9 Conclusion
The Benefits of the Arctic Illusion

Returning to the story from Chapter 1 and the icebreaker in the port of Murmansk in June 2008, Russia ended up losing the football match against Spain. After drinking vodka with Norwegian Foreign Minister Gahr Støre, things more or less went downhill for Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Still, from 2008 to 2013, there was relative optimism and, at times, exaggeration regarding Arctic resource potential, while Arctic states – and primarily Russia – simultaneously invested in Arctic military capabilities. There was also a considerable interest in the 'Arctic' that stemmed from limited understanding of regional variances and complexities.

From 2014 onwards, a decline in relations with Russia and a drop in global commodity markets shifted the narrative away from overly optimistic projections, leading to a sense of Arctic disillusionment.[1] However, from 2018, events such as China's first Arctic policy, the first Trump administration's vocal stance on Arctic security issues, and increasingly aggressive military activity from Russia began to attract a different kind of global interest. Russia was not invited to participate in the Euro 2024 tournament due to its illegal invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which must have been a low point, at least in terms of football. In the context of Arctic geopolitics, tensions had already been mounting between Russia and the other Arctic states before 2014.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 further underscored these trends and added an immediacy to concerns about potential conflict escalation in the Arctic. Both Russia and NATO states are demonstrating their military capabilities in this region, raising worries about potential escalation and outright conflict, for example, related to the

[1] The Norwegian conservative commentator Asle Toje called Norway's High North endeavour a *nachspiel*, that is an afterparty where everyone in fact had lost interest and wanted to go home (Toje 2015).

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Svalbard archipelago. This is undoubtedly Arctic *geopolitics*. But does it concern all of the Arctic?

The Arctic spans all time zones, eight countries, and three continents. Its territory is six times as large as the European Union. Just the Arctic Ocean is six times larger than the Mediterranean Sea. Due to the Gulf Stream, the European Arctic coasts and the waters of North-West Russia are completely ice-free even during the coldest months of the year, setting them apart from the ice-covered waters of North Alaska and Canada. Drifting sea ice, darkness, and low temperatures are no doubt common traits in the Arctic region, but the climatic conditions vary across it – and they are changing faster than anywhere else on the planet.

Furthermore, there are considerable differences between parts of the Arctic in terms of levels of development, culture, infrastructure, and resources. The way of life in the university city of Tromsø is different from the industrial and naval city of Murmansk, and these cities are relatively close to one another – a mere 13 hour and 1,000 km drive. If one also considers the differences between the local Inuit communities in north-west Greenland and the coastal communities on the east coast of Alaska, it is apparent that the Arctic is by no means one coherent region on a range of, if not most, parameters.

Still, the security interests of Arctic states are increasingly seen as intertwined. The Arctic is portrayed either as a region where great power rivalries abound and military conflict is likely, or – before 2022 – as a part of the world defined by positive-sum interests expressed through various cooperative mechanisms. The Arctic is subject to descriptions of being an arena for growing great power rivalry, and as a spatial domain where military activity is increasing and conflict might be unavoidable due to the clashing interests of both Arctic and non-Arctic states. The Arctic is thus implicitly or explicitly portrayed as a 'security region': a spatial domain in which the security concerns and interests of states are interlinked and overlapping. Such portrayals, which tend to focus on state-oriented or military security, seldom make use of the concepts upon which they rely, in this case the concept of security regions or regional security complexes.

The region label is frequently used, but without a proper analysis of what this label means when we pair it with state security practices. As explored throughout this book, the idea that up until 2022 the Arctic was a unique region, and that its cooperative traits and lack of internal

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dispute led to some shielding from security affairs, did and does not correspond with the security practices of Arctic states even during that time. However, describing the Arctic as an arena for geopolitics, interstate conflict, and intertwined security dynamics also does not fit both previous and current realities.

Is the Arctic truly a 'region' if we take a closer look at the eight Arctic states and the various Arctic subregions? Do the security interests and practices of states overlap and intertwine within this defined geographic space that comprises 4 per cent of the globe?

