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Arctic Exceptionalism under Scrutiny

A qualitative content analysis of the increasing securitisation in the European Arctic

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Abstract

This master thesis investigates how the increasing securitisation of the European Arctic challenges the notion of Arctic exceptionalism. This thesis focuses on the Nordic countries' approach to the European Arctic. The Arctic has long been perceived as a region of peace, cooperation, and environmental vulnerability. However, in recent years, the changing geopolitical dynamics and the region's growing strategic importance have intensified the securitisation discourse, blurring the traditional perception of the Arctic as exceptional. It examines the various dimensions of securitisation, including military presence, resource competition, and the implications of climate change on security dynamics. A qualitative content analysis of Nordic Arctic policies allows us to discern the construction of security threats in 2020-2022. The analysis of interviews conducted in 2023 addresses the dominant securitising narratives in the Nordic countries post-Ukraine war. The results suggest that the securitisation of the European Arctic has challenged the notion of Arctic exceptionalism to a significant extent. The increasing military presence in the region has introduced a securitisation lens emphasising power competition and the potential for conflict. The outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war led to pausing activities in the Arctic Council. This poses a severe disturbance to the exceptional governance mechanism of the Arctic region. This thesis contributes to the ongoing debates surrounding the changing dynamics in the European Arctic and their implications for Arctic exceptionalism. It highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of the region, acknowledging the complex interplay between security, geopolitics, and environmental concerns.

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Abbreviations

A5	Arctic five
A8	Arctic eight
AC	Arctic Council
AEPS	Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy
AHDR	Arctic Human Development Reports
BEAC	Barents Euro-Arctic Council
EEA	European Economic Area
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zones
EU	European Union
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
US	United States of America

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1. Introduction

Unlike the Antarctic, the Arctic region is not governed by one all-encompassing treaty. This makes the structure of governance in the Arctic quite exceptional while allowing it to adapt to the respective geopolitical context. The Arctic region is mainly governed by the consensus-based Arctic Council, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (United Nations, 1994) and the individual Arctic states' dedicated national policies. While there is no overarching definition of the Arctic region, it can be narrowed down to the land and sea territories north of the Arctic circle, about 66° 34'N (Jegorova, 2013). This thesis will apply the Arctic Human Development Reports (Arctic Portal, AHDR, 2016) demarcation of the Arctic boundary. It encompasses the Arctic Ocean and the northernmost territories of eight Arctic (A8) states: Canada, Denmark (through Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States. While the Arctic Council (AC) is the intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation in the Arctic, including all Arctic Eight (A8), various other regional organisations have been created. According to various criteria, such as access to the Arctic Ocean (Arctic 5), proximity to the Barents Sea (Euro-Arctic Barents Council), or economic interests (Arctic Economic Council), regional organisations have established themselves. Furthermore, each sub-region of the Arctic has different expectations, challenges, and interests to be met.

For the sake of this research, the focus will be on the European Arctic as defined by the European Environment Agency (2017), focusing on the Nordic countries. This Arctic sub-region comprises the Northernmost territories of Sweden, Finland, Norway, the Russian Kola peninsula, Iceland, and Greenland. Focusing on the Nordics has multiple reasons. First, the Nordics are closely related to one another and the European Union through direct membership or participation in the European Economic Area (EEA). They have similar approaches to Arctic governance but different threat perceptions relating to their respective historical and geographical context. According to Zimmerbauer (2012), the most striking characteristic of the European Arctic region is that it used to be the most sensitive military confrontation between East and West during the Cold War. The Barents Region, consisting of northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and North-West Russia, was where the Iron Curtain split the world into two opposing blocs- East and West. In addition, it is the most developed, populated and fastest-growing part of the Arctic region. With 5.2 million inhabitants, the Barents region is the most populated region above the Arctic Circle (Barents Euro-Arctic Council, n.d.). No other area of Europe contains as many forests, fish, minerals, oil, and gas (Barents Euro-Arctic Council, n.d.). Including Iceland and Greenland, it is thus also the region with the most potential for economic and business development while facing many challenges. According to global warming research conducted by automatic weather stations on Svalbard and

Franz Josef Land islands, the Barents Sea is warming seven times faster than the global average (Jonassen, 2022). These measurements were taken over the last 20-40 years. Researchers warn that the heating in the Barents Sea region is alarming as it could be used as an “early warning” of what is expected to happen across the rest of the Arctic.

The Nordic countries have adopted different Arctic security and governance approaches based on their distinct historical, cultural and geopolitical context. Climate change has brought about new opportunities for economic development and resource extraction while at the same time also giving rise to new challenges. Thus, the Nordics have a shared interest in keeping the Arctic a region of stability and cooperation while considering their national interests.

When 2007, a Russian flag was planted in the Arctic seabed below the North Pole, the Arctic region attracted global attention from the media, politicians and academics (Østhagen, 2017). The Illulissat Declaration by the five coastal Arctic states (A5) reiterated that the Arctic was not a lawless place and that the race for the Arctic was merely a myth. There is an adequate legal and institutional framework that governs the Arctic region. The following years were marked by a trend of the A8 releasing their individual, national Arctic policies. They address current challenges and lay the framework for handling them. Although they differ in their specificities, they are all centred around keeping the region one of peaceful cooperation. Only through fruitful discussions and collaboration in the Arctic Council can the Arctic states address the Arctic's challenges. A second wave of policy rewriting was noted in and around 2020-2022. Here the states address the most recent challenges the region is facing. Climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic, and Russian military build-up are recurrent themes in these renewed strategies. While there was a consensus that the region remains a zone of peace, the Russian-Ukrainian war has severely altered the global and regional security dynamics. The Arctic Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council paused their activity with Russia as a direct reaction to the war. The war thus posed a significant hindrance to peaceful Arctic cooperation. The region previously praised for its exceptional cooperation and not letting military issues disturb its governance has been severely altered. Military issues from outside the region have impacted Arctic multilateral governance. This thesis builds on the concept of Arctic exceptionalism that perceived the region as a unique and cooperative space, characterised by peaceful international relations and a focus on environmental cooperation. Relating the concept to the current geopolitical situation raises the question: How does increasing securitisation in the Nordic's approach to the European Arctic challenge the notion of Arctic exceptionalism? This thesis will follow a qualitative content analysis of the Nordic states' approach to Arctic security governance to shed light on the concept of Arctic exceptionalism.

The thesis is developed through several chapters. The first chapter has sought to introduce this thesis's topic. It introduces the European Arctic and the changing security context that it is facing. The second chapter presents previous research by prominent scholars in Arctic security studies. Contextualisation helps to identify the research gap and discern the overarching research question. The third chapter presents the theoretical framework that is centred around securitisation theory. The fourth chapter outlines the methods employed in this thesis, detailing the case selection, the data collection and production and the subsequent framework for analysis. Ethical considerations and methodological limitations are also addressed in this chapter. The fifth chapter exhibits the analysis results in two parts, policy findings and interview findings. The sixth chapter discusses the findings to answer the research question. The last chapter presents the study's conclusion and possibilities for further research.

1.1. Current Geopolitical Context and Developments

The Russo-Ukrainian war began in 2014, with Russia illegally annexing Crimea. Relations with the West were generally deteriorating, but the Arctic states decided that conflict outside the region shall not disturb Arctic cooperation. In the Arctic Council, which does not address military issues, business was thus conducted as usual. Following Russia's unprecedented invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Arctic Council, Northern Dimension and Barents Euro-Arctic Council paused their activity. Happening outside the Arctic region could no longer be ignored and significantly impacted the Arctic's peaceful cooperation narrative. In June 2022, the Arctic Council's seven member states, excluding Russia, decided to implement a limited resumption of the Council's work that does not involve the participation of Russia. Business as usual could, however, not be achieved.

The research for this thesis was started in December 2022, and tried to stay updated on the current situation. While the Russo-Ukrainian war continues, the European geopolitical situation is continuously evolving. A significant development, Finland became a full member of NATO in April 2023, while Sweden's membership is still pending. Norway is scheduled to take over the Arctic Council membership from Russia in mid-May. Significant developments in the European (Arctic) security landscape are, of course, considered by the researcher. However, anything after April 2023 cannot be thematised in this thesis's analytical part. Significant developments would thus have to be explored in future academic works.

2. Previous research & aim

2.1. Literature review

In the following, sources from prominent scholars of International relations, European studies, EU foreign and security policy, Arctic security, governance and geopolitics are combined. They are linked to one another to shed light on the existing research in the field. The literature review is split into three parts. First, scholars such as Bevir, Heininen, Exner-Pirot and Plouffe introduce the concept of 'governance'. This highlights the unique governance mechanism in the Arctic. Next, security is represented through the Copenhagen school, coined by the scholars Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde. A changing Arctic security narrative concerning environmental security is explored through the works of Sam-Aggrey & Lanteigne, Heininen & Exner-Pirot and Pic & Lasserre. Last, the debate around Arctic exceptionalism is introduced. To conclude the section, the gap in the literature is addressed that this thesis seeks to fill by introducing the aim of this research.

2.1.1. *Arctic governance & regionalism*

“Governance in the Arctic (as structure and agency) is multifaceted, interconnected and evolving.

Above all, it is complex.”(Heininen, Exner-Pirot & Plouffe, 2015)

Heininen, Exner-Pirot & Plouffe (2015) define governance as “numerous principles, objectives and meanings that create the space in which actors will implement ideas, policies and institutions and/or institutional arrangements in a way to achieve collectively decided objectives”. While Bevir (2012) notes that “governance is the process of governing”. He elucidates multiple scenarios of these governing processes. They can be undertaken by a government or network, over a family, territory, formal or informal organisation, through laws, power, norms or language (Bevir, 2012). It is not to be confused with the *government*, as governance does not solely focus on political state institutions; it can also encapsulate social organisation, practices and activities. Bevir (2012) lists three prominent features of governance. First, ideas, activities and designs of governance might appear unconventional. Next, governance can be multi-jurisdictional and transnational, meaning it can unite people and institutions from different policy sectors related to different levels of territoriality (international, national, regional, and local). Last, an increasing range and diversity of involved stakeholders can be identified.

When addressing how the Arctic region is governed, it is crucial first to conceptualise the distinct region (Pelaudeix, 2015). Pieper et al. (2011) note that there is no single fixed definition of the 'Arctic region' as it largely varies between disciplines and stakeholders. Dodds (2020) notes that delimiting the 'Arctic region' is closely connected to the power-knowledge relationships of spatial

politics, as it decides who is included and who is excluded from the region. Thus, the Arctic is not a predefined region but “actively generated through regional security projects, the identifying of stakeholders, common issues, and future directions” (Dodds, 2020, p.265). Pic and Lasserre (2019) note that framing the Arctic region is a political choice. The region at play for this thesis is the European Arctic, as defined by the European Environment Agency (2017), a sub-region of the Arctic. This comprises the Northernmost territories of Sweden, Finland, and Norway, as well as Iceland and Greenland. Russia, partly belonging to the European continent, cannot be neglected in this equation.

