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The Transformation of the Arctic Governance Regime Complex: From Institutional Cooperation to Security-Driven

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Abstract: The significance of polar governance in global affairs is substantial, particularly in the Arctic, where governance is exceptionally complex due to the numerous sovereign states involved, intersecting interests, and the conflicts that arise from them. At the heart of Arctic governance is the Arctic Council, an international regime complex whose characteristics have undergone a significant transformation from a stance of "intra-regional self-reliance and extra-regional exclusion" to "intra-regional differentiation and extra-regional collaboration." This paradigm shift is rooted in great power strategic competition and represents a substantial elevation in the priority of traditional security issues in the Arctic. It reflects a major transition in the orientation and preferences of national interest definitions – namely, a shift from systemic cooperative benefits to national security imperatives. These changes further mirror the prevailing trend of global governance returning to geopolitics and self-determination within the context of broader national security considerations. On the other hand, the governance vacuum that has emerged also presents new opportunities for non-Arctic states to participate in Arctic governance. The Arctic governance regime complex is set to be reshaped under the influences of changing world order and the reconfiguration of major powers' strengths, solidifying its characteristics of both exclusion and collaboration.

Keywords: Arctic Council; Arctic Governance; Regime Complex; Exclusivity

1. Introduction

The polar regions have long been a focal point of global governance, with polar climate management and resource development becoming significant elements in international relations. In the development of global governance and international institutions, the Arctic and Antarctic have each spawned distinct international regimes, leading to unique governance approaches. The Antarctic, regarded as a common heritage of humankind, has a governance system grounded in international law, forming an array of international legal documents centered around the Antarctic Treaty. Conversely, the

Arctic, a region of sovereign territories of multiple nations (see Figure 1.1), features a governance framework characterized by diversity, sovereign participation, and decentralized authority. This has given rise to an international institutional system with the Arctic Council at its core, an international legal system centred on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and a multi-actor structure which includes the United Nations, the European Union, among others, supplementing on various issues. It exhibits a multi-layered and complex system, akin to a 'stacked architecture' and has relatively weaker legal force compared to the Antarctic governance system. The Arctic governance system also encompasses numerous yet-to-be-realized concepts, such as the speculative adoption of a shared administration akin to the Svalbard Treaty's governance of the Svalbard archipelago, characterized by "sovereign maneuvering and joint development" (a global co-management system for the Arctic). Hence, it is necessary to first delineate the institutional evolution of Arctic governance.

Figure 1.1: Map of the Arctic Administrative areas

Source：Arctic Center, University of Lapland

In 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev delivered a speech in Murmansk, titled "Strengthening Cooperation in the Arctic Region," emphasizing the need for collaboration on environmental protection in the Arctic. A year after his address, Finland, along with other seven nations, jointly advocated for collective action in the region. In 1989, the Finnish government endorsed the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS), consultations among the eight Arctic states commenced, and by 1991, they collectively recognized it as a non-binding strategy. The AEPS served as the precursor to the Arctic Council.

To further address the challenges posed by changes in the Arctic region, in June 1996, the eight Arctic states issued the Ottawa Declaration, "Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council," officially announcing the creation of the Arctic Council. In 2011, at the Nuuk meeting, the Council formally established its secretariat, marking its status as an official international organization, and adopted its first legally binding document—the Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and

Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic. This signalled an important shift for the Arctic Council from soft law to hard law.

Since its establishment, the Arctic governance system, with the Arctic Council at its core, has exhibited strong characteristics of "intra-regional self-governance and extra-regional exclusion," with the eight Arctic states having nearly monopolistic power within this system. Based on extra-regional exclusion, governance within the Arctic has effectively become an "intra-regional affair" of these Arctic states. However, as global warming accelerates and Arctic sea ice melts, it paves the way for more extensive development in the Arctic. (see Figure 1.2) Consequently, Arctic governance is gradually transitioning from an "intra-regional affair" of the Arctic eight to a global concern. An increasing number of actors are shaping themselves as "Arctic stakeholders" in order to participate in Arctic governance, posing new challenges to the inclusivity and effectiveness of the governance system. The "intra-regional self-governance" feature of the international institutional system, centered around the Arctic Council, is facing progressively severe challenges from external forces.

Figure 1.2: Map of the Arctic Administrative areas

Source：Arctic Center, University of Lapland

Simultaneously, as the Russia-Ukraine conflict evolves, the shift in internal interests and the growing emphasis on pan-security measures within the Arctic policies of European and American states are becoming increasingly apparent. Consequently, the influence of geopolitics on Arctic governance is intensifying, and the international institutional system is slowly reverting to country-specific norms, with the urgency of traditionally neglected security topics rising. Under the influence of multiple factors, the member states of the Arctic Council, collectively known as the Arctic eight, are bifurcating into two distinct groups: Arctic seven plus Russia (and Arctic stakeholders). In March 2022, the Arctic seven issued a joint statement declaring the suspension of participation in any meetings of the Arctic Council during Russia's chairmanship in response to Russia's military actions against Ukraine. This signifies a growing internal division within the Arctic governance international institutional system. Along with the conflict and division among the Arctic states, the characteristics of the governance system are

shifting from "intra-regional self-governance, extra-regional exclusion" to "intra-regional differentiation, extra-regional cooperation." The exclusivity of the Arctic governance system is turning inward, shifting from an external "hard exclusion" based on organizational texts to an internal "soft exclusion" based on actual state behaviors.