The answer to these questions necessitates a conceptualisation of the linkages between security, geography, and regions in international relations. This book has analysed this interplay in the context of the Arctic in the twenty-first century, with a focus on state security practices, the divergence between foreign and defence policies, and the role of regional cooperation. In turn, this means leaning on notions such as geopolitics (i.e., the relationship between security and geography in international affairs), regionalism (i.e., the social construction of regions), and regional security complexes (i.e., theories attempting to define the relationship between geography, security, and the regional).

This book has explored the interconnection of security interests and practices across various geographic scales, focusing on how geography and regionalism impact security. To understand the complexities of Arctic security interactions, this book has advocated for a multilevel analysis encompassing regional, global, and national dynamics, before also adjusting our scope and looking at the subregional. This matters not only to get a better picture of the security threats and conflict potential in the Arctic. It also matters in order to improve the way we conceive of regional security relations in other regions around the world.

Leaning on the regional security complex theory (RSCT) by Buzan and Wæver from 2003, this diverges from the RSCT by narrowing the (geographic) focus, while also centring the state and notions of state security. Moreover, this book argues that subregional security complexes (SRSCs) do not need to be the primary spatial domain defining security practices of participating states as long an impact can be discerned. Security regions, or more accurately, subregions, are in turn overlapping. As such, this is less of a grand theory of regions and security interactions in the world, and more of a way to operationalise

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how to unpack how a state's security practices are influenced by geography, that is, its near abroad and immediate spatial environment.

A key feature of the argument put forth in this book is about questioning the role of geographic proximity vis-à-vis other relevant factors when gauging security concerns and interests. This work reinforces two ongoing, or returning if you will, trends in international studies (whether traditional international relations, geopolitics, or security studies), namely placing importance on geographic traits defining state actions, and focusing on state or military security. What is novel is linking the various strands of regional or territorial studies with debates on geopolitics and international relations, while also giving weight to processes of regionalisation and region-building.

The Arctic is the ideal case study: because it has increasingly been referred to as a region in terms of security and geopolitics, or even as a regional security complex; and because there are in fact multiple subregions that are markedly different from, but still interlink with, wider security dynamics related to the Arctic at global, circumpolar, and national levels. Furthermore, the Arctic highlights the clustering of security dynamics around enclosed maritime spaces. The book concludes that the idea of an 'Arctic region' in security terms remains relevant not as a factual description, but as an aspirational framework for cooperation and confidence-building.

In essence this work is about taking geography (i.e., a version of geopolitics) seriously, but nuancing and qualifying it, while also leaning on the work done by Buzan and Wæver and all those that have followed in their footsteps with the RSCT. And perhaps most importantly, it is about better understanding the Arctic region(s) and security developments and conflict potential in that geographic space.

As showcased here, 'Arctic geopolitics' actually takes place in Arctic subregional security complexes (SRSCs), specifically the Barents SRSC and the Beringia SRSC – named after the Barents Sea and the Beringia Sea/land space. In those domains, conflict potential is undoubtedly real, although we must be specific about where and over what. Here we must unpack the way these subregions figure in systemic competition, relevant national strategic security policies, as well as broader regional dynamics. Separating between these different levels of analysis, and between different geographic domains, helps improve the accuracy of our analysis of Arctic geopolitics.

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States participate in multiple geographical security domains, at a smaller scale than 'North America', 'Pacific', 'Europe', or 'Arctic'. Therefore, these security dynamics must be analysed and understood in order to improve our understanding of state behaviour in international relations, as well as the limitations posed by geography, and how states practice their security dynamics in such domains. In essence, what the examination here of the two Arctic SRSCs showcases is the importance of studying the subregional: specific issues and developments that take place a level below the regional (Arctic) and the global, but that constitute more than the 'national'.