Many argue that Gorbachev’s, then Secretary-General of the Soviet Communist Party, speech in Murmansk in 1987 concluded an era of global tension (Åtland, 2008; Vidal, 2022). What is now known as the Murmansk Initiative was meant to transform the Arctic from a zone of high military activity into an international ‘zone of peace’ by fostering international cooperation in the areas of resource development, scientific research, the well-being of indigenous peoples, environmental protection, and marine transport (Åtland, 2008). The beginning of the end of the Cold War era in the Arctic region gave way to the establishment of new political and institutional dynamics. In 1993 the Kirkenes Declaration created the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), the official body for intergovernmental cooperation in the Barents Region (Barents Euro-Arctic Council, n.d.). Followed by the initiation of the Arctic Council in 1996. The Arctic Council is “the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, Arctic Indigenous peoples and other Arctic inhabitants” (Arctic Council, n.d.), mainly in relation to environmental protection and sustainable development. It is the only forum uniting all eight Arctic (A8) states while actively giving Indigenous people a voice. The founding document, the Ottawa Declaration (1996), explicitly states that the Arctic Council shall not address military issues and matters of hard security. As regional interaction and cooperation increased, the region disappeared from the radar of global power politics (Raspotnik & Østhagen, 2022). This marked the beginning and flourishing of Arctic exceptionalism.

2.1.2. Arctic security & geopolitics

“The future security of the Arctic is inseparably connected to the response of Arctic states to new challenges.” (Padrtova, 2020)

Security studies can be divided into traditional, realist and non-traditionalist comprehensive approaches. The traditional approach identifies the state as the most important actor in the international governance system. Padrtova (2020) states that “sovereign states [are] pursuing their own self-interests to maximise power in order to survive in a competitive state system” (p.31).

The Copenhagen school introduced the concept of comparative security, which encapsulates a comprehensive approach to security. Buzan, Waever and de Wilde (1998), the founders of the Copenhagen school, announced the need for a theory that could study security issues beyond the traditional military conflicts. Their theory of comprehensive security takes the perspectives of multiple actors (state and non-state), multiple levels (global, national, regional, local) and a wide variety of security topics (military, economic, environmental, societal, and political) into account (Gjørsv & Hodgson, 2019).

At the end of the Cold War, the argument emerged that low-politics issues, such as economics, social issues and the environment, could be used effectively “to promote cooperation and increase overall security by spilling over into the high-political realm” (Sam-Aggrey & Lanteigne, 2020). Environmental effects rarely stay confined to state borders. There is growing acknowledgement that environmental security concerns should be addressed via a multilateral approach, which paved the way for Arctic cooperation. The Arctic Council is an offshoot of previous A8 attempts to develop joint protection of the local environment under the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS). Heininen and Exner-Pirot (2020) highlight the security nexus of the post-Cold War Arctic. They argue that the Arctic changed from military confrontation to cooperation and a focus on environmental security (Heininen& Exner-Pirot, 2020, p.4). Change in security premises and the rapid climate change led to the necessity of a paradigm shift. They argue in favour of focusing on environmental security, as all security sectors are interconnected, but climate change is the most pressing threat to the region’s overall security. Sam-Aggrey & Lanteigne (2020) note that it is no surprise that environmental concerns can feed into insecurity. A stable Arctic environment is thus crucial for general Arctic security.

Pic and Lasserre (2019) point out that the Arctic is changing, implying that this will affect regional security and cooperation. Since 2014, Arctic security has been deteriorating, as a shift in narrative from environmental security back to politico-military security can be noticed. The crises taking part on a global level have a continuously transformative effect on the dominant Arctic security narrative (Gricius & Raspotnik, 2023; Padrtova, 2020; Raspotnik & Østhagen, 2022). Gjørsv and Lanteigne (2020) note that a comprehensive security framework is necessary to understand how different perceptions of security interact. They highlight that the growing array of security questions might lead to new state and sub-state dialogue forms.

While scholars still praised the cooperative nature of Arctic governance until 2022, the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine has changed the region’s security situation. Raspotnik and Østhagen (2022) raise the fragile Arctic security dialogue issue. The region can no longer be separated from events happening on a global scale. The NATO-Russia discourse has overshadowed Arctic security,

and spillover from the international level into the regional level can thus be noticed. The AC does not address military-related security issues (Pic & Lassserre, 2019). In addition, pausing its official meetings raises the question: where should one talk about Arctic-specific security challenges (Raspotnik & Østhagen, 2022)? Before the Russo-Ukrainian war, they argued that the Arctic's security trajectory was determined by the strategic interactions of NATO, Russia, the other Arctic states and the EU (Raspotnik & Østhagen, 2022). Looking at the future of the Arctic security environment now, Raspotnik and Østhagen (2022) argue that the outcome will largely depend on the West's response to Russian actions.

2.1.3. *Arctic Exceptionalism*

“Arctic exceptionalism’ – an idea stemming from the Cold War era, whereby the region was portrayed as a unique ‘zone of peace’ and a ‘territory of dialogue’ between the West and Russia, despite conflicts elsewhere in the world.” (Mikkola, Paukkunen & Toveri, 2023, p.3)

As previously mentioned, the region is praised for its ‘exceptional’ character concerning its governance mechanisms. Käpylä and Mikkola (2015) note that the Arctic region is exceptional in political scope for two reasons. It is “a unique region detached from global political dynamics”, which thus characterises it as “an apolitical space of regional governance, functional co-operation, and peaceful co-existence” (Käpylä & Mikkola, 2015, p.5). It can be seen as a “distinctive region in international society” (Young in Käpylä & Mikkola, 2015, p.5). Exner-Pirot & Murray (2017) define Arctic exceptionalism as “the successful effort to maintain cooperation in the region despite internal competition for resources and territory and to compartmentalize Arctic relations from external geopolitical tensions” (p.47). The word ‘effort’ in the definition thus indicates that it is the Arctic States’ joint decision to keep the region peaceful. They argue that the Arctic international society takes conscious steps based on Arctic internationalism to promote cooperation between the Arctic states (Exner-Pirot & Murray, 2017, p.48). Arguably, this order can be disrupted when the states fail to maintain this strong institutional framework.

Käpylä and Mikkola give the reader four key assumptions for why the region can be considered a zone of peace and cooperation. They argue that it is not inherently exceptional but rather the unique conditions that foster the spirit of cooperation. First, there is *not that much to fight over to begin with* (Käpylä & Mikkola, 2015, p.8). About ninety per cent of the undiscovered hydrocarbon reserves lie within the undisputed Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of the individual Arctic states. Next, they state that the Arctic region has *existing governance structures that foster cooperation and can defuse potential conflict dynamics* (Käpylä & Mikkola, 2015, p.8). The Arctic governance agenda is manifolded, so the Arctic falls under multiple governance structures and organisations. They mention the UNCLOS, Arctic Council and International Maritime Organisation as among the most important

governance frameworks for the Arctic. By not dealing with issues of hard security, Käpylä and Mikkola (2015) argue that these institutions further encourage the spirit of cooperation and respect for the rule of law. In addition, *Arctic states have explicitly expressed their interest in international cooperation* (Käpylä & Mikkola, 2015, p.9). By endorsing Arctic multilateralism, the Arctic states actively work together to maintain the zone of peaceful cooperation. Lastly, *Arctic states have little to gain* (Käpylä & Mikkola, 2015, p.10) from Arctic conflicts. Disrupting peaceful cooperation in the Arctic would only lead to unfruitful investments and hinder the development of the economy and business developments. They then note that these arguments are only valid when considered in relation to avoiding intra-Arctic conflict. This view only considers the Arctic's regional dynamics without considering global political dynamics. Raspotnik and Østhagen (2022) further question the exceptionalist narrative by exploring whether or not one can separate issues on the regional level from events on the global scale.

Exner-Pirot & Murray argue that recent history concerning Crimea (2014) and Georgia (2008) has reaffirmed that the Arctic is exceptional, "(...)narratives of conflict or at least spillover (...) have failed to be realised" (Exner-Pirot & Murray, 2017, p.55). Regional cooperation in the Arctic has proven resistant despite the involved states' antagonistic positions. Like Käpylä and Mikkola (2015), Exner-Pirot & Murray (2017) have established four arguments to show why Arctic international relations are exceptional. First, due to the unique geography of the Arctic, states have *marine and environmental interests*. Formal regional cooperation centres on marine issues concerning trade, security, pollution and climate change. In the literal sense, climate change and "marine matters are fluid" (Exner-Pirot & Murray, 2017, p.58). They do not respect national borders, leaving cooperation between the involved states as the only option to deal with these issues. Next, an unusual amount of political space is given to non-state actors such as Indigenous organisations, scientists and academics or (environmental) NGOs. This attributes a unique role to the Arctic's *epistemic community*. The very diverse network of non-state actors has played a stabilising role in the regional society. In addition, there is no *likelihood of military conflict*. The states' borders are undisputed, while the UNCLOS (United Nations, 1994) regulates the continental shelf dispute. The Arctic is thus not a lawless zone but rather regulated by international multilateralism and legal frameworks. The large majority of undiscovered Arctic resources are said to be located in the states' EEZ. Conflict is thus unlikely. Furthermore, the Arctic states have nothing to gain from military conflict in the Arctic. It would just drive investors away, which is not in the economic interest of any state. Lastly, the exceptional narrative rests primarily on the unique cooperation between Russia and the other seven Arctic states. *Russia's interests* in the Arctic are manifold. It has too much to lose, making a possible military conflict in the Arctic unthinkable. Russia needs foreign investments to push its Arctic economic sector. The increasing

militarisation of the Russian Arctic seems more focused on domestic political interests than aggression against its Arctic neighbours.

While this section has sought to provide an overview of scholars that argue in favour of the existence of Arctic exceptionalism, this notion is further discussed in the discussion part of this thesis. Applying the securitisation theory to the concept of Arctic exceptionalism allows for a discussion on the accuracy of the term. Arctic experts and politicians have differing opinions of the term's validity, especially in light of the current geopolitical situation in Europe. Käpylä and Mikkola (2015) argue that “the paradigm of Arctic exceptionalism appears to be an insufficient approach to understanding both the present and the future of the global Arctic.” (p.5).

2.2. Aim and research questions

The literature review has sought to establish the interconnectedness of Arctic security and exceptionalism. Departing from the general concepts, they have been examined through the works of prominent scholars in the field. Reading into the Arctic exceptionalism narrative from an Arctic security viewpoint has allowed discerning that the notion is somewhat contested in the current geopolitical situation faced by the European Arctic and the world.

For decades, the Arctic was marked by exceptionalism regarding international cooperation in sustainable development and environmental protection, leading to peace and stability in the region. Using cooperation as the primary governance mechanism made the region immune to global events. A positive transition from military conflict to an increasing focus on environmental security has been noticed by scholars. Recent geopolitical developments concerning the Russo-Ukrainian war have disrupted this evolution.