Therefore, this research poses fundamental questions: Why has the character of the Arctic governance regime complex shifted from "intra-regional self-governance, extra-regional exclusion" to "intra-regional differentiation, extra-regional cooperation"? Furthermore, why has the Arctic Council system, which previously benefitted from cooperative institutional engagement, been increasingly marginalized following the Russia-Ukraine conflict? And why are individual states increasingly replacing the regime complex with security-driven, exclusionary practices to engage in Arctic governance?

2. Literature Review: National Interest Definition and International Institutions

The theoretical backdrop of this paper is closely associated with international institutions and revolves around how these institutions comprehend the definition of national interests—an essential perspective for understanding the characteristics of the Arctic governance complex. Consequently, this literature review section will focus on discussing the research approaches to national interest definition and international institutions. The international relations scholarship initially adopted a cooperative orientation towards international institutions. Neoliberal institutionalists, building on the assumption of an anarchic state system posited by neorealism, argued for the possibility of international cooperation from the perspective of international institutions. Based on assumptions of anarchy and interdependence, neoliberalism posits that rational and self-interested states prioritize national interests and aim to maximize benefits for the minimum cost. Therefore, states prefer to use cooperation and coordination to resolve conflicts rather than turning to the use of force and power competition. Nations can also create international institutions to reduce uncertainty and information asymmetry in interstate interactions, thereby facilitating international cooperation. As the international environment evolves, scholarly research on international institutions has broadened its focus beyond the positive role of international cooperation. Existing research reveals two primary approaches: firstly, how states use international cooperation and institutions to engage in international competition. Some scholars have introduced concepts such as interdependence and the weaponization of international institutions, with corresponding theoretical constructs increasingly appearing. Secondly, the focus lies on how to understand the challenges of multiple institutional interactions based on the development and evolution of international institutions, where the concept of regime complexity has emerged as a topic of interest.

2.1 National Interest Definition and Prioritization

When considering different orientations towards the utilization of international institutions, national interests are a crucial premise. Realism posits that various aspects such as national security, sovereign independence, and economic development constitute national interests. In the realist

hierarchy, security interests often hold a prominent position. However, constructivists and neoliberal institutionalists argue that security interests do not necessarily take precedence over the benefits arising from economic development, environmental protection, and other issues. There is a basic consensus that the mainstream international relations community recognizes elements like security, power, and the economy as playing vital roles in framing national interests. Once the main components of national interests have been identified, the selection and prioritization of these interests become primary concerns. Neoliberalists and constructivists often believe that robust international institutions can allow security interests to give way to other benefits. Constructivists also hold that international interests arise from the collective recognition of the international community, and changes in this collective recognition can alter the prioritization of national interests. Realists, however, insist on the foundational role of power structures in determining the hierarchy of national interests, considering relative power as a crucial criterion for defining national interests. Moreover, depending on the stability of the international power structure, relative and absolute gains also become significant in weighing national interests.

Existing research offers a fundamental trajectory for this paper, suggesting that the transformation of the Arctic governance complex's characteristics may be closely related to shifts in the orientation of national interest definitions. The paper thus needs to discuss what changes have occurred in the orientation of national interest definitions concerning the Arctic and their causes. According to the historical evolution presented earlier, while the Arctic governance includes a complex of institutions, the current transformation appears to be associated with pan-security thinking driven by national security logic, the weaponization of institutions, and exclusivity.

2.2 Regime Complex

Kal Raustiala was the first to introduce the concept of a regime complex, defined as overlapping and parallel organizations that regulate a specific issue area, where no hierarchical relationship exists between the organizations, and different actors participate in their establishment and maintenance. Building upon this, the complexity of international institutions arises from norm density and the coexistence of regime complexes within a global governance-oriented international political system. The core aspect of institutional complexity is how elements and mechanisms establish overlapping or (potentially) competing claims of authority within international governance. A lack of hierarchy in institutions and rules also drives key dynamics and strategic interactions within regime complexes. As a concept that straddles interdependence theory and realism, regime complexes can adapt to shifts in power structures over time, as well as to changes in state preferences, thereby integrating into newly emerging institutions.

However, scholarly research on regime complexes and institutional complexity has often focused on issues of institutional choice and competition within the complexes, as well as on the advantages that strong states derive from institutional complexity. There tends to be a tendency to regard regime

complexes as self-contained entities that endure competition without collapse, thereby overlooking the fact that regime complexes themselves can disintegrate or become dysfunctional and the significant roles that states play within them. Therefore, this paper will utilize the concepts of regime complexes and institutional complexity to describe the current state of Arctic governance centered around the Arctic Council. It also considers the development of institutional complexity as a governance strategy choice, rather than an inevitable backdrop to the institutions.

2.3 International Institutions Weaponization and Exclusivity

There are two complex layers to security-oriented national interest strategies: firstly, international institutions have clear international responsibilities and promote cooperation by reducing transaction costs and resolving information asymmetry between states. Secondly, institutions can also be used as weapons by states to target their competitors. The scholarship primarily explores the weaponization of international institutions through theoretical and case studies. Scholars such as Stephen D. Krasner first addressed the competitive aspects within international institutions, highlighting that the distribution of benefits under these institutions could lead to cooperation dilemmas. Krasner also noted that international institutions could themselves be sources of state power. Building upon this, scholars like Zhang Falin focused on confrontational strategies based on international institutions. Zhang Falin went on to study exclusive institutional strategies in international politics, explaining how states exercise key powers, including agenda-setting and rule-making, through selective and exclusionary methods. In addition, Tian Ye conducted a systematic study of the weaponization mechanisms of international institutions, proposing mechanisms that dominant states could choose to weaponize institutions, including deprivation, decoupling, and balancing—illuminating the offensive uses of international institutions. Scholars like Alastair Iain Johnston have examined inherently exclusive international institutions, identifying the characteristics of such institutions and the legitimation strategies that countries use to respond to exclusivity.