Geopolitics in Practice

The focus on security issues and practices amongst states in a regional, bounded setting has increased in the last few decades. The view of global development as a monodirectional path towards globalisation and a 'borderless' society has been replaced with increased attention on territory, national interests, and the immediate region. Decoupling and protectionism are today more in vogue than openness and the removal of barriers. In these trends, attention has shifted towards security developments in regional settings where 'geopolitics' is apparent, as states engage in rivalry and even conflict, such as, for example, in the South China Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and Eastern Europe. The Arctic is also one such geographic space that has increasingly been attracting attention due to its geopolitics.

Do we have our scope properly adjusted and are we looking at the right levels of analysis? Or are we even trying to distinguish between the different security dynamics that take place at different levels and over different sets of issues? Arguably, when we examine these geographic regions, we tend to lean on already preconceived notions of where the boundaries of that region are, and in our analyses reproduce these boundaries that are either (1) a result of region-building efforts, or (2) due to the relevance of these boundaries in other issue areas such as trade, migration, or climate issues, or (3) due to both.

This book fundamentally agrees with the premise that as 'world security actually does fall in "chunks" for mostly geographical and partly cultural and historical reasons, the level of regional security complexes can stabilize as an organizing center from which one ties domestic, interregional and global security together around the regional focus'

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(Jacobsen, Wæver, and Pram Gad 2024c: 14). However, the argument presented here is that if we want to understand what happens and what states do in these specific regions, or *geopolitics in practice*, we must scale down our level of analysis.

When examining the geopolitics, regions, and political processes of regionalisation, particularly in the context of security, it is crucial to understand the role and limitations imposed by geography. By leaning on both political geographers' conceptualisation of geopolitics, and international relations approaches to regions and security complexes, we can conceive a more fine-grained framework for analyses of regional affairs and state security. A framework that argues for a restricted or scaled-down approach, where security practices and interactions in, for example, the Eastern Mediterranean do not impact the same practices and interactions in the Baltic region, despite both being part of 'Europe'.

This immediate area for states is arguably smaller than what scholars and analysts usually designate as a 'region', which is a concept that can be vague and overly broad. Most states are neither great powers nor superpowers; they typically do not engage in security interactions across multiple global regions. Instead, their security concerns are often confined to their immediate surroundings. Neither Norway nor Vietnam engage in the Beringia security subregional complex, but Japan, for example, can do by extension of its geography. By considering prevailing geopolitical perceptions and theories such as the 'revenge of geography' and the regional security complex theory, it is clear that we need to focus more on 'subregions'. These are smaller, more defined areas involving fewer states that share borders and/or maritime spaces, where the dynamics of security are intensely localised, and the basic questions of 'survival' still impact state actions.

Moreover, developments in these subregions must be seen in conjunction, but not equated to, the various, and at times contradictory, security dynamics that all occur under the broader region label (in this instance the Arctic), but that in reality relate to different levels of security analysis. Unpacking these dynamics is done by the distinction presented here: systemic or global rivalry and competition (in the Arctic, why the United States started focusing on China in 2018–2019), regional interaction best understood as 'regionalism' (why Arctic states have up until 2022 continued to meet to sign new agreements hailing the cooperative spirit of the North), and national security practices

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(why, for example, some Arctic states, and not others, have invested heavily in their northern defence posture).

That is not to say that the concepts of regions or regional security complexes are without relevance; this book merely urges caution in slapping on the 'region label' when examining security dynamics between states, without clear definitions or parameters. Moreover, attention must still be paid to geography when focusing on the security of states. Which states border each other, the distances between states, geographical features such as mountain ranges, and enclosed maritime domains surrounded by states are all components of the immediate geographic surroundings that influence and – to an extent – determine security practices and thus also dynamics amongst the same states.

Others have noted the importance of the subregional level in order to understand military concerns or state security practices (in the Arctic specifically, see Åtland 2007; Friis 2021; Greaves 2019). However, as argued throughout this book, we must also connect these subregions to the wider regional and global security dynamics *and* examine the national approaches to the same region and subregion in order to understand why, for example, China engages in the Arctic space and which part of it. In turn, what these nuances imply is that simplistic, one-liner descriptions of security or geopolitics in a regional context such as the Arctic must be taken with a pinch of salt. This should inspire further studies of security politics in regional settings or – more accurately – security subregions around the world that are highly complex security structures.