From the previous literature on Arctic security, a research gap has been identified concerning the current changing narrative of Arctic exceptionalism in relation to Arctic security. A two-folded puzzle has been identified from the literature. First, when considering global politics, more than Arctic exceptionalism is needed to understand Arctic security governance's present and future. Second, one has to look at the West's response to current challenges to analyse Arctic security's future. Extensive research has been done on the Arctic states' policies and approaches to security governance. However, a case study of the Nordic's current approach to the European Arctic could not be found in the previous literature. The focus on the changing discursive narrative in relation to current geopolitical shifts is a reasonably recent topic. Not a lot of academic articles have been published after March 2022. This thesis thus seeks to fill this gap by examining the changing security narrative in relation to Arctic exceptionalism in the European Arctic. This thesis investigates the Nordics' approach to the European Arctic by examining how the Nordics construct security threats. To do this, this thesis is guided by the overarching research question:

How does increasing securitisation in the Nordics' approach to the European Arctic challenge the notion of Arctic exceptionalism?

To best answer this question, a set of sub-questions has been identified, namely:

1. How do the Nordic countries construct security threats in the European Arctic in 2020-2022?
2. What are the dominant securitising narratives in the Nordic countries regarding the European Arctic post-Ukraine war?

To examine the increasing securitisation in the Nordics' approach to the European Arctic, first, a state-of-the-art has to be established by doing a securitisation reading of the Nordic Arctic policies. The policy analysis seeks to answer sub-question one. Interviews with Arctic experts and elite conducted in 2023 allow one to study current securitising narratives that have emerged after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Subquestion two is answered in the analysis of these interviews. This two-folded analysis is necessary to answer the overall research question. Relating the findings to previous and current securitisation trends allows one to discuss how increasing securitisation challenges the notion of Arctic exceptionalism.

3. Theory

3.1. Securitisation theory

While traditional security studies are only concerned with security in the military sector, Buzan, de Wilde and Waever (1998) seek to present a new framework based on a broader agenda for security studies within the field of International Relations. The securitisation theory was established as a constructivist analytical tool by the Copenhagen School in the 1990s. They incorporate the traditionalist, state- and military-centred approach, including the political, economic, societal and environmental sectors. Within their theory, they use a range of concepts that need explanation.

In the traditional military-political understanding, *security* is about survival. When state representatives talk about security, they declare an emergency condition that needs extraordinary measures to handle them. It thus takes politics beyond the established conventions and presents the issue as a concern above politics (Buzan et al., 1998). Here the authors note that there is no universal definition to the concept of 'security' as its meaning lies in its usage. There is not one predefined understanding of security. It is rather about the process or practice of declaring something a security issue that presents something as an existential threat. No real threat needs to exist. It is about perceiving and representing an existential threat, making it a security issue. Thus, security is a discursive practice taking place in a specific setting and context.

The nature of the *existential threat* has to be understood in regard to the character of the *referent object*. Buzan et al. (1998) define the referent object as "things that are seen to be existentially threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival" (p.36). However, in each sector (military, political, economic, societal and environmental), a specific threat is identified as threatening a referent object. Table 1 summarises the examples of referent objects and threats with the different security sectors elaborated by Buzan et al. (1998, p.22-23). This table is completed by referent objects and threats concerning the European Arctic to understand how securitisation can be used as an analytical tool (in blue).

Sector	Referent object	Threat
military	The state Political entities Armed forces Maritime sphere	Coup d'état War Blockade of sea routes
political	State sovereignty State ideology Supranational institutions Regional governance institutions	Questioning recognition, legitimacy or governing authority Undermining the governing rules, norms and institutions Disputes on the continental shelf Disrespect of international law
economic	Firms National economies Survival of population	(national) Bankruptcy Changes in laws making firms unviable Sanctions Competition over valuable natural resources
societal	Large scale collective identities (nations, religions) Indigenous people Arctic Youth	Challenges and changes threatening the collective identity Rural exodus
environmental	Survival of individual species and types of habitat Maintenance of planetary climate and biosphere Survival of human civilisation	Climate change Melting ice caps (nuclear) Pollution Rising sea levels

Table 1 Referent objects and threats in the different security sectors (inspired by Buzan et al., 1998)

The securitising actor tries to securitise an issue. The actor does this by framing something, the referent object, as existentially threatened. The securitising actor can be political leaders, governments, non-governmental organisations or any actor who has the power to frame an issue as being a security threat. The securitising actor performs a speech act through which they present something as an existential threat requiring exceptional measures to handle the threat. A functional actor will carry out the exceptional measures required to address a security threat. Functional actors can be government agencies, military organisations, law enforcement bodies, or any other actor that can implement exceptional measures. However, the audience will decide whether or not a securitising move was successful. An issue only becomes securitised once the audience collectively agrees on the nature of the threat. This is when we can speak of securitisation. However, the concept of audience is highly complex, according to Balzacq, Léonard & Ruzicka (2016), as there are several possible audiences. It is hard to discern which audience reacts to a specific securitisation move, and acceptance among them is hard to measure.

Buzan et al. (1998) argue that any public issue can range from non-politicised to politicised to securitised. In non-politicisation, the state does not deal with an issue, nor is it in any other way elevated to the status of public debate. The first level of public debate is a politicised issue, here, it is part of public policy and requires government attention. When the politicisation of an issue is not enough to reach the aspired goal, actors tend to securitise it. The issue is then framed as an existential threat requiring emergency measures (Buzan et al., 1998, p.23). Securitisation can thus be seen as unfavourable because it entails a failure to deal with an issue in ordinary politics. Buzan et al. (1998) argue that desecuritisation of an issue is the optimal long-range solution. Relating the five security sectors introduced by Buzan et al. (1998) to the Arctic region allows us to tie the theory to the case.

3.1.1. The military sector

The military sector focuses on the state as the critical actor in securitisation moves. The referent object is usually the state; perceived threats can be anything of military origin threatening the state's survival. The Arctic region is becoming increasingly militarised due to geopolitical competition amongst countries like Russia, China, and the United States investing in military capabilities in the region. Military security is, therefore, an essential concern for many Arctic states.

3.1.2. The political sector

The political sector includes the stability and legitimacy of political systems, the ability of governments to maintain order and control, and the protection of human rights and freedoms. The referent object is usually the state's sovereignty and ideology, but it can incorporate supranational or regional institutions. Multiple regional institutions, such as the Arctic Council or the BEAC, govern the Arctic. Respect for international law and governance mechanisms is the key to securing the region.

3.1.3. The economic sector

The economic sector relates to the survival of the national economies. It includes the stability and growth of economies, control of trade and distribution of resources. Possible referent objects are the national economy and the population in question. Threats can be trade regulations, sanctions or unfair distribution/exploitation of natural resources. The Arctic has significant economic potential with its vast natural resources. Managing the exploration and exploitation in a sustainable and just manner is thus the focus of economic security. Economic security can easily be linked to social security, as the economic potential in the Arctic gives its population many new job opportunities.

3.1.4. The social sector

The social sector focuses on the possible inter-state of community conflict due to threatened collective identity. The referent object could be social institutions, cultural traditions, values and identities. A threat could be anything that challenges the survival of the collective identity. Usually, the social sector is heavily linked to the economic and environmental sectors, as these sectors can give rise to challenges and opportunities for the social sector. The European Arctic is home to the continent's only Indigenous people. Their cultural and linguistic traditions should thus be preserved. Societal security in the region involves protecting and preserving these traditions and promoting social cohesion and inclusion.

3.1.5. The environmental sector

The environmental sector is concerned with protecting natural resources and ecosystems, including managing pollution and climate change. The referent object can be the regional or global environment. A human civilisation or regional populations can also assume the role of referent objects. Climate change is accelerating three times faster in the Arctic than in any other part of the world. Melting ice and rising sea levels have significant environmental implications for the Arctic's sensitive ecosystem.

4. Method and material

After establishing the theoretical frame through which the analysis is guided, the next section is devoted to selecting primary and secondary sources and how they are analysed. With recent global geopolitical developments, the Arctic has become an increasingly exciting region for international relations, foreign policy and security studies.

4.1. Research Design & Case Selection

Yin (2014) identified case studies as an appropriate approach to studying a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. Furthermore, case studies are the preferred method to answer 'how' or 'why' questions in a scenario where the researcher has little to no control over behavioural events. Case studies research comprises an all-encompassing method, according to Yin (2014). It covers the logic of design, data collection techniques and approaches to data analysis. This thesis uses case studies as a research strategy, not a method of analysing the empirical data. As elaborated later, qualitative content analysis provides the framework for empirical analysis.

The case selection has been motivated by a thorough reading of previous research on Arctic security. This led to identifying a research gap and formulating the research question: How does increasing securitisation in the Nordics' approach to the European Arctic challenge the notion of Arctic exceptionalism? To answer this research question, the Nordics' shifting securitisation concerning the European Arctic has been identified as the overarching case.

As a shift in narrative is investigated, the case is bound to two separate time frames, 2020-2022 and 2023. The selected case is longitudinal, meaning the same case is studied at two points in time (Yin, 2014). Longitudinal cases allow one to study the stages at which changes reveal themselves. The time frames were selected to accurately depict the Nordics' threat perception before and after the Russo-Ukraine war outbreak.

The analytical part of this thesis will be conducted through a qualitative case study of the empirical material. A two-folded analysis of the two time frames and data types is conducted to answer the overarching research question. 2020-2022 is studied through the Nordic countries' Arctic policies. This allows establishing the state-of-the-art of Nordic securitisation in the European Arctic before the Russian war. The second part of the analysis comprises an analysis of interview findings conducted by the researcher in 2023. This part will show the dominant securitising narratives following the Russian war in Ukraine. These two parts are combined in the discussion by analysing how the increasing securitisation challenges Arctic exceptionalism.

4.2. Data collection & production

The data collection process is split into multiple sections. Different data had to be collected to answer the various sub-questions. The data collection is motivated by a qualitative research approach. Policy documents have been selected to answer sub-question one. Interviews conducted by the researcher were selected to answer sub-question two. The overarching research question is addressed in a final reflection and thus uses the acquired information from all selected data. Using multiple data sources and different data collection methods contributes to the data's reliability. In order to do this, a triangulation process is applied to approach the research problem from different angles (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p.175).