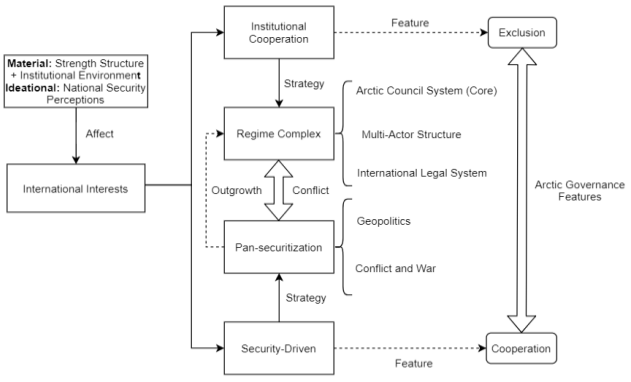
Upon systematic examination of the existing research on the weaponization of international institutions and institutional complexity, this paper identifies the following issues: Both lines of study tend to focus primarily on the inequality between advantaged and disadvantaged states within the institutions, while overlooking the substitutability of the international institutions themselves as a choice. In analyzing the progression of institutions due to intra-institutional and inter-institutional competition, the reality of institutions as a governance option is often neglected. Thus, in line with the research subject of this paper, we will return to the analytic core of realism, viewing pan-securitization and the regime complex as strategic choices made by states under different types of interest-driven motivations. Pan-securitization stems from a security-driven orientation of national interests, while institutional complexity emerges from an orientation of national interests driven by the benefits of institutional cooperation. The tendencies in choosing between these two types of interests are influenced by both material and ideational factors.

3. Theoretical Framework

The regime complex of Arctic governance can be segmented into three constituent parts: the Arctic Council system, with the Arctic Council at its core; a multi-actor structure supplemented by issues by other international organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union; and the international legal system centered on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Given that the latter two are not established solely for Arctic regulation, this paper will primarily focus on the changes within the Arctic Council system. Although the emergence of a regime complex is largely a natural selection based on state interests, international institutions, once created, are not entirely controlled by their leading states. Thus, it can also be posited that regime complexes possess a degree of independence and are an outgrowth of the structural international system. Consequently, this paper will investigate regime complexes and pan-securitization as two separate and competing choices.

This paper postulates that changes in the characteristics of the Arctic governance system can be explained on two levels: the material level involving power structure and the institutional environment, and the ideational level concerning national security perceptions. The dominant states in Arctic governance are typically considered to be the Arctic Eight. Initially, these states had congruent interests in the Arctic, particularly regarding environmental and developmental issues. Hence, the governance system, in its inception and development, was dominated by the benefits of institutional cooperation, reflected in the system's exclusive characteristics. However, there remained fundamental divergences in security perceptions between Russia and the other seven Arctic states. As a consequence of the increasing security concerns and military actions in the Arctic, particularly by Russia, interests shifted towards a security-driven orientation, revealing the deficiencies of the Arctic governance system in addressing security issues. In light of the intractable reality posed by the existing exclusive system, Russia and the other seven countries opted to marginalize the regime complex and to lead with a pan-securitization strategy, seeking their Arctic interests through multilateral cooperative state actions. (see Figure 3.1) The fundamental changes in the features of the Arctic governance regime complex, primarily spearheaded by the Arctic Council, are the result of changes in strategic choices driven by shifts in interests influenced by both material and ideational levels.

Figure 3.1: Theoretical Framework



4. Change in Arctic Governance: From Regime Complex to Security-Driven Dynamics

Prior to the intensification of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Arctic states prioritized institutional cooperation benefits as their main national interest in the Arctic. The governance system was dominated by the regime complex, emphasizing the exclusion of non-Arctic states from participating in Arctic governance. Following the outbreak of the conflict, the significance of traditional security issues in the Arctic rose, with the national interest definitions of the Arctic states shifting towards a security-driven orientation. The governance system shifted to be dominated by pan-securitization, with an increase in strategies related to the weaponization of international institutions and the external manifestation transitioning from extra-regional exclusion to extra-regional cooperation, or understood as: post-reconfiguration of national interest towards security-oriented drives, the nature of exclusion gradually turned inwards, whereas the united effort generated by institutions shifted outwards; the direction of exploiting the regime complex transitioned from targeting the external to focusing on the internal sphere. This is exemplified by Russia and the Arctic Seven actively coalescing with other non-Arctic states to participate in their own Arctic development and security agendas.

4.1 Institutional Cooperation Dominance: Intra-Regional Self-Governance and Extra-Regional Exclusion

The Arctic Council, as the core of the Arctic regime complex, has inherently exhibited strong characteristics of "intra-regional self-governance and extra-regional exclusion" since its inception. The Arctic Eight hold the absolute decision-making and discursive core within this complex, deeply integrating their sovereignty and development interests into all facets of the Arctic Council's operations and further deepening them within its subsidiary bodies. The Arctic Eight monopolize governance rights in the Arctic through the design of international institutions, directly impeding the involvement of other states in Arctic affairs.

4.1.1 The Arctic Council's Intra-Regional Self-Governance Framework and "Nuuk Criteria"

The power structure of the Arctic Council is divided into three levels: the Arctic Eight, permanent participants, and observers. The main targets of extra-regional exclusion are represented by "Arctic stakeholders", mainly Arctic Council observers, and a broader international community. The Council’s exclusionary framework is primarily constructed through its decision-making system and observer policy. The decision-making system, centered on the amended "Rules of Procedure of the Arctic Council," ensures the absolute authority of the Arctic Eight in Council decision-making, while the observer policy, based on the "Arctic Council Observer Manual," ensures that non-Arctic states cannot deeply engage in relevant affairs, yet are still required to fulfill a series of obligations within the Council.