This matters because, fundamentally, we need to provide accurate analyses of security development and state practices around the world. In the case of the Arctic, perhaps it is indeed a security region, if one is looking through the lens of human or environmental security and examining pan-Arctic (regional) developments since the start of the twenty-first century. Such a characterisation might also link to a critical idea of security regions, or regionalism, where the construction of regional order and institutions is seen as an end goal in itself to solve certain problems. Maybe environmental concerns and corresponding region-building efforts to deal with those are less spatially bound and 'travel' more easily across the Arctic spatial domain.

However, as this book has emphasised, seeing everything as one big bundle of security issues without hierarchy or priority does not

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help unpack state practices concerning security. Wide-ranging theories or claims such as those offered by either popular geopoliticians concerning the inevitability of geography, or regionalist scholars arguing that regions are inherently just political constructs, fail to capture the essence of state security practices within a geographically confined domain. States do prioritise, and security is still inherently tied up into notions of survival, threat perceptions, and fear of the 'other'.

In this book, the focus has been on the more traditional or conventional forms of security and geopolitics in order to unpack them in a specific regional context and answer the fundamental question in international affairs of whether or not there are certain inherent traits in that regional context that makes it prone to conflict. In other words, by adjusting our scope when examining questions of conflict and escalation between states, it is possible to get to a more fine-grained understanding of these issues at hand. That means we can avoid getting trapped in simple causal statements, such as equating the presence of resources with interstate conflict or arguing that the strategic importance of certain islands is bound to cause tension between states.

That does not mean that we can, and we should not, stop examining the relevance of other forms of security, or the effects of seeing them as bundled, or categorised, for both state practices and region-building. Had this book, for example, prioritised local or human security concerns in the Arctic, or solely the perspectives of the Indigenous Peoples, a very different outlook would have emerged (Greaves 2016). The same goes if the priority had been on global climate change and the role of the Arctic region therein (Palosaari and Tynkkynen 2015; Miner et al. 2023).

This book has also cautioned against attempting to define *one* region, its boundaries, or the *primary* geographic domain that a given state participates in or belongs to. Arguably, such boundaries and regional definitions are inherently subjective to the analyst and dependent on that individual's regional knowledge and which factors are given priority in defining the framework that in turn produces the regional. Instead, this book has been about studying and pinpointing the role of geographic regions, or specific spatial domains, in influencing state security practices. The goal of an analyst should thus be to do two things at once: keep an eye on both various levels of security dynamics of relevance to the subregion in question, while also

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studying geography and state practices in that specific subregion. This in turn can help avoid geopolitical simplifications and provide more accuracy to our understanding of international relations.

The Arctic Illusion

The conclusions presented here lead to the question of whether or not we should discount the whole notion, and use of, 'Arctic security' or 'Arctic geopolitics' given that they probably hold as much meaning as saying 'European geopolitics' or 'Asian security'. Perhaps the title of this book is inherently a misguided lure in order to play off all the attention given to 'Arctic geopolitics'. However, contrary to what you might think after reading some of these pages, there is arguably still value in keeping the 'Arctic' label.

First, although in terms of security dynamics and state practices the Arctic is too broad in scope, the political idea of the Arctic, as well as general conceptions of security, geopolitics, and actors' roles and interests in the Arctic, influences states' practices. Over the last few years, several non-Arctic states such as Turkey and the United Arab Emirates have shown an interest in Arctic political affairs with a geopolitical flair. For example, Turkey signed the Svalbard Treaty, with Turkish experts highlighting that it might lead to a more active Turkish position in the Arctic in general (Sarıoğlu 2023; Ayaydin 2023). Or, in terms of actual military footprints: as the UK has been eager to showcase its Arctic military credentials post Brexit, British troops sail and train more, and British politicians talk more about their North Atlantic and Barents Sea security capacities and roles (Depledge, Kennedy-Pipe, and Roger 2019; Depledge and Østhagen 2021).

