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The West and Russia: Does the Way Forward Point North?

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The West and Russia: Does the Way Forward Point North?

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A thesis submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Political Science in the Trans-Atlantic Master's Program in the Center for European Studies.

Chapel Hill
2020

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Abstract

This thesis proposes two methods by which the West can achieve a peaceful and cooperative outcome in the Arctic. As sea ice continues to recede, the northern reaches of the globe open to increased shipping, military presence, oil and precious mineral extraction, fishing and other opportunities. These opportunities represent potential cooperation or competition between interested parties, to include Russia. Realists argue that conflict is inevitable, but there already exists reason to hope for a more peaceful reality. By suggesting a new perspective on the NATO alliance and what it takes to secure ocean shipping and the vulnerable environment in a collaborative way, this thesis seeks to determine a cooperative path with benefits extending far beyond access rights and lower tensions in the Far North.

Date of publication

2020

Keyword

[International relations](#)
[Russia](#)
[Arctic](#)
[NATO](#)
[The West](#)
[Arctic Council](#)

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.17615/3mzv-t768>

Resource type

[Masters Thesis](#)

Advisor

Searing, Donald D.
Stephens, John
Vachudova, Milada

Degree

Master of Arts

Degree granting institution

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Graduate School

Graduation year

2020


Language

[English](#)

Parents:

This work has no parents.

Items

Thumbnail	Title	Date Uploaded	Visibility	Actions
	Lewis_unc_0153M_19526.pdf	2020-06-22	Public	Select an action ▾

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“A step forward is that Russia and the West realized they do not want open hostilities. On several occasions during 2015 there was a real danger of direct military confrontation, like in Ukraine, where the Russian and American military could have come face to face, and over the downing of a Russian aircraft by a NATO member state, Turkey. It was good that neither side got blinded by the provocation and saw the red line they should not cross. Another positive element is that both sides agreed that these conflicts require a political solution. The new split in Europe has forced them to seek a way out of the difficult situation. French President Francois Hollande expressed his readiness to discuss with presidents Obama and Putin concerted efforts to fight Islamic State. The way forward lies in a more inclusive and flexible order, driven by a common imperative in meeting universal challenges, such as climate change, pandemic disease, and global poverty. Such an enterprise will be contentious and chaotic. Xi has transformed Chinese foreign policy, although not in the way that is usually understood in the West. Despite the frequent comparisons with Mao Zedong, he is no revolutionary seeking to overturn the global order and impose in its place a Chinese Brave New World. They treated Russia as a defeated power, riding roughshod over its geopolitical interests by expanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to Russia’s borders. They wrecked its economy by forcing through ill-motivated prescriptions. Northwest Russia or Northern European Russia can be roughly defined as that part of European Russia bounded by Finland, the Arctic Ocean, the Ural Mountains and the east-flowing part of the Volga River. Although it was never a political unit there is some reason for treating it as a distinct region. The Volga marks the approximate northern limit of moderately dense settlement. The Usa River flows west from the Urals and joins the west-flowing part of the Pechora. The Izhma flows north

to meet the Pechora bend. The Tsilma meets the Pechora bend from the west. We would point out the size of our militaries and the fact that they had been steadily downsizing. We would also emphasize that the U.S. military in Europe had been reduced dramatically since the Cold War and that unless provoked or our Allies were threatened, it posed no military threat to the Russian Federation. Invariably, the individual would lurch forward and answer with an absolute “yes.” The more thoughtful individuals would then stop and become pensive, likely wondering what pacts, blocs, and alliances would emerge after NATO and whether they would necessarily have Russia’s better interests in mind, with their eyeballs on the threats of our villages and towns in western Russia and

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