The decision-making system of the Arctic Council grants the Arctic Eight complete monopoly over decision-making on Council affairs. According to the "Rules of Procedure" (hereinafter referred to as the rules), all resolutions of the Arctic Council and its subsidiary bodies, including decisions made at

ministerial or Senior Arctic Official (SAO) meetings, must be passed by consensus among the Arctic Eight, as per the "Ottawa Declaration." If not all of the Arctic Eight are present at a ministerial or SAO meeting, attending states must reach a unanimous agreement, which the absent states subsequently confirm in writing. The political role of the Arctic Council has also been progressively strengthened. In the "Tromsø Declaration" released in 2009, the Council explicitly clarified its "existing leadership position in the face of challenges and opportunities in the Arctic region," effectively strengthening the monopoly of Arctic affairs by the Arctic Eight. Through its decision-making system, the Arctic Council has transformed multilateral practices into the multilateral practices of the Arctic Eight, creating a collective consciousness of "Arctic Monroeism," namely "The Arctic belongs to the Arctic states," thus affirming the characteristic of "intra-regional self-governance" in Arctic governance.

The observer policy of the Arctic Council provides another layer of assurance for the dominance by the Arctic Eight over Arctic affairs. The Senior Arctic Officials (SAO) Report to Ministers, adopted at the Nuuk meeting of the Arctic Council in 2011, and the Arctic Council Observer Manual for Subsidiary Bodies passed in 2013, limit Arctic Council observers in terms of both admission and rights. The Nuuk SAO Report introduced the "Nuuk Criteria" for the admission of observers to the Arctic Council, which includes recognizing the sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction of the Arctic States in the Arctic and acknowledging the importance of the international legal system based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) for governing the Arctic Ocean. The Observer Manual further specifies observer rights and obligations based on the Nuuk Criteria, with a focus on the latter. Observers are granted rights including being invited to Arctic Council meetings, participating in working groups, speaking and submitting documents upon agreement, and contributing funds not exceeding those of the Arctic States. However, observers can be consulted and asked to leave a meeting or have their observer status suspended if they engage in any activities contrary to the Council's regulations or fail to adhere to the guidelines of the Observer Manual. Moreover, the admission of observers as part of the Arctic Council decision-making is also controlled by the Arctic Eight as per the regulations in the Rules of Procedure, essentially forming the "extra-regional exclusion" characteristic of the Arctic Council.

4.1.2 Arctic Economic Council's Self-Governance and Exclusivity

The Arctic Economic Council and the Arctic Ministerial Science Meeting, as significant subsidiary bodies to the Arctic Council, differ considerably in their exclusivity: the Arctic Economic Council exhibits clear exclusivity, while the Arctic Ministerial Science Meeting tends towards extra-regional cooperation. This section will mainly discuss the institutional arrangements of the Arctic Economic Council, further substantiating the Arctic Council's characteristic of "intra-regional self-governance and extra-regional exclusion," whereas the feature of extra-regional cooperation typical to the Arctic Ministerial Science Meeting will be discussed in detail later on.

In terms of information and institutional arrangements, the Arctic Economic Council showcases characteristics of self-governance and exclusivity. In the realm of information, the Arctic Economic Council provides member states with a substantial first-mover advantage in managing economic information, converting fragmented Arctic economic data into effective information resources shared internally among Arctic States and providing actual institutional conveniences to these states. Furthermore, the Arctic Eight can indirectly lead the research and decision-making agendas of the Arctic Economic Council, further controlling its affairs.

Institutionally, the Arctic Economic Council continues the three-tier structure of the Arctic Council, which includes traditional members (also called voting members, Legacy Members), non-voting partners (Non-voting Partners), and Permafrost Partners. Traditional members are exclusively from the Arctic Eight and permanent participants of the Arctic Council. The decision-making bodies of the Arctic Economic Council are elected by the vote of traditional members. Representatives from Arctic states automatically become traditional members and hold permanent positions upon joining the Arctic Economic Council. Non-Arctic states can only apply for non-voting membership (approval of which rests in the hands of Arctic states) and once approved, their membership lasts only for 12 months. Additionally, they are required to contribute financially to the Council in an amount similar to that of traditional members, with the extension of their membership being tied to their contributions within the working groups of the Arctic Economic Council. Meanwhile, the leadership of the Arctic Economic Council's research teams is legitimately monopolized by experts from the Arctic Eight, wholly excluding non-Arctic states from information sharing and agenda setting. Through various regulations, the Arctic Economic Council establishes systemic institutional discrimination against non-Arctic states.

In summary, by examining the Arctic Council itself and the Arctic Economic Council, this section has characterized the "intra-regional self-governance and extra-regional exclusion" feature of the Arctic Council. "Intra-regional self-governance" emerges as the Arctic Eight use decision-making mechanisms to control the international institutional system of Arctic governance, transforming Arctic matters into internal multilateral consultations of the Arctic Eight. "Extra-regional exclusion" is manifest when the Arctic Eight prevent non-Arctic states from gaining decision-making rights within the international institutional system of Arctic governance, further strengthening their institutional discursive power in Arctic regions. This exclusivity is enforced through stringent organizational rules and clear texts that restrict non-Arctic states—a type of "hard exclusion."