4.2.1. *Policy documents*

This thesis aims to discern the discursive components of Nordic Arctic policies by using qualitative content analysis to find patterns of securitisation in the European Arctic. The first part of the findings is based on an analysis of the Arctic strategies of the selected states. Based on previous research, there has been a trend of revising national Arctic strategies around 2020. To answer the first sub-question, the timeframe from 2020 to February 2022 has been identified. Policies written during this time will accurately depict the securitisation trends pre-Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This allows for a later discussion of the topical research gap of the current changing narrative of Arctic exceptionalism concerning securitisation in the European Arctic. The primary sources were selected as they are the respective governments' official guidelines for the Arctic region. Only limited intertextual research has been conducted on the most recent Nordic Arctic policies. An online search on the respective governments' websites was conducted to retrieve their most recent policies that fall between 2020-2022. The identified Arctic strategies are:

- Government of Sweden, 2020, Sweden's Strategy for the Arctic Region
- Norwegian Government, 2021, The Norwegian Government's Arctic Policy
- Government of Iceland, 2021, Iceland's Policy on Matters Concerning the Arctic Region
- Finnish Government, 2021, Finland's Strategy for Arctic Policy
- Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands: Kingdom of Denmark Strategy for the Arctic 2011–2020

The Kingdom of Denmark proved to be a deviant case when compared to its Nordic colleagues. Denmark only published one Arctic policy in 2011 that laid out the priorities for 2011-2020. Works on an updated Arctic policy were initiated in 2019 but then put on hold due to the elections in Greenland and the Covid-19 pandemic. Denmark has yet to publish their updated strategy. During

the data collection process, it has come to the researcher's attention that the Danish Foreign and Security Policy 2022 includes the Arctic as one of its priority areas. Its Arctic Policy (2011) and Foreign and Security Policy (2022) analyse Denmark's construction of military and political security threats. This allows for equal treatment amongst the studied countries while getting Denmark's updated views on current security threats.

- Regeringen, 2022, Foreign and Security Policy Strategy 2022

These six documents serve as primary sources to establish a discursive framework of Arctic security governance by the Nordics. To outline the general discursive framework of Arctic governance and security, the documents mentioned above were supported by topic-relevant secondary literature.

4.2.2. Interviews

Interviews conducted by the researcher are used to answer sub-question two. As the interviews were conducted between March-May 2023, they accurately depict the securitisation trends post-Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

As a primary purpose of interviewing in political science, Halperin & Heath (2020) have stated that the researcher seeks to produce data contributing to answering the research question. This research is complemented by data acquired from semi-structured interviews. The validity of data from an interview depends to a large extent on the quality of the selected interviewees. Elite and expert interviews have been identified as the best-fitting type of interviewees to answer the overarching research question. A thorough research on the political elite and experts concerning Arctic security studies has been conducted to identify the eight desired interviewees. The first step was to contact the desired interviewees by informing them about the nature of the research and formally inviting them to participate in online face-to-face interviews. The goal was to find one interviewee per analysed country to keep objectivity. The expert interviews seek to contribute general information about the European Arctic region; they do not focus on one specific country. Upon confirmation of participation, the involved parties fix a time and date for the interview. All interviewees get a letter of consent informing them of their rights concerning the study. Here they are left with the choice of whether or not they would like to be anonymised. It is up to the interviewee if they give written consent by signing the letter, or oral consent, at the beginning of the interview. Upon approval, all interviews were audio recorded. This benefits that the interviewer is not distracted by taking notes and facilitates transcription.

Before conducting the individual interviews, the researcher established an interview guide with preselected and possible follow-up questions (Appendix 2). The semi-structured nature of the interview allows the interviewer to adjust their questions according to the interviewee's responses

(Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2019). This allows for a more natural conversation while providing more significant insights into the interviewee's thoughts and experiences. As a disadvantage, however, having divergent data depending on the interviewee's expertise makes it harder to compare the responses. Generalisation would thus be problematic. Not only expertise but also the willingness to answer all questions can limit the results. Securitisation, especially military security, being a sensitive topic might lead some interviewees to refuse an answer. Their personal views or professional affiliations might hinder the researcher's interview expectations.

Halperin & Heath (2020) define the political elite as people "who exercise disproportionately high influence on the outcome of events or policies in your research area" (p.322). The challenge would thus be getting a positive response from those people. In this research area, the political elite is identified as people working for the foreign ministry that might be involved in drafting the Arctic policies or are engaged in the Arctic Council.

Experts are "individuals with specialised knowledge or expertise relating to a particular issue" (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p.324). The researcher looked for people in academia with Arctic security and geopolitics expertise. A few prominent people have contributed to Arctic security studies by publishing valuable scholarly works. The expert interviewees could be university professors or research fellows in Arctic-related think tanks.

4.3. Data analysis

4.3.1. *Qualitative content analysis*

While the case study allows for an in-depth examination of the case, qualitative content analysis is used to analyse the data, policy documents and interviews systematically. Within the case study methodology, qualitative content analysis (QCA) is a valuable tool to analyse and interpret the textual data collected within the case study. QCA has its origin as a critique of quantitative content analysis. Scholars such as Kracauer (1952) or George (1959) (in Schreier 2012) have criticised the purely quantitative nature of the content analysis. The quantitative content analysis does not grasp the complexity of meaning that is context-dependent. QCA emerged as a relatively new method in the second half of the 20th century. Schreier (2012) defines QCA as a method for "describing the meaning of qualitative material in a systematic way" (p.1). It can deal with rich data that require interpretation to reveal its meaning and context, while the research question determines the angle from which the data is analysed. Schreier (2012) notes that QCA is systematic, flexible, and reduces data. It is systematic in that all data is analysed according to the coding frame allowing for an interpretation and presentation of the findings. This contributes to the method's reliability. QCA is flexible, as the coding frame has to be tailored to the empirical material. This ensures that the

coding frame is reliable and valid. The coding frame is valid when the categories adequately represent the concepts under the research question (Schreier, 2012). Coding frames can be theory-driven but must be adapted to the specific material under analysis. QCA reduces data. The analysis is limited to the text's aspects relevant to answering the research question. Classifying the data according to specific codes allows for a reduction of irrelevant data and easier identification of relevant information. Specific information on the individual level is reduced, but it will allow for a cross-case reading of the findings.

The further steps of performing a qualitative content analysis of the empirical material are introduced in the next part, the analytical framework.

4.3.2. Analytical framework

As introduced in the theory section (3.1), this thesis seeks to apply the securitisation theory to analyse how increasing securitisation of the European Arctic challenges the notion of Arctic exceptionalism. The material is analysed using the two time frames, pre-Russian-aggression (2020-2022) and post-Russian-aggression (2023). Arctic policies will study the 2020-2022 time frame, while interviews serve as data for the 2023 time frame. Drawing on the securitisation theory introduced by Buzan et al. (1998), a coherent analytical framework allowing for a qualitative content analysis of the primary sources has been established.

While keeping the overarching research question in mind, the data is studied according to the main themes and concepts. In preparation for the analysis, a theory-based coding scheme has been established. This allows the researcher to systematically identify and categorise different aspects of the data. The table below shows the first coding scheme applied to a subset of the data to test its accuracy and execution.

Theme/ Code	Keywords
Securitisation high	Threat, war, military, race to the Arctic, resource competition
Securitisation low	Rising tension, possible conflict
Desecuritisation	Zone of Peace, cooperation, exceptionalism, Arctic Council

Table 2 First coding scheme established based on the Theoretical framework

Testing the first coding scheme on a subset of the data has helped identify any issues or challenges with the approach. Refining the coding scheme was necessary to link the theory to the concept of Arctic exceptionalism. A data-driven rewriting of the coding scheme was essential to conduct a qualitative content analysis of the studied case. Here it became evident that a sequential analysis of the two data types is necessary.

Conducting a sequential analysis allows initial policy analysis using one coding scheme (Table 3). A different coding scheme is used to analyse the interviews (Table 4). The filled-out coding schemes are found in Appendix 3 and 4. This sequential approach allows the policy analysis first and establishes a foundation for understanding the context before examining the interviews in light of the policy framework.

The national policies are analysed according to a theory-driven coding scheme. Table 1 (in section 3.1.) can be consulted as a reference point for possible referent objects and perceived threats in the different security sectors. A first reading of the policies allows the researcher to locate securitisation as a phenomenon (Buzan et al., 1998, p.169) by colour-coding them according to the different security sectors. This is not always easy, as the security sectors are often interconnected, where one perceived threat could affect multiple security sectors.

Splitting the policy analysis into the five security sectors allows a more precise and coherent analysis of the underlying factors/units of securitisation. However, only some issues can be regarded as threatening Arctic security. In this manner, military, political and environmental have been identified as producing findings most relevant to answering the research question. Economic security is closely linked to environmental security, as most Arctic business is rooted in natural resource extraction. Social security is likely to affect something other than Arctic security. While there are undoubtedly socio-economic issues among the Arctic population, a rising conflict in the form of a civil revolution is doubtful.

The existential threat, referent object and exceptional measures will be studied by applying the theoretical framework of securitisation theory (Buzan et al., 1998). For the 2020-2022 time frame, the analysed documents are official state policies by the Foreign Ministries of the respective state. The state can thus be identified as a *securitising actor* in all instances of securitisation from 2020-2022. Table 3 shows the operationalisation of the theory that will be applied to the study of the policies to reveal instances of securitisation in the Nordics' approaches to security governance.

Qualitative content analysis provides the necessary support to the theory to study the underlying context in which these discursive practices occur. Studying the context and the power relations that guide the securitisation process allows the researcher to attribute each security sector with a securitisation grade. As previously mentioned, Buzan et al. (1998) argue that any public issue can range from non-politicised to politicised, to securitised, to desecuritised. As non-politicisation is defined as an issue not dealt with by the state nor elevated to the status of public debate, it does not apply to this study. The state deals with all issues addressed in the empirical material, so the minimum level on the grading scale has to be 'politicised'. When the politicisation of an issue does not reach the aspired goal, it will be elevated to the level of securitisation. The following proposed level is thus that

of the ‘securitisation move’. Issues that are just on the verge of politicisation but have not yet been accepted by the audience will be positioned here. Next, when the audience fully accepts a securitising act and proves to be successful, the level of ‘securitised’ has been achieved. Although less studied, ‘desecuritisation’ is the optional long-range solution to any issue (Buzan et al., 1998). This can be achieved when an issue previously elevated to the securitisation level is returned to the political or non-politicised sphere. The applied grading scale for securitisation is:

Politicised ⇒ securitisation move ⇒ securitised ⇒ desecuritised

Sector/Code	Example	Referent object Who needs to be protected?	Perceived threat Who or what is presented as posing a threat?	Exceptional measures What is the solution to the threat?	Securitisation grade * 2020-2022
Military security Political security					
Environmental Security (including instances of social and economic security)					

Table 3: Revised Coding scheme for policy documents based on Securitisation theory

*Grading scale: Politicised ⇒ securitisation move ⇒ securitised ⇒ desecuritised

The 2023 time frame is studied through interviews with the Arctic elite and experts. This will answer the question: What are the dominant securitising narratives in the Nordic countries regarding the European Arctic post-Ukraine war? The Arctic elite represents their state’s views and opinions. Here the state, with its political elite, is also identified as a securitising actor. As for the Arctic experts, it varies; they are part of the epistemic community that can influence policymakers. Analysing the interview findings requires a more data-driven coding approach. After conducting the first interviews, the coding scheme was designed following the interview guide to reveal securitisation narratives.