Despite being inaccurate in terms of denoting a specific spatial domain, states (their politicians and bureaucrats) *are* spurred into certain actions due to the increased interest in the Arctic, whether linked to climate change, economics, military posturing or status-seeking. This might in turn have concrete implications for security dynamics in the various subregions. We then must also study and conceptualise the effects of these interests in and ideas of Arctic geopolitics, and how they in turn might influence security practices in the various parts of the Arctic. We cannot ignore the effects of 'Arctic' geopolitics and related narratives and notions that impact state practices, despite the inaccuracy of that terminology in and of itself.

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However, studies of the Arctic would benefit from bridging views from geographically oriented security experts and regionally oriented Arctic governance experts. Building on reflections after fifteen years in the 'Arctic bubble',[2] it is interesting to note the emergence of two distinct groups of analysts examining Arctic-related political issues.

The first group comprises members of the Arctic 'epistemic community', as both Beate Steinveg (2023) and Rasmus Bertelsen (2019) have described, where barriers between policymakers, bureaucrats, and scholars are minimal. At Arctic conferences and seminars, discussions often centre on enhancing the role of the Arctic Council, advancing Arctic Ocean governance, and promoting sustainable development for northern communities. Security analyses are present in these forums, but military security is often sidelined, seen as too narrow in scope. Although there are exceptions, one could label these analysts 'doves'. This group, simplified, is the one actively working to shelter the Arctic Council structure (or at least parts of it) so that cooperation can, at some level, continue.

The other group, however, seldom attends Arctic seminars and conferences. In fact, they seldom make use of the term the Arctic to describe their work, since it – as shown in this book – denotes a vast geographical area and often draws attention to issues such as climate change or governance, which are less relevant to their focus on military security and defence in northern countries. This group could be labelled 'hawks', who assert that cooperation with Russia on softer issues through, for example, the Arctic Council holds little relevance for Russian defence doctrines in the North. This group, simplified, tends to argue that maintaining any form of multilateral or bilateral cooperation with Russia is not only redundant, but could also be a liability.

This author has experienced being labelled a dove – or, more bluntly, naïve – when emphasising the importance of governance structures such as the Law of the Sea, or the self-interest of Russian fishers in maintaining relative stability around Svalbard and preventing further escalation over ongoing disputes. Conversely, at Arctic conferences and seminars, particularly before 2014 but also afterwards, this author has been called a hawk or, more bluntly, a warmonger for arguing that

[2] As explored by Beate Steinveg (2023) in *Arctic Governance through Conferencing*.

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military security concerns *do* exist in the Arctic, or that escalation over fisheries issues could develop into a serious state-to-state security concern. Which metaphor holds true clearly depends on the context.

This observation points to a more fundamental issue in how we approach regional studies related to security, politics, and state practices. Security and defence analysts have sometimes overlooked the broader political and situational contexts in which states operate, beyond the immediate demands of their defence doctrines and military capabilities. Conversely, Arctic politics and governance scholars have occasionally disregarded military developments at a subregional level and the continued primacy of security and survival for states in the twenty-first century. One potential solution for fostering cross-learning is to bring more Arctic analysts and military analysts into the same room – even if 'the Arctic' is at times an artificial political construct. It could help prevent simplistic statements and misguided policy actions concerning a region that comprises 4 per cent of the globe and is made up of multiple domains and spaces.