4.2 Ascendance of Security Orientation: Intra-Regional Division and Extra-Regional Cooperation

Since the 2008 Russian flag-planting incident, the Arctic has been rapidly entering an era of "competitive development." Despite the Arctic Eight institutionalizing Arctic matters as internal affairs and achieving the goal of external exclusion to a significant extent, internal contradictions among them have led to a lack of attention within the Arctic governance international institutional system for many

critical issues, such as the complete omission of traditional security, primarily military matters, from the Arctic Council agenda. Arctic energy development has also largely been conducted independently by each state, favoring national regulations over international institutions and minilateralism over international organizations. Starting with Canada's refusal to attend an Arctic Council working group meeting in Moscow, post the 2014 Crimea crisis, a trend of intra-regional division among the Arctic Eight began to emerge. The outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in March 2022 crystallized these internal conflicts; the state-to-state consultations sustained by "intra-regional self-governance" were insufficient to resolve fundamental national interest contradictions. Divisions arose among the leading states of the Arctic governance international institutional system, attacking each other through soft exclusionary practices based on state behavior. Simultaneously, the Arctic Eight reversed their previous attitude of exclusion toward non-Arctic states, gradually incorporating external states and mechanisms into the Arctic governance framework. While this shift did not bring significant organizational changes, direct international cooperation between states increased. "Intra-regional self-governance" and "extra-regional exclusion" are being replaced by "intra-regional division" and "extra-regional cooperation," with the latter indicative of the intra-Arctic Eight exclusivity. Beyond the Arctic states' cooperation with external actors, there exists another form of cooperation for advancement, namely the extra-regional union adopted by the Arctic Ministerial Science Meeting to promote collaborative Arctic scientific research. This section will primarily discuss the exclusionary extra-regional cooperation characteristic of Russia and the Arctic Seven, while also briefly explaining the cooperative mechanism used by the Arctic Ministerial Science Meeting.

4.2.1 The Arctic Seven's Framework to Exclude Russia and Russia's Development-Oriented "Extra-Regional Cooperation"

The great power competition between the United States and Russia is a significant factor influencing Arctic affairs. The intra-regional division and extra-regional cooperation of the Arctic governance international institutional system largely stem from this dynamic. As the Arctic Council did not establish an exit mechanism at its founding, the intra-regional division of the Arctic Eight is more often expressed through actions such as refusing participation or suspending activities to demonstrate exclusion from one another. Rejection by the Arctic Seven has led Russia to seek participation from non-Arctic states, engaging in international cooperation with areas such as Arctic development as the main focus to escape its isolation in the region.

After the Crimean crisis in 2014, the Arctic states' armed forces' chiefs of staff meeting mechanism was terminated, and Canada, then chair of the Arctic Council, announced its refusal to attend an Arctic Council working group meeting in Moscow. Following the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in March 2022, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States issued a joint statement declaring, "The core principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, based on international law, have long underpinned the work of the Arctic Council, a forum which Russia currently chairs. In

light of Russia's flagrant violation of these principles, our representatives will not travel to Russia for meetings of the Arctic Council." Consequently, the work of the Arctic Council came to a halt. Even by June 2022, when the Arctic Seven issued another joint statement to announce the limited resumption of Arctic Council-related work, activities involving Russia were still excluded. In January 2023, Russia's invitation to Arctic states' foreign ministers to participate in the 13th Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting scheduled to be held in Salekhard was met with refusal, and the meeting was not successfully held until May of that year. It was not until Norway took over the Arctic Council's chairmanship from Russia in March 2023 that the Council's normal order began to gradually restore.

After facing a series of rejections, Russia shifted its focus away from the Arctic Seven and towards non-Arctic states, attempting to reconstruct its dominant position in the region through the introduction of external actors and the realization of its vision for "pan-Arctic cooperation." Along with its traditional partners, China and India, Russia has contemplated multilevel Arctic cooperation with non-Arctic states such as the BRICS countries, Vietnam, and South Korea, particularly in areas of Arctic scientific research, Arctic sea route development, and Arctic climate and environmental protection. In 2017, Russia announced its plan to collaborate with China to build the "Ice Silk Road." On March 21, 2023, China and Russia signed the "Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for the New Era," which explicitly proposed to "continuously deepen practical cooperation in polar scientific research, environmental protection and organizing scientific expeditions." Russia also engaged in detailed discussions about Arctic cooperation with India, Brazil, and the entire BRICS grouping throughout 2023, via academic forums and economic forums. Through these initiatives, Russia is reconstructing a development-oriented extra-regional coalition centered on itself in the Arctic region, ensuring its developmental interests in the area.

4.2.2 The Arctic Seven's Security-Oriented "Extra-Regional Cooperation"

Contrary to Russia's development-oriented extra-regional cooperation with states as primary actors, the extra-regional cooperation partners of the Arctic Seven are international institutions like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the security-oriented expansion of such external institutions in the Arctic establishes extra-regional cooperation. Essentially, it involves constructing new multilateral forms of cooperation outside the Arctic governance international institutional system, forming a supplementary Arctic security system sans Russia, characterized mainly by the expansion of the NATO security system led by the United States and the European Union's participation in Arctic affairs.