Securitisation narratives	Sub-categories	Findings
Militarisation & NATO	Sweden & Finland's NATO application	
Arctic Council & environmental security	Pausing of Arctic Council meeting Restoring Arctic Council activity Chairmanship of Arctic Council Environmental research Climate change threat	
Arctic exceptionalism & desecuritisation	Was there ever Arctic exceptionalism? Can Arctic exceptionalism be restored?	

Table 4: Coding scheme for the qualitative content analysis of interviews

4.4. Ethical considerations

Working with interviews as a tool for new data production entails various ethical considerations. The Vetenskapsrådet's (2002) four ethical principles are followed, namely, requirements relating to information, consent, confidentiality and utilisation. The interviewee is informed of the purpose of the interview and made aware of the voluntary nature of their participation. The interviewer will treat the interviewees with respect and make sure not to use language that could cause discomfort to the interviewees. During the interview, the interviewee is not obliged to answer questions they do not feel comfortable with. The information acquired from the interviews is strictly confidential and stored securely. Only the author of this thesis will have access to it. Data is stored according to the GDPR. The interviewees are made aware of the possibility of staying anonymous. Upon completion of the interviews, the interviewee is given the opportunity to debrief and ask any questions they may have about the study. Interviewees also have the possibility of contacting the interviewer at any time after the interview. Interviewees wishing to read the finalised thesis will be sent a copy after it is handed in to the University of Gothenburg.

4.5. Limitations

Case studies are often criticised for their lack of validity. To construct general validity, this research has used multiple sources of evidence. This has significantly guided the data collection process. A triangulation process is used by employing various data sources, methods, or perspectives to enhance the validity and reliability of the case study. Different types of textual data, such as interviews and documents, are used to understand the studied case comprehensively. The triangulation process strengthens the credibility of the analysis.

When deciding what is part of the case, one also excludes some aspects from the analysis. This thesis focuses on the Nordics' approach to the European Arctic in 2020-2022 and 2023 to stay within

a reasonable scope. A four-folded exclusion underlies this decision. First, this thesis does not analyse the Arctic countries of Canada, the US, and Russia's approach. Second, limiting the analysis to the European Arctic creates a geographical exclusion of the remaining parts of the Arctic region. Third, the Nordics' approach is studied through state narrative, excluding non-state actors and stakeholders in the Arctic region. Lastly, a temporal limitation is necessary to draw current conclusions. These exclusions were necessary to stay within a reasonable length. This, however, allows for further research on the topic.

Generalisation is hard to achieve with this study, as the findings and analysis are tailored explicitly to the European Arctic and the Nordics approach. Extending the study to the remaining three Arctic countries would likely present different results. In addition, the interview findings are hard to generalise, as each interviewee represents their personal views. The thesis is also time-sensitive. It will be completed in May 2023, when the geopolitical situation could change instantly. This would make many of the findings outdated; it will, however, remain representative of the current situation in May 2023.

Additionally, objectivity is hard to maintain in a qualitative case study. Many personal decisions influence the research process. Subjectivity does not necessarily imply invalidity. The researcher knows their subjectivity relating to personal bias, interpretation and meaning. The researcher strives to minimise bias throughout the research process by ensuring transparency and considering alternative perspectives. Critical geopolitics and new regionalism were considered possible alternative theories before conducting the empirical analysis. While they proved to be valuable theories for studying Arctic security, they would not answer this thesis' specific research question and have thus been discarded.

5. Findings

The following section presents the findings from the analysis of the empirical material. The results are divided into two parts according to the two studied time frames: 2020-2022 and 2023. The first part is organised according to the countries. This is because pre-Russian war, the individual countries had different threat perceptions and approaches to dealing with them. The second part is structured according to the three securitising narratives identified in the interviews. The Russia-Ukraine war has led to a more consistent threat perception among the Nordic countries, making the country separation redundant.

The 2020-2022 findings seek to answer the question: How do the Nordic countries construct security threats in the European Arctic in 2020-2022? Results from the military and political security sectors are presented first, followed by environmental security. Each security sector presents the referent object, perceived threat and exceptional measures to assign it with a securitisation grade.

The 2023 time frame addresses the question: What are the dominant securitising narratives in the Nordic countries regarding the European Arctic post-Ukraine war? The findings are taken from the interviews conducted with Arctic experts and diplomats. Here, the results largely depend on the willingness of the interviewees to talk about current securitisation trends. Certain interviewees did not touch upon all security sectors.

5.1. Policy Findings 2020-2022

5.1.1. Finland

Military and political security

Finland has strong internal security that Police, Border Guards and rescue services guarantee. There is no visible sign of internal military/political security conflict, which is why the internal dimension of traditional security is merely politicised; no exceptional measures or perceived threat could be identified.

“At the same time, turmoil in international policy and military tensions in the rest of the world are also reflected on the Arctic region, where the political interests of great powers may result in confrontations.” (Finnish Government, 2020, p.17)

Political and military turmoil and disagreement outside the Finnish border impact the European Arctic region. Political and military instability in the European borderlands, especially in Russia, has been named as posing a challenge to keeping the Arctic a zone of peace and cooperation. In this securitisation process, the peaceful and cooperative nature of the Arctic is identified as a referent object of the traditional security sector. There is no direct military confrontation inside the Finnish Arctic area, but growing international attention by great powers could lead to regional tensions. The

perceived threat by Finland is thus the lack of cooperation caused by the strategic interests of great powers like China or Russia. Confidence-building measures by the US, Canada and the European NATO members are already being conducted. An exceptional measure that is suggested in the Finnish Arctic policy is the possibility of an Arctic summit:

“(...) create a possible forum for addressing security policy matters, which are outside of the Arctic Council’s mandate.” (Finnish Government, 2021, p.19)

This is an exceptional measure, as military security issues are beyond the AC’s mandate. However, this is where the securitisation move failed, as the audience did not accept it. Taken that the Arctic epistemic community assumes the role of the audience, they agree that there is no need for a forum that discusses military-political security. The Arctic Council, including the eight Arctic states and Indigenous people organisations, should remain the main governance forum for the region.

Environmental security

Environmental security is dominated by a narrative of the threats posed by climate change. Climate change does not only threaten the Arctic region but rather the whole globe. The Finnish Arctic Policy is focused on climate change's impacts on the Arctic region. While climate change can be identified as an overall threat, it encompasses many dimensions.

“Climate change mitigation and adaptation are relevant to all actors in the Arctic region from individual residents to municipalities, the regional level, states and businesses.” (Finnish Government, 2021, p.17)

If climate change is not dealt with accordingly, it poses a threat multiplier in all security sectors. It directly affects environmental security by threatening Arctic biodiversity. However, it also causes socio-economic challenges, like demographic change or unemployment. Climate change will make winter conditions more unpredictable while the summers face forest fire risks. Finland thus proposes several measures to combat climate change and save the Arctic environment. Apart from the regular measures in line with the Paris Agreement, Finland appeals to the coastal Arctic states not to open up any new fossil reserves in the Arctic. Particular emphasis is placed on including traditional Sámi knowledge in climate change mitigation work. Additionally, it is essential for Finland that Russia participates in international environmental cooperation in the Arctic. They are a crucial partner in reducing black carbon and other harmful emissions and improving nuclear safety.

Concerning economic development, climate change can create new opportunities. This has, however, to be conducted sustainably. Here Finland’s guiding principle is that of the economy of wellbeing.

“Economy of wellbeing emphasises the connection and balance between the three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Economy of wellbeing promotes social stability.” (Finnish Government, 2021, p.40)

5.1.2. Sweden

Military and political security

Sweden praises the AC for its “constructive spirit of cooperation” that has “functioned well despite a deterioration of relations between western countries and Russia at global level in recent years.” (Government of Sweden, 2020, p.14). It acknowledges the political discrepancies between the West and Russia but has an overall non-confrontational approach.

“Although relations with Russia have deteriorated in the light of its breaches of international law and the European security order, cooperation with Russia in the Arctic Council has functioned well.” (Government of Sweden, 2020, p.19)

Sweden acknowledges the problem outside of the Arctic but prefers to focus on excellent and orderly cooperation within the Arctic region. Some naivety has, however, to be noted here:

“It is an overarching Swedish interest to uphold respect for international law and the rules-based world order, which form part of the foundations for international security and stability in the region.” (Government of Sweden, 2020, p.5)

Respect for international law is the crucial foundation for regional security and stability. Would not a breach of international law by Russia then have a spill-over effect on the Arctic security order? Although not explicitly stated, it could be argued that these contrasting statements hint towards a political securitisation move but are hidden under the non-confrontational nature of the Swedish Government vis-à-vis Russia.

“The current security policy challenges in the Arctic are not of a military nature.” (Government of Sweden, 2011, p.14)

While the 2011 Swedish Arctic policy was entirely in line with the after-Cold War spirit of desecuritisation, this narrative has changed in the 2020 strategy. One out of six priorities in total is entirely devoted to security and stability. This hints towards a feeling of uncertainty. Taking all steps necessary to keep the Arctic a region characterised by peace, security, and stability is all the more critical.

“Sweden will continue to closely follow the development of the security situation in the Arctic, including detecting and countering attempts to exert influence in and destabilising the region.” (Government of Sweden, 2020, p.21)

Three security policy trends have been identified in Sweden’s Arctic strategy. This allows us to identify the securitisation units at play. First, climate change has made the Arctic’s natural resources more accessible, leading to increased international interest by outside actors. Resource competition and competing continental shelf claims can be perceived as destabilising the region. The region’s stability and safety is the referent object that needs to be protected from rising competition caused mainly by climate change. Similarly, climate change has also opened up new maritime routes that need to be maintained under the law of the sea. Free navigation has to be resolved by diplomatic means.

Second, Russian military activity and build-up in the Arctic are increasing. NATO is, however, handling the situation by conducting confidence-building operations in the western part of the Arctic. Sweden states that there is a risk of an arms race as the military strategic importance of the Arctic has increased. As a clear political-military securitisation move, Sweden calls the Arctic “a dividing line between Western countries and Russia”. Third, the growing number of non-Arctic states expressing interest in the Arctic could further disturb the region’s stability. China is showing increasing interest in the area and has publicly demonstrated that it wants to exert more influence on developments in the Arctic. China’s selective respect for international law could lead to political conflicts of interest. Additionally, China is building up its naval forces, including submarines.

“More attention needs to be given to the military cooperation between China and Russia, especially regarding possible military cooperation aimed at the Arctic.” (Government of Sweden, 2020, p.23)

An increasing Sino-Russian military cooperation is thus a prospective threat to the European Arctic’s stability. As for now, observation, collaboration and confidence-building measures are the only measures the Swedish government proposes. While there are instances of military-political securitisation at play, the security developments remain merely politicised. The Arctic’s existing governance mechanisms, such as the AC, UNCLOS and bilateral- and multilateral agreements, are sufficient.