Second, there might also be other benefits from combining levels of analysis, types of security, and geographical domains, namely by upholding the Arctic 'illusion'. In the 1960s, Stanley Hoffman (1966: 882, 901) coined the distinction between 'high' and 'low' politics as a way of separating the different policy spheres of European integration. Economic policy constitutes 'low politics', whereas the survival of the state – security policy – constitutes 'high politics'.[3] In the field of low politics, there is in theory room for dialogue between states even as tensions mount, for example, through so-called track two diplomacy.[4]

[3] Scholars have made use of Hoffmann's distinction to highlight how certain areas of low politics – such as environmental policy or trade – have allowed states to cooperate in spite of rivalry in the domain of high politics (Mirovitskaya, Clark, and Purver 1993: 44–45; Young 2010: 173; Østreng 1999: 76). Homans (2011), for example, argues that track two diplomacy has become a core element of international diplomacy. In particular, relations between Asian countries and those in Southeast Asia have been the focal point of much of the related literature. Constructivist scholars have argued that we can draw on cognitive work and ideas of bounded rationality to understand how leaders and policymakers are influenced by the act of arguing and discursive persuasion (Risse 2000; A. I. Johnston 2001).

[4] Some contributed the term to the article 'Foreign Policy According to Freud' by William D. Davidson and Joseph V. Montville (1982), which examined psychological dimensions to conflict resolution.

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Military security concerns were dominant in the two highlighted security subregions – the Beringia and Barents domains – both during the Cold War and from 2014 onwards. During the period in between, from the 1990s to the first decade of the 2000s, security dynamics never disappeared, but emphasis was placed on region-building efforts and political (and scientific and social) cooperation, both in a pan-Arctic context and in a subregional context. This can be understood as efforts from certain Arctic states that narrated the actor constellation as something broader, or porous, in order to avoid being trapped by the inherent subregional security dynamics.

Norway, for example, benefited from the circumpolar or pan-Arctic constellation because it could then collaborate with Russia in a setting other than the bilateral one, which has historically been defined by asymmetry and security concerns. Region-building and regional cooperation that expands beyond the SRSCs can enable states to transcend, or at least partly disregard, 'patterns of amity and enmity'. By upscaling to a so-called Arctic level, there was more space for multilateral low politics efforts that otherwise might get 'trapped' by subregional security dynamics or hampered by asymmetry between the engaged actors. Some speculate this might be why Russia is not interested in leaving the Arctic Council structures despite exiting the Barents Cooperation – it provides for a multilateral arena for dialogue with the USA beyond, for example, the rigidity of the UN Security Council or the sensitivities of bilateral relations (Andreeva and Rottem 2024).

With Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the subsequent responses from the other Arctic states, including Finland and Sweden joining NATO, Arctic-wide cooperation on any level has become almost impossible and security concerns now dominate much of the Arctic focus, both in Arctic states and amongst the global community. Moreover, Russia has deliberately turned away from emphasising Arctic cooperation and engagement with the other Arctic states and is rather seeking third-party involvement from particularly the BRICS grouping of states (Edvardsen 2023a), turning to, for example, China (in military and political matters) and India (in scientific and economic matters).

In terms of hard security dialogue, formalised arenas developed to discuss security matters – such as the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable and the Northern Chiefs of Defense Forum – have been cancelled,

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postponed, or held without Russian participation. At the same time, organising Arctic security roundtables without Russia defeats one of the main purposes why such venues were created. As stated by the US European Command director of strategy and policy before the war in Ukraine: 'not to single one nation out, but having Russia at the table matters' (Vandiver 2012).

The Arctic states consequently find themselves in a catch-22. Reinstating the military dialogue encounters the problem of upholding a strong response to Russian actions in Ukraine. The Arctic states cannot cherry-pick what military-to-military contact to preserve for fear of distorting the effect of a coherent response.

However, the effects of the Russian war in Ukraine have not led to a complete breakdown of the various cooperative mechanisms and hotlines that exist in the Arctic. Relations between states, including in the Arctic, are not binary. Interestingly enough, it is often military practitioners (not analysts) who seem to be the most pragmatic concerning contact with Russia, exemplified by how both the Norwegian and Finnish Armed Forces emphasise the need to maintain a hotline with Russia in case of emergencies (Edvardsen and Molid Martinussen 2024a; Edvardsen 2024).[5]

At the same time, military-to-military structures are also the ones that are cut first in response to deterioration in relations. This, however, does not concern notions of region-building or contact between states in order to achieve wider political or economic goals. This concerns avoiding escalation of incidents and developing joint codes of conduct and operational procedures, and – as put forth in this