The introduction of NATO provides supplementation in the traditional security domain where the Arctic region lacks institutional presence. Before the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, NATO maintained a low profile regarding its role in the Arctic. At the 2010 NATO Summit in Lisbon, the alliance proposed that its future Arctic policy would shift focus from its traditional military deterrence

to monitoring sustainable development and stability, thus diminishing the presence of the "security" concept. NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen expressed that NATO had no intention to promote the militarization of the Arctic. Although watchful of Russia's escalating military presence in the region, he emphasized the preference for resolving all issues through dialogue and consultation. After the Russia-Ukraine conflict erupted, NATO's attitude towards engagement in Arctic affairs began to shift internally, with the geopolitical significance of the Arctic region becoming increasingly prominent, as reflected in Finland and Sweden's abandonment of neutrality and initiation of NATO accession processes. At the 2022 NATO Summit, citing the political and cultural homogeny with member states, NATO provided Finland and Sweden with a "fast-track" beyond the Membership Action Plan. It also actively negotiated with Turkey, offering military assistance in exchange for Turkey's support and maintaining close contact with Finland and Sweden through NATO's Enhanced Opportunity Partnership Program. As of now, Finland joined NATO on April 4, 2023, and Sweden followed on March 7, 2024. Unlike the consensus-based mechanism of the Arctic Council, NATO's decision-making process, due to the alignment of member interests, seldom faces internal division issues, thus providing the Arctic Seven comprehensive institutional support in traditional security domains within the Arctic.

Aside from NATO, the European Union also represents significant extra-regional cooperation by Nordic states, and the policy coordination between NATO and the EU in the traditional security domain of the Arctic cannot be overlooked. Diverging from its 2016 Arctic policy, the EU clarified in its 2021 Arctic policy update that the EU is positioned within the Arctic region, and Russia is no longer seen as a partner but a military threat. Compared to 2016, the EU's level of involvement has increased (moving away from the emphasis that only a few members are situated in the Arctic), and the posture towards Russia has shifted from cooperation to confrontation. NATO has also facilitated the military capacity building of its Arctic member states within the EU by leveraging the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) mechanisms to enhance military spending.

By introducing and leveraging international mechanisms like NATO and the EU, the Arctic Seven have established a military security system in the Arctic region centered on the NATO-EU security apparatus, which directly targets Russia's growing military and developmental needs in the area. This development exacerbates the pan-securitization and geopolitical tension in the Arctic region, objectively altering the non-security status quo of the Arctic governance international institutional system centered on the Arctic Council, with strong intra-regional exclusion characteristics. Beyond NATO and the EU, the "Nordic Plus" mechanism is another approach for the Arctic Seven to exclude Russia collectively within the realm of Arctic governance.

4.2.3 Non-Exclusionary "Extra-Regional Cooperation" by Subsidiary Bodies of the Arctic Council

The Arctic Ministerial Science Meeting, another significant subsidiary body of the Arctic Council, diverges from the exclusive framework of the Arctic governance international institutional system, promoting international cooperation in Arctic research through non-discriminatory inter-state collaboration.

The Arctic Ministerial Science Meeting is not the only cooperative mechanism within the Arctic Council framework focused on Arctic research. At the May 2017 ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council, the Arctic Eight signed the Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation. This cooperation system based on the agreement is discriminatory and exclusive, wherein the Arctic Eight, as signatories, have reciprocal rights to enter other parties' specified Arctic regions for scientific research and collaboration, while observer states and other non-signatories do not have such privileges. This establishes a substantial preferential status for the Arctic states in scientific research domains. The Arctic Ministerial Science Meeting includes primary national representatives involved in Arctic research and representatives from the EU and indigenous organizations. The 2016 and 2018 meetings clarified the meeting's intent: to serve as a multilateral platform for direct interaction between government policymakers and the scientific community in response to the impacts of Arctic climate and environmental changes, and to promote an understanding of the Arctic by related actors. This meeting acknowledges the positive contributions made by countries outside the Arctic Circle to scientific research, with many non-Arctic states making significant contributions to pivotal projects, exceeding 30% and, in some cases, over 60%.

While the Arctic Ministerial Science Meeting possesses important non-discriminatory characteristics, it still does not address the paramount aspects that stir conflicts in the Arctic, and it does not change the nature of the external cooperation undertaken by the Arctic Eight due to internal exclusion. The intra-regional division and extra-regional cooperation of the Arctic governance international institutional system inherently remains a significant display of the Arctic Eight's intra-regional exclusion. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the Arctic Ministerial Science Meeting still plays a vital role in alleviating international tensions and fostering cooperation in scientific research amidst an increasingly tense geopolitical climate in the Arctic.

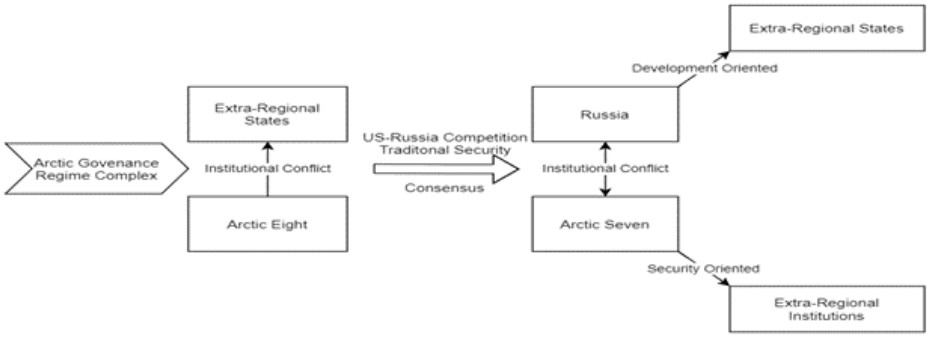
In conclusion, this section summarizes the characteristics of "intra-regional division and extra-regional cooperation" within the Arctic governance international institutional system after examining the extra-regional cooperative systems of Russia and the Arctic Seven, as well as the external cooperation measures taken by the Arctic Ministerial Science Meeting. Intra-regional division is evident in the systemic exclusion of Russia by the Arctic Seven through exclusionary state actions within the international system of Arctic governance. Extra-regional cooperation, on the other hand, manifests in the actions taken by Russia and the Arctic Seven to strengthen their discourse power in the Arctic region

by incorporating outside states and mechanisms. Fundamentally, this is a form of "soft exclusion," restricting competitors through the construction of new multilateral cooperation through state actions.