To add, “Sweden attaches great importance to the engagement of the EU in the Arctic.” (Government of Sweden, 2020, p.18). Being a European Union member state, Sweden welcomes the EU’s participation in Arctic affairs. Although it is not presented as a pressing need, more involvement in the EU certainly gives rise to debates among the Arctic states. The issue of EU involvement is politicised, though not by Sweden but rather by the non-European Arctic states.

Environmental security

Threatened biodiversity, the loss of habitat and Arctic species, ocean acidification, the spread of harmful substances like plastics, microplastics or nuclear materials, and mercury deposition are all direct consequences of climate change on the region’s vulnerable environment. Climate change poses the most severe threat to the Arctic environment, and changes are already clearly visible. The Swedish Government presents a whole set of measures to reach the target goals under the 2030 EU Green Deal agenda and exceed them.

“Sweden will therefore focus on action that contributes to achieving results in three main areas: limiting Arctic warming by reducing global emissions of both long-lived and short-lived greenhouse gases; conserving biodiversity in the Arctic including its marine environment; and establishing a global non-toxic circular economy.” (Government of Sweden, 2020, p.30)

While they comply with the regulatory measures under the EU Green Deal and the Paris Agreement, the policy proposes additional measures. Especially outstanding is their goal to be a fossil-free nation by 2045, a goal that would also benefit the Arctic's environment tremendously.

“The Government has the objective that Sweden will be the world's first fossil-free welfare nation and that, by 2045, Sweden will not have any net emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.” (Government of Sweden, 2020, p.6)

Additionally, the Government requests stricter global chemical control and improved nuclear safety and radiation protection. They are currently drafting a regional plan for dealing with marine litter. Fossil fuel extraction threatens the Paris Agreement's global efforts and must be phased out. Similarly, extraction of minerals from the deep sea must not be undertaken unless it has been thoroughly studied and “its effect on the marine environment, biodiversity and human activities are available.” (Government of Sweden, 2020, p.33). All of these extraordinary measures have to be conducted by taking traditional knowledge into account and working with international frameworks such as the EU, OSCE, and AC. The Arctic's environment can thus be identified as the referent object to be protected from the harmful consequences of climate change. A set of exceptional measures have been implemented to reduce global warming. The Swedish government has successfully securitised the environmental sector.

Apart from the effect of climate change on the Arctic's environment, the people living in this area are also confronted with these changes. Climate change endangers the Swedish Arctic's inhabitants, especially the Indigenous population. The region is faced with demographic challenges. The out-migration of young people and the ageing population threaten the region's social stability. The Government works closely with the other Arctic states, especially Norway and Finland, to preserve and develop the Indigenous population's identity, culture and traditional livelihoods.

Climate change also brings new opportunities to the Arctic region. Here the Swedish Government is mainly focused on how the increase in economic activity in the region can benefit local economic growth. Developing attractive tourist destinations and the mining industry are the most profitable business sectors in the Swedish Arctic. The economic sector is not threatened but flourishing with increasing opportunities for local economic growth.

5.1.3. Denmark

Military and political security

The Kingdom of Denmark's traditional security focuses on enforcing sovereignty and avoiding military escalation in the Arctic region. While the policy is a joint declaration by the three governments, it focuses on the Kingdom's Arctic territories: Greenland, the Faroe Islands and the seas around it. In 2011 the overall goal of the Kingdom's security policy in the Arctic centred around:

“preventing conflicts and avoiding the militarization of the Arctic, and actively helping to preserve the Arctic as a region characterized by trust, cooperation and mutually beneficial partnerships.” (Kingdom of Denmark, 2011, p.10)

This was a desecuritisation instance regarding the 2008 Illulissat Declaration. The Arctic is not an unlawful space, and the ‘race to the North Pole’ is merely a myth. The Arctic region builds on cooperation with respect for international law by all involved parties. While there are certain desecuritisation instances, the securitising moves outweigh them.

There is a general fear of the Kingdom’s sovereignty in light of anticipated increasing activity and territorial claims in the region. Maritime safety concerning new shipping routes and fisheries in international waters must be regulated under the UNCLOS—the same counts for conflicting claims to the continental shelves. With 14 direct references to enforcing sovereignty, it can be identified as the Kingdom’s referent object that needs to be protected from outside threats.

“The Armed Forces must be visibly present in and around Greenland and the Faroe Islands with regard to the enforcement of sovereignty and surveillance.” (Kingdom of Denmark, 2011, p.20)

Avoiding the militarisation of the Arctic is in clear contrast with the visibility of the Armed Forces. The visibly present Armed Forces can thus be identified as exceptional measures to protect the Kingdom’s sovereignty. Through confidence-building measures, observation and cooperation with Arctic partners, especially the US and NATO, the Kingdom ensures that “no systematic violations of territory can take place” (Kingdom of Denmark, 2011, p.21). This measure is reinforced in their Foreign and Security policy.

“The Government has decided to spend DKK 1,5 billion for a capacity package that, starting from 2023, will strengthen the Danish Armed Forces’ monitoring and presence in the Arctic and the North Atlantic.” (Regeringen, 2022, p.7)

This military spending was approved, making it a successful securitisation move. The Foreign and Security Policy also gives a clear depiction of what the perceived threat is. The Arctic is a geopolitical battlefield, confronted by Russian military build-up, China defines itself as a “near-Arctic state,” and a risk of an arms race in the region threatens its peace and stability.

“Because rising tensions in the Arctic constitute a threat against the entire Danish Realm and against global security.” (Regeringen, 2022, p.23)

Exceptional measures, such as the Arctic capacity package, are necessary to avoid the region's military and political escalation. This would harm the Danish realm’s sovereignty but also impact global security. The Danish Kingdom has fully securitised the military and political sector in the Arctic region.

Environmental security

“Climate change has major implications for the global, regional and local climatic and environmental conditions and requires global action.” (Kingdom of Denmark, 2011, p.9)

The Arctic environment is exposed to the effects of global warming. Shrinking sea ice, melting of Greenland’s ice sheet, endangered ecosystems, and the influx of invasive species are all direct consequences of climate change in the Arctic. However, the challenges to the Arctic’s environment provoked by climate change are presented in a future outlook tone. There is a lack of urgency in the policy’s tone. Possible outcomes of climate change are outlined, but tangible evidence is missing. The policy was written before the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015.

“Denmark’s commitment to renewable energy targets under the EU is 30% by 2020. Greenland will increase its share of renewable energy to 60% of total energy production by 2020.” (Kingdom of Denmark, 2011, p.30)

The policy’s measures include increased use of renewable energy sources, safeguarding the marine environment against pollution by enhancing maritime safety, monitoring and systematic collating of research findings, protection of biodiversity, and prevention of marine pollution. In addition, living resources such as fish, shellfish and marine mammals shall be harvested sustainably. As Greenland is responsible for all matters relating to natural resource extraction, the Kingdom’s policy does not focus on this, besides saying that it should be conducted sustainably based on scientific research. Collaboration with the Kingdom, other Arctic nations and stakeholders interested in the region are necessary to implement the measures.

While the measures seem fit to address climate change challenges, they are not presented in securitisation rhetoric. Climate change is presented as possibly endangering the Arctic’s fragile and unique environment. However, it does not yet pose an existential threat.

Climate change will significantly change “the basis of the Arctic inhabitants’ lifestyles and the Indigenous Arctic people’s culture.” (Kingdom of Denmark, 2011, p.9). The Greenlandic and Faroe Islands’ population’s social security in relation to culture and food security is directly impacted by global warming. Additionally, there is rising controversy concerning their rights to hunt marine mammals, like seals and whales. There are several threats to the population’s social security; they are, however, not elevated to the securitisation level. Possibly because of the difficulties of addressing such issues in a three-folded government setting.

“The huge economic potential in the Arctic must be realized while appreciating its human impact, i.e. the economic and social integration of the population and with sensitivity to environmental concerns, thereby creating a healthy, productive and self-sustaining community.” (Kingdom of Denmark, 2011, p.23)

The economic sector cannot be analysed without the social and environmental sectors. Climate change and technological development are opening up many new possibilities in the Arctic region. The

exploitation of oil, gas and minerals, tourism, new areas for fishing and new Arctic shipping routes are among the new possibilities. These opportunities must, however, be realised with respect to the human and environmental dimensions.

“Mineral resources shall be exploited under the highest international standards of safety, health, environment, preparedness and response, and transparency with high returns for society.” (Kingdom of Denmark, 2011, p.23)

As part of Greenland’s self-rule, they have completely taken over the mineral resources area. The Greenlandic authorities have taken over any decisions on developing, exploring and exploiting resources. New opportunities must be exploited in close cooperation with the industry, and the Danish realm ensures an optimal regulatory framework for exports and investments with relevant international partners. While the traditional livelihoods of Indigenous people are threatened, the new possibilities in the resource exploitation sector seek to positively contribute to Greenlandic economic safety and stability.

5.1.4. Norway

Military and political security

The continental shelf is an issue that was once highly securitised by Norway. However, these political conflicts have now been resolved due to the willingness of the A5 to cooperate under the principles of international law.

“National sovereignty is undisputed in almost all areas of the Arctic. Only a few sea areas are beyond national jurisdiction.” (Norwegian Government, 2021, p.11)

This issue has been desecuritised. It is returned to the average politicised level, as Norwegian sovereignty is no longer threatened.

Throughout the policy, however, Norway sheds light on the necessary preparedness of the Allied forces in the event of war or crisis.

“NATO is the cornerstone of Norway’s security and our defence and deterrence policy is based on effective national defence and the guarantee of Allied reinforcements in the event of war or crisis.” (Norwegian Government, 2021, p.3)

With direct reference to Russia and the deteriorating relations with the West since Russia’s annexation of Crimea, Norway is not withholding their argument. Russian military build-up is perceived as a clear threat to “the security of Norway and other Allied countries.” (Norwegian Government, 2021, p.16). The security of Norway but also the other Allied countries is at stake. While Russia is the perceived threat, the responsive measures are more involvement by NATO and increasing spending on Norwegian defence.

“In addition, Russia is demonstrating an ability to make use of a broader range of instruments. In particular, the new generation of strategic submarines, new missile programmes and the

revival of the bastion defence concept aimed at protecting Russia's strategic capabilities as far as the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) Gap could have major implications for NATO's ability to keep the sea routes over the North Atlantic open. This is important to allow for Allied reinforcement of Europe in the event of a crisis." (Norwegian Government, 2021, p.16)

Russia's military modernisation is also threatening maritime security. Unsafe and unstable maritime routes could significantly affect NATO's response capabilities in the event of war or crisis. Norway's security and defence policy is based on guaranteed support from Allied countries, so they welcome more NATO involvement. In this manner, US strategic bomber aircraft are carrying out flights over the Barents Sea. US Navy and UK Royal Navy surface vessels conduct operations in the same area. These are exceptional measures, as such operations have not been conducted since the 1980s. Is this a return to the Cold War militarisation of the Arctic? The Norwegian Arctic policy can thus be read as a successful securitisation move.