[5] Spokesperson for the Norwegian Joint Headquarters, Corporal Jonny Karlsen, highlights that:

'Weekly system checks occur on Skype between the NJHQ and the Northern Fleet. In addition, there has been sporadic correspondence via letters or e-mail between the headquarters at Reitan, Northern Norway, and in Severomorsk, North-West Russia. As known, military cooperation with Russia has been stopped. The communications channel between the military headquarters is kept open to ensure the security of our airmen and sailors as they operate in the same area' (Edvardsen and Molid Martinussen 2024a).

Major General Sami Nurmi, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategy in the Finnish Defence Forces, outlines similar pragmatic measures: 'Our hotline to the Russian Armed Forces is tested weekly, and the Russian side answers. The conversation is very short. The Finnish Border Guard also maintains regular contacts on appropriate levels with their counterparts in Russia' (Edvardsen 2024).

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book – recognising the fundamental interlinkages between geography and state security in a given spatial domain.

Even so, these things cannot be conceived as completely independent of each other. Arctic security debates do not find themselves in a vacuum. They never have, despite ideas of an 'Arctic exceptionalism'. Although what exceptionalism entails is sometimes unspecified, the notion is still relevant to the extent that the Arctic can be a political arena to engage in low-level political dialogue and/or scientific research with Russia. There are still no major internal disputes or drivers for *regional* tension in the Arctic, or in the various subregions of the Arctic (the European Arctic and the North Pacific Arctic) where security interactions compound.

Arctic region-building, political relations, and track two dialogue was never what was going to stop Russia from engaging in rivalry, even conflict, with other states beyond that specific geographic domain. But it might be a place where re-engaging Russia in constructive dialogue, even on practical or low-level security matters, might be possible in the future. If relations between Russia and the other states improve at some future point, region-building efforts and a re-emphasis on low-level politics or positive-sum cooperation might again emerge. Or, at a bare minimum, common procedures for military exercise or incident management could be developed. That in turn can improve security relations in the more tense subregions of the Arctic.

The framework put forth in this book is about recognising the importance of geography and subregional security dynamics that are inherent to subregions (e.g., Norway cannot avoid contact with Russia and vice versa). However, this framework is also about recognising *where* security practices materialise, and *how* these practices are indeed linked to other levels including region-building efforts such as those highlighted here. This makes it possible to pinpoint how some actors have attempted to portray the Arctic as a coherent region, including for security interests. This might in turn offer more clarity surrounding a pathway to creating pan-Arctic arrangements for security discussions that might lean on 'softer' security elements or 'low politics' in order to build trust and confidence amongst Arctic actors.

It is perhaps a paradox that this book, which seemingly relies on traditional conceptions of geography, security, and geopolitics, concludes by emphasising the importance of region-building efforts as a mechanism for managing increasingly tense security practices in

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the Arctic context. Nonetheless, this is the fundamental point made here when examining state security relations in geographical domains worldwide: the necessity to map and conceptualise state security practices along a broad spectrum that includes geography, regionalism, and various levels of analysis to more effectively address or manage these dynamics. This in turn constitutes the 'geopolitics' of any given spatial domain.

In essence, this book has showcased how geography matters – probably more than we acknowledge in general analyses of international relations, but less than what some are quick to claim.[6] For state practitioners and analysts alike, understanding what the geopolitics of a region entails is crucial, rather than becoming trapped by conceptions and ideas of it.[7] States cannot choose their neighbours. However, they can choose how to deal with their neighbours and avoid getting stuck in traditional rivalries and conflict patterns under the guise of the so-called fate of geopolitics. This is likely what the Russian foreign minister toasted to aboard the icebreaker in Murmansk in 2008 after decades of peace-building efforts in the Arctic, but seems to have since forgotten.

[6] Paraphrasing Dodds (2019: 53).

[7] A fitting example of getting trapped in geographic determinism might be *Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia* by Aleksandr Dugin (1997).

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