5. Drivers of Change

The changes in the characteristics of the Arctic governance international institutional system are not incidental but driven by multi-level factors. The opportunities brought about by the melting Arctic sea ice have intensified the geopoliticization of Arctic governance, consequently elevating the significance of traditional security issues in the region. The great power competition between the United States and Russia has also extended to the Arctic, causing the intra-Arctic competition between the Arctic Seven and Russia to shift externally. As the United States pivoted its industrial policies towards domestic rejuvenation, the Arctic strategies of various nations also shifted towards serving national interests. The Arctic Council system, which should ideally assume the role of an “onlooker,” has become a tool for excluding competitors due to its low binding force and consensual decision-making mechanism originating from its international forum status. This section analyses the drivers behind the characteristic changes discussed previously. The paper proposes that the changes in the features of the Arctic governance international institutional system fundamentally stem from the escalation of US-Russia great power competition and the consequential shift in the targets of institutional exclusion caused by the rise in importance of traditional security issues in the Arctic. This process was accelerated by the low binding force and consensual decision-making mechanism characteristic of the Arctic governance international institutional system (see Figure 5.1). Influenced by material and ideational factors, the national interests of Arctic states have moved from being driven by institutional cooperation to being security-oriented. This strategic shift is reflected in the transition from institutional complexity to pan-securitization, meaning the marginalization of the Arctic Council system and a pivot towards aligning with external countries and institutions to reconstruct Arctic leadership.

Figure 5.1 Changes in the characteristics of the international system of Arctic governance



Firstly, the development competition in the Arctic between the United States and Russia has intensified, with other Arctic states also reorienting their policies to serve domestic interests. Following Trump’s election in 2017, the US Arctic strategy shifted towards "competitive development." The

Trump administration's 2019 Arctic strategy report explicitly stated the desire to ensure US national security interests in the Arctic. During his tenure, Trump promoted the development of the oil industry in the near-Arctic territories through policies such as the "America First Energy Plan," thereby boosting the economy of Alaska and enhancing the country's energy industrial sector. The Trump administration also focused on improving the US's capacity to utilize the Arctic sea routes, particularly its icebreaker fleet strength. President Biden largely continued Trump's policies but also returned to international cooperation in the Arctic. Russia, on its part, implemented a variety of national policies and laws aimed at enhancing the utilization of the Arctic sea route and energy development capacity while also pivoting towards domestic interests. In February 2023, Russia revised the "Fundamental Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic to 2035," adding expressions concerning Russia's national interests in the Arctic region. That same year, Russia also approved amendments to the "Russian Federation Natural Gas Export Law," granting the rights to export natural gas to users of regional plots in the Arctic and agreed in April to implement a zero mineral extraction tax (MET) for producing ammonia and hydrogen in the Arctic region. Besides the United States and Russia, other Arctic states, such as Norway, have directed their Arctic policies towards domestic interests. Based on the broad market provided by the EU, Norway leveraged its energy and fishery resources in the Arctic for further domestic economic development, stating in its 2020 Arctic policy an objective to increase employment and value creation. In its updated Arctic strategy in 2020, Sweden also indicated an intent to develop sustainable economic and commercial interests in the Arctic.

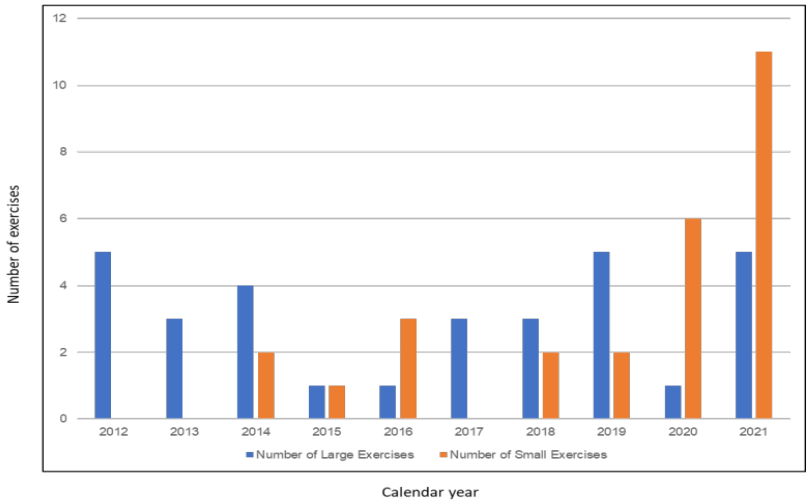
Secondly, NATO's expansion further aggravated the division between the Arctic Seven and Russia. Before the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, NATO faced difficulty intervening in Arctic affairs due to the complex security interests of the Arctic states and the reluctance of non-NATO Arctic states towards NATO involvement in the region. However, the conflict led to a rapid increase in the demand for national security protection in Finland and Sweden among the Arctic Seven, making NATO expansion a natural progression. Accompanying Finland's accession to NATO, the geographical distance between NATO and Russia further contracted (see Figure 5.2). Although NATO's military deployment and operational capabilities in the Arctic remain limited, Finland and Sweden's accession marked a further expansion of NATO's influence in the Arctic (all Arctic countries except Russia are NATO members), signifying a formal division of the Arctic Eight into two blocs: the Arctic Seven and Russia. Since 2020, NATO has intensified its exercises and reconnaissance activities in the Arctic region, directly targeting Russia's presence in the Arctic. In addition, some non-Arctic NATO member states, such as the United Kingdom, are accelerating the establishment of a military presence in the High North, directly posing a national security threat to Russia and further accelerating the division between the parties.