Environmental security

Climate change is identified as the biggest threat to the Arctic region. It has severe implications for the environmental, economic and social security sectors.

"The rapid warming of the Arctic is endangering Arctic species and ecosystems that are dependent on ice and snow, and also poses a threat to local communities and the way of life and culture of indigenous peoples." (Norwegian Government, 2021, p.8)

Climate change threatens the Arctic particularly strongly but presents unprecedented global challenges. In the Arctic region, it causes sea ice to shrink, snow and glaciers to melt, thawing permafrost, loss of biodiversity, wildfires, endanger the ecosystems and loss of suitable habitats for Arctic species. So while climate change is the threat, the Arctic environment is the referent object that needs to be protected through climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. As special measures, the policy names the importance of achieving the long-term temperature target of the Paris Agreement. The Norwegian Government will take all necessary steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2030 compared to the 1990 level. Until 2050 they want to transform Norway into a low-emission society where greenhouse gas emissions have been reduced by 90-95%. To achieve this goal, Norway cooperates with the EU and the Arctic states to reduce black carbon emissions. The Arctic Council provides an essential framework for the scientific basis for ecosystem-based management, a plan to combat marine litter and microplastic in the Arctic and sets the agenda for reducing black carbon emissions. The environmental sector shows securitising instances. However, the proposed measures are nothing out of the ordinary—the urgency in their tone calls for the necessity of prompt action.

The national economic focus is on the region's natural resources, raw materials, and energy security.

“The region is rich in natural resources that contribute to economic growth for the country as a whole, and the economy and social development of this region are therefore a matter of national importance.” (Norwegian Government, 2021, p.6)

Here the main point is Norway’s energy security that is ensured due to Norway’s abundant access to renewable energy sources. Having a self-sustaining energy grid and being one of the leading energy suppliers of the EU ensures the countries’ economic wealth. In this regard, Norway’s economic sector is not threatened.

5.1.5. Iceland

Military and political security

Iceland highlights that the security and defence landscape in the Arctic region has changed significantly in recent years. Shifts in international relations have affected the geopolitical status of the region. The policy highlights that any arising disputes or conflicts must be resolved peacefully based on respect for international law. An adequate legal framework and institutional systems are in place. The UNCLOS regulates any issues regarding continental shelves; Arctic coastal states should respect this. Despite the orderly legal framework that is in place, tensions in the region are rising.

“Despite this, the tension level in the region is rising, with the main cause being increased Russian military developments and activities and the Western response to them.” (Government of Iceland, 2021, p.21)

Russia is increasing its military capabilities in their part of the Arctic region. Iceland criticises this by stating that the increase is “bigger than what the situation calls for” (Government of Iceland, 2021, p.21). The increasing Russian militarisation has a broader effect on the Arctic region that must be observed closely to prevent any conflict that might arise from it. Furthermore, international actors’ increasing interest in the region leads to more maritime activity. Here, specifically, China and Russia’s commercial interests should be examined closely as their increasing involvement in the region could have implications for its security-political dimension.

The policy notes that active cooperation with other Arctic and non-Arctic countries and international organisations is crucial for Iceland’s Security Policy. As a nation with no standing military, Iceland depends on its NATO membership and Defence Agreement with the US as its primary defence pillars. There is consensus in Iceland that they depend highly on cooperation and collaboration to keep the region a zone of peace. No instances of securitisations can be noticed. No narrative of crisis, war or existential threat can be noted. Raising awareness of Russian militarisation increases political-military cooperation amongst like-minded partners, especially the Nordic countries.

Environmental security

Global warming due to climate change poses a particular threat to the Arctic. The signs of climate change are already visible in Iceland. The region's most worrisome environmental developments are glacier retreat, pack ice decrease and permafrost thawing. The direct effects of rising carbon emissions cause ocean acidification. The balance of ecosystems and biodiversity on land and sea are also endangered. Additionally, ice-free waters allow for an increased shipping industry. This comes with the threat of pollution in Arctic maritime waters. Oil leaks, toxic substances, radioactive materials and plastic waste worsen the Arctic environment. The ecosystems are threatened by environmental changes, and the Arctic population is exposed to black carbon pollution.

While changes are visible in Iceland, “the climate threat poses a challenge that is not confined by borders.” (Government of Iceland, 2021, p.14). The effects of the warming of the polar regions are felt globally, and the rising sea level is a big concern. The policy thus appeals to the importance of international cooperation in efforts to slow down climate change and its consequences. The world's countries must uphold their obligations under the Paris Agreement on climate change. As an exceptional measure, Iceland seeks to exceed their 2030 objectives by aiming to be carbon neutral by 2040. By 2050 Iceland aims to be a leader in sustainable energy production and transition. “All over the world, the use of fossil fuels must give way to renewable energy sources” (Government of Iceland, 2021, p.14) are their guiding words for the sustainable energy transition. Iceland seeks to strengthen its monitoring capacities and reinforce scientific research to make the Green Transition happen. In addition, the rise in maritime activity within the Arctic Ocean necessitates heightened readiness in search and rescue operations and handling of accidental pollution occurrences. Although climate change poses an existential threat to the Arctic environment, Iceland does not propose exceptional measures arising from a securitisation move. Standard measures and impeccable international cooperation are the way to limit climate change’s harm to the Arctic environment.

“To utilise possible economic opportunities in the Arctic region with an eye to sustainability and responsible use of resources.” (Government of Iceland, 2021, p.4)

All economic opportunities shall be handled with an eye to sustainability and responsible use of resources. Increasing trade and cooperation with Greenland and the Faroe Islands provided additional opportunities.

5.1.6. Summary

Table 5 summarises this section’s findings. This analysis is necessary to discern the securitisation level in 2020-2022 under which Arctic exceptionalism was still functioning. Taking the previous securitisation level into account, the next part builds on the new securitisation of the Arctic region after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

	Military & political security	Environmental security
Finland	Securitisation move	Politicised
Sweden	Securitisation move	Politicised
Denmark	Securitised	Politicised
Norway	Securitised	Politicised
Iceland	Politicised	Politicised

Table 5: Summary of securitisation grade 2020-2022

5.2. Interview findings 2023

All interviewees were asked what they consider the biggest threat to Arctic security to highlight dominant securitising narratives among Nordic countries. For this reason, the interview findings are organised according to the dominant securitising narratives the interviewees touched upon. This will allow us to answer subquestion two: What are the dominant securitising narratives expressed by interviewees regarding the European Arctic post-Ukraine war?

5.2.1. Increasing militarisation and NATO membership of Finland and Sweden

Several interviewees highlighted Finland and Sweden's sudden application for NATO membership as a direct consequence of the changing security dynamic in Europe. This also impacts the security dynamic in the North. As noted by Interviewee 6, it builds a military-political division between the seven western Arctic states and Russia. While some interviewees criticise this sudden shift in focus on NATO, Interviewee 1 from Finland notes that "the NATO membership will enhance and improve the security and predictability in the Arctic region". Finland is NATO's newest member, while Sweden still awaits its acceptance. Interviewee 1 notes that the first priority for ensuring Arctic security and stability is ensuring that Sweden becomes a NATO member as soon as possible.

Interviewee 3, also from Finland, is critical of Finland's sudden NATO application. They note that NATO membership dominates Finland's foreign and security policy discourse. The Arctic is merely used as a point for justifying Finland's NATO application which was organised without first consulting the population via referendum. The critique is directed towards policy-makers and the political elite, claiming they want the Arctic to remain a zone of peace and cooperation but investing in military capacities instead of climate change mitigation. They further claim that NATO being

Finland and Sweden's current top priorities, would not leave room to discuss the actual situation of the Arctic.

“To this day, there are no armed conflicts in the Arctic region, none, zero. (...) The ironic thing is that now when there is a hot war in Europe, there is still this stable situation in the Arctic, with no armed conflicts. But of course, the politicians do not highlight this.” (Interviewee 3)

Interviewee 6 notes that Finland and Sweden's NATO membership application brings hard military issues back into the Arctic. Before the war, the Arctic states all praised that hard military issues were not discussed in the Arctic context. This has, however, now changed. “This change could be dangerous because you talk more about security in a hard fact and less in human/environmental security terms.” (Interviewee 6)

A clear shift in military security discourse can thus be noted. Especially Finland and Sweden, which were previously neutral, are now redirecting their focus on the military dimension. Various interviewees (2, 4, 5) have abstained from discussing NATO and increasing militarisation.

5.2.2. The importance of the Arctic Council & environmental security

All interviewees have identified climate change as seriously affecting the Arctic region's security. This can be related to increasing activity and international attention, environmental implications or the socio-economic dynamic. The focus of all these discussions is the importance of the survival of the Arctic Council.

Interviewee 3 focuses on how environmental protection triggered Arctic cooperation. Arctic cooperation in the 1990s was built on scientific and environmental cooperation to build confidence between the different Arctic states and involved actors. Former Cold War rivals could put their differences aside by focusing on environmental protection. Doing so created a situation with high geopolitical stability based on constructive cooperation between the parties. Interviewee 3 thus considers it crucial that the states continue to work together in climate change mitigation efforts. Letting hard military issues hinder the work of the Arctic Council will have serious implications for the Arctic's environment. They highlight that military threats cannot be differentiated from environmental threats as “even environmental degradation leads to a threat against state sovereignty” (Interviewee 3). The climate crisis poses the biggest threat to Arctic security. Interviewee 3 saw a positive development through the last 30 years. States were increasingly focusing on the environment, however, this work is now endangered by focusing on military affairs. The climate crisis, in combination with a focus on military security, will pose the most severe consequences on the future of Arctic security.

Less harsh but similar thinking was presented by Interviewee 4, from Denmark. They note that increasing military talk is understandable in light of the current situation. The military discussion

should not outweigh the urgency of the effects of climate change and environmental and socio-economic development. They note that despite the current geopolitical challenges outside the Arctic, issues arising in the Arctic can only be addressed by working together. The focus is on a smooth transition of the Arctic Council chairmanship from Russia to Norway on May 11th. There is an acute need for the Arctic Council to be up and running again, but this is impossible with the current war with Russia. Interviewee 5, from Iceland, agrees with this narrative. The lack of cooperation in the Arctic Council is the biggest threat to Arctic security. The Arctic Council could be a venue for increasing cooperation with Russia; this was necessary for confidence building after the Cold War. When the political climate allows it, it is crucial to get this venue back. Several interviewees (7, 6, 3) highlight that climate research needs to continue in cross-border exchange. Cooperation on climate change with Russia is crucial as most of the region's permafrost is in Russian territory.

Climate change per se is not the biggest threat to the European Arctic, as Interviewees 2 and 6 argue. Climate change poses a threat multiplier in the Arctic region. Instead, climate change's hindrance of regional developments poses the biggest threat to European Arctic security. "This plays into a broader general security issue. If we do not have people living in the North, we do not have a barrier, we do not have the human force if Russia would attack." (Interviewee 6). Climate change, the lack of young people, insufficient jobs, and deteriorating cross-border cooperation all destabilise Arctic security.

Several interviewees identify the necessity of the return to a functioning Arctic Council. The current situation does, however, not allow for it. Interviewee 6 is optimistic that as the issues discussed in the AC are rather soft, there is hope for a "relatively easy return to discussing softer issues" (Interviewee 6). This depends on if and when the Russian-Ukrainian war cools down, and the willingness of the other Arctic states to restore cooperation. The trust that has been broken will probably not be easy to restore.

5.2.3. On Arctic Exceptionalism

Interviewees were asked if they were familiar with the notion of Arctic exceptionalism and to what extent they agreed that the Russian invasion of Ukraine had marked the beginning of the end of Arctic exceptionalism.

There are some discrepancies between the interviewees on the usefulness of the 'Arctic exceptionalism' narrative. Interviewee 2 noted that multilateral cooperation is functioning well in other parts of the world, so is the Arctic really that exceptional? Interviewee 3 follows the same argumentation. Keeping the cooperation in the Arctic up after Crimea in 2014 is always used as an example to show the success of Arctic cooperation. However, cooperation with Russia also continued

in many other places as well. Interviewee 4 states that there is no need to put the 'exceptional stamp' on the Arctic, as the cooperation only functions so well because there is a need for the eight Arctic states to work together. There is no innate exceptionalism that makes the Arctic cooperation function. The states deliberately work together to uphold Arctic security. Interviewee 7 notes that much of the diplomatic relations between the states were driven by "making sure that Russia was where nations wanted Russia to be and not expand their power within the Arctic" (Interviewee 7). Similarly, Interviewee 4 states, "I think if you have exceptionalism anywhere, it is because the states or organisations believe that it is better to work together than not to work together.". Interviewee 6 prefers to call Arctic governance 'unique' but not exceptional. "Something unique has been created after the Cold War, but there was so much intention in this uniqueness" (Interviewee 6). Putting the complex region on an additional pedestal by calling it 'exceptional' might do more harm than good.

They all agree that the Russian war has hindered cooperation and possibly disrupted Arctic exceptionalism for now. Interviewee 1 notes that the debate is not on whether or not one can restore Arctic exceptionalism. However, one should focus on keeping the Arctic a region of peace and cooperation. Interviewees 1 and 2 both mention that there was no possibility of ignoring military happenings outside the Arctic. The Arctic is no longer immune to outside problems. "I do not argue against the argument that Arctic exceptionalism is over because what happened now was that security issues became after all a part of the balance. There was no possibility to ignore what happens outside the Arctic." (Interviewee 2). Interviewees 2 and 7 highlight that Russia's chairmanship of the Arctic Council made the issue more problematic. Had there been another chair, the pausing of the Arctic Council might have taken on a different nature, but this is all speculation.

Interviewee 5 adds another dimension to the discussion. Leaving military affairs out of the Arctic Council's agenda has allowed for the participation of Indigenous peoples. Deciding not to include military affairs left room for civilians to speak. This has contributed positively to the Arctic security dynamic. They believe the participation of Indigenous people helped to keep Arctic exceptionalism alive. Restoring discussions in the AC would thus be necessary when the political climate allows it.

Whether or not the interviewees agreed on the usefulness of describing the Arctic as exceptional, they agreed that the ultimate goal should be to keep the region one of peaceful multilateral cooperation. The securitisation discourse that can be taken from this narrative is that all instances under Arctic exceptionalism feed into the desecuritisation narrative first introduced by Gorbachev in 1987.

6. Discussion

Arctic exceptionalism refers to the idea that the Arctic region is a unique and cooperative area, characterised by peaceful international relations and a focus on environmental cooperation (Exner-Pirot & Murray, 2017). The region has been insulated from geopolitical tensions outside the region (Lackenbauer & Dean, 2020). The exceptional order in the Arctic region can be disrupted when the “international society does not take conscious steps to maintain a strong institutional framework that protects Arctic internationalism.” (Exner-Pirot & Murray, 2017, p.48). This thesis argues that increasing securitisation in the European Arctic challenges the notion of Arctic exceptionalism.

Analysing the Nordic countries' Arctic policies has allowed the researcher to get a picture of the securitisation level of the European Arctic in 2020-2022. Russian military build-up in the Arctic, deteriorating relations between the West and Russia, and increasing Sino-Russian cooperation have been identified as recurrent themes in the Nordic policies. Although their threat perception and approach to dealing with the threats differ somewhat, there seems to be a consensus that increasing militarisation of the Arctic could disrupt the region's peaceful multilateral cooperation. Military and political security can refer to state sovereignty. This explains why the different Nordic countries have divergent approaches to dealing with the increasing militarisation. While all Nordic countries have identified climate change as a severe threat to the Arctic's sensitive environment, individual policies do not securitise environmental issues. Individual securitisation is not necessary, as only through joint action on climate change mitigation can the harm be limited in the region. The Nordic countries are like-minded partners in the fight against climate change. International agreements such as the Paris Agreement or the EU Green Deal are in place to deal with the effects of climate change. In addition, working on making decisions together in the Arctic Council is more important than presenting individual goals and measures. As environmental matters do not respect state borders, a joint approach is necessary. Exceptional measures arising from securitisation by the individual states could do more harm than good. All environmental-related questions should be addressed together.

General concern about future military-political security is felt among the Nordic countries in 2020-2022. Studying the policies has revealed an increasing emphasis on the region's military, geopolitical and security aspects. In addition, climate change will open up many new economic opportunities in the region. This could add additional tension if not dealt with accordingly. The different security sectors are closely interlinked. As environmental development constantly changes the region, multilateral cooperation among the Arctic states is vital to ensure general Arctic security. Despite growing concerns, the five analysed countries deliberately work together to maintain the region one of peaceful dialogue and cooperation. All states identify the Arctic Council as an essential

institution embodying this cooperative approach. It can be argued that the policies align with the Arctic exceptionalism spirit of keeping the region detached from global political dynamics (Käpylä & Mikkola, 2015). Global dynamics, especially the deteriorating relations with Russia, are acknowledged; however, only in the spirit of not letting this come in between fruitful dialogue and efficient cooperation. The 2020-2022 securitisation narrative thus seems to not be in contrast with Arctic exceptionalism. As long as multilateral cooperation and respect for the legal framework are ensured, securitisation does not necessarily harm the continuation of the unique governance structure in the Arctic.

The 2023 conducted interviews show a different Arctic, where geopolitical issues and militarisation have overtaken the environmental protection agenda. The Arctic's security dynamics have changed due to the Russian war in Ukraine. Since the end of the Cold War, low-politics issues have been used effectively “to promote cooperation and increase overall security by spilling over into the high-political realm” (Sam-Aggrey & Lanteigne, 2020). This has proven to be a well-functioning governance mechanism and has been at the heart of what scholars call Arctic exceptionalism for the last 30 years. The interview findings have, however, revealed that Arctic exceptionalism could only flourish as long as military conflict was not happening too close to the European borderland. A clear shift in the security narrative can be noted from the interview findings. As the security sectors are closely related, large securitisation in one sector will likely affect the other. This is what has happened in light of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Interviewee 7 noted that the Russian war had united the remaining Arctic states' threat perception. While Russia is waging war in Ukraine, it has become unavoidable for the Western states to keep cooperation with Russia going. There are too many military-political disagreements between the parties that the war has led to a re-formation of two opposing blocs in the high north. This has been reinforced by Finland and Sweden's application for NATO membership. While certain interviewees note that if there is a conflict between the A8, it is not because of what is happening inside the Arctic Circle but rather the geopolitical setting outside. To prevent military affairs from overtaking the Arctic Council agenda, all activity with Russia was stopped in March 2022. This goes against the premise of Arctic exceptionalism: “to compartmentalize Arctic relations from external geopolitical tensions” (Exner-Pirot & Murray, 2017). The Russo-Ukrainian war, an external geopolitical tension, has paused the essential cooperation between the A8. Even though there is no sign of military conflict in the Arctic, Nordic foreign ministries have shifted their attention to increasing military capabilities and readiness in the case of conflict. The military security narrative has overshadowed the environmental degradation in the Arctic. Interviewee 3 is particularly discontent with the recent developments. They note that it feels like Arctic relations are returning to a pre-Cold War status. The focus on the high-political realm is seriously endangering the last 30 years of efforts in building confidence through cooperation in low-

political areas. The desecuritisation instance at the end of the Cold War seems to have been reversed again, high-politics spill-over into low-politics. While desecuritisation was the long-term goal for Arctic security, increasing military-political securitisation currently governs the Arctic region.

To answer the overarching research question, it can be argued that when the security narrative is dominated by military-political securitisation, it overshadows environmental security. The danger is that cooperative initiatives such as the Arctic Council could be lost, disrupting the peaceful narrative of Arctic exceptionalism. The Arctic Council, initiated in an instance of desecuritisation, has become the primary referent object that is existentially threatened. First, stopping all Arctic Council work, then resuming cooperation among like-minded partners, and now the premature handing over of chairmanship from Russia to Norway are all exceptional measures. These measures in the highest securitisation instance would not have happened were the Arctic Council's future existence not threatened. Concludingly, when military-political securitisation harms the peaceful efforts by the Arctic states under environmental cooperation, it is the beginning of the end of Arctic exceptionalism. The current geopolitical situation does not allow political cooperation between the Western Arctic states and Russia. Arctic exceptionalism is 'challenged' by increasing securitisation; it is currently, however, not wholly lost. All interviewees noted that cooperation with Russia was not stopped; they were not kicked out of the Arctic Council. As long as this cooperation is merely 'paused', there is hope for restoring Arctic exceptionalism when the time and political contexts allow it. Overall, all securitisation of the Arctic should have desecuritisation as an end goal. This relates Arctic cooperation to Gorbachev's Murmansk initiative of keeping the Arctic a zone of peace. The European Arctic shall be governed peacefully to provide a platform for lowering tensions in the European borderland. A prosperous and peaceful Arctic is a driver for the region's security and Europe at large.

Conclusion

This thesis is structured around answering the question: How does increasing securitisation in the Nordics' approach to the European Arctic challenge the notion of Arctic exceptionalism? The answer to the research question is developed through several chapters. First, the thesis' overall topic is presented in the introduction. Next, the literature review has introduced previous research on Arctic governance and regionalism, Arctic security and geopolitics and Arctic exceptionalism. Contextualisation helped to identify the research gap and discern the overarching research question. Securitisation theory is highlighted as the theoretical framework guiding