining operations in sea fjords. Millions of tons of waste ore with remnants of copper, nickel, and mercury with chemicals disposed of in the production process are dumped into the sea. Chemicals by sea currents fall into the territorial Arctic waters of Russia. Three fjords (Böckfjord, Reppfjord and Ferdefjord), where mining industry waste is dumped, is the Norwegian water area where wild salmon is found. Ocean cod migration also passes through the sea border of these fjords. [33].

In the published draft of the Federal Law "On the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation", the Arctic Zone is defined as part of the Arctic within the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation [34]. The structure of the Russian Arctic includes a number of administrative districts of the Arkhangelsk region. Contrary to the protest speeches of the population of the region, local authorities intend to place a landfill for recycling garbage, which will be removed from Moscow.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper considered some issues related to the intersection of the geostrategic interests of Russia, China and the United States in the Arctic, it's necessary to draw some conclusions. The military rivalry of the leading countries of the world in the Arctic zone will be disastrous for its fragile ecosystem. Due to the natural-geographical features of this region, further ill-conceived anthropogenic impact on the Arctic environment will lead to irreversible processes. The efforts of Russia, China and the United States should be directed not at the militarization of this region, but at creating here an effective international security regime designed to ensure the preservation of its harsh and at the same time vulnerable nature. With a high degree of probability, it can be assumed that the number of states claiming to participate in decision-making processes on the key problems of the Arctic, and primarily in the development of its natural resources, will increase from year to year. These include not only European, but also Asian countries that are already striving to include the Arctic issues in their geopolitical interests. China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Australia have declared their intentions to participate in solving the Arctic problems. The actions of both these states and the members of the Arctic Council in this zone should be carried out within the framework of international legal regulation. The experience of China, which has achieved significant success in solving environmental problems and should be used in the Arctic, deserves a positive assessment.

Preserving the ecological balance in the Arctic zone, using its territory exclusively for peaceful purposes will be a blessing for all of humanity.

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