Figure 5.2: NATO Members in Europe

Source: NATO

Third, the influence of traditional security issues in the Arctic cannot be neglected. As the divide between Western countries and Russia deepens, the Arctic, with its abundant strategic resource reserves, has become an important location for the deployment of their military operations. Statistics from the RAND Corporation show an increasing trend in the size and frequency of Russia's military exercises in the Arctic region (see Figure 5.3). The United States has begun rebuilding military bases and the Second Fleet in the Arctic and has invested more resources in military exercises and operational training in the region. RAND's related reports also indicate the need for the United States to strengthen its military deployment in the Arctic. Canada, in its 2017 defence policy titled "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defense Policy," proposed increased defense spending in the Arctic, enhancing the combat capabilities of the Canadian Armed Forces in the region, and developing new military technologies in collaboration with the United States, continuing Arctic military exercises with other Arctic states and NATO. Compared to the previous editions that emphasized international cooperation, climate, and energy development, the Arctic strategies released by the Nordic Five around 2020 almost all added content regarding traditional security in the Arctic. The attention of these countries to security and military competition in the Arctic has also risen, particularly concerning the "military threats" of Russia's growing presence in the region. In May 2021, at the 12th Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting, Russia—as the rotating chair—first proposed the inclusion of previously overlooked military issues on the agenda, reminding NATO states to adhere to the "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation." This marked the first official request for discussion of the traditional security agenda that had been suppressed since the Arctic Council's establishment with the "Ottawa Declaration." Although the Arctic Council did not explicitly list traditional security problems in the "Reykjavik Declaration" and the "Arctic Council Strategic Plan 2021 to 2030," the Arctic Eight have already established national actions and alliance-level strategic arrangements concerning traditional security.

Figure 5.3 Russia's Military Exercises in the Arctic, 2012–2021



Source: RAND Corporation

Finally, the low binding force and consensus-based decision-making mechanism at the core of the Arctic governance international institutional system catalyzed the transformation of characteristics and have been adopted as institutional weapons in international competition. In addition to the aforementioned causes that generated the new characteristics of the Arctic international governance system, the nature and decision-making mechanism of the Arctic Council have also accelerated the emergence of this transformation. The consensus-based decision mechanism of the Arctic Council, centered on the Arctic Eight, is different from NATO's consensus; the Arctic Council's consensus group has direct interest divergence, leading to an inability to achieve its pre-set governance efficiency when faced with the interest divergence of core members. Furthermore, core members with divergent interests, in turn, use the consensus mechanism to prevent adversaries from using the international mechanism, forming the internal exclusivity of the Arctic governance international institutional system. This has prompted countries to turn towards establishing new international institutional systems to circumvent the consensus affected by interest divergence, such as the "Nordic Plus" mechanism of the Nordic countries, the introduction of NATO, and Russia's development-oriented external coalitions.

6. Conclusion

The transformation in the characteristics of the Arctic governance international institutional system signifies not only the intensified competition among Arctic states in the region but also provides non-Arctic states with opportunities to enhance their discourse in Arctic governance through external coalitions. For instance, China and India have utilized Russia's development-oriented external coalition as a conduit, engaging through partnership cooperation and summit diplomacy to become a part of the Russia-centered development-oriented external coalition system. Non-Arctic European states like the United Kingdom have participated in the US-centered security-oriented external coalition system via

NATO-EU mechanisms. Arctic affairs have gradually shifted from being an internal concern of the Arctic region to more inclusive pan-Arctic affairs involving a greater number of countries. The internal divisions within the Arctic Council have also enabled observers and permanent participants to have deeper involvement in Arctic matters rather than consistently following agendas proposed jointly by Arctic states. Especially for "Arctic interest states" in Asia and Latin America, which are relatively distant from the Arctic, Russia may serve as a significant facilitator for further involvement in Arctic affairs. Non-exclusionary and non-security institutions like the Arctic Ministerial Science Meeting may gain increased relevance, offering some mitigation in the international environment for the Arctic governance international institutional system whose effectiveness has been compromised by traditional security issues.

However, it is essential not to overlook that the efficacy of the Arctic governance regime complex is still influenced by the backdrop of great power competition between the US and Russia. Within the system, even though the international institutional system functions centered around the Arctic Council have somewhat recovered with Norway's chairmanship, the Arctic Seven still maintain caution and exclusion towards Arctic issues involving Russia. Russia's actions within other Arctic international mechanisms are also constrained. Externally, Russia and the Arctic Seven are intensively building their respective or collective external coalition mechanisms for the Arctic and are using these to compete for resources and security in the region, leaving the future of the Arctic governance international institutional system uncertain. What can be confirmed is that contrary to the cooperative international stance of the Arctic around the year 2010, the latest round of Arctic policies and strategies emerging in 2020 from various countries have concurrently heightened the focus on traditional security issues. The Arctic is no longer merely a domain for "cooperative development" but a battleground for "competitive development." Furthermore, as the recent changes to the Arctic governance regime complex have accelerated during the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the full scope of their impact on international politics remains to be seen

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Author Contributions

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: Zhihao Zheng: Writing, Original draft, Conceptualization, Theoretical framework, Methodology. Beizhen Zhang: Writing, Original draft, Literature review, Material collection and analysis. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Availability of Data and Materials

The data and materials used in this study are all available according to websites provided by references.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to report regarding the present study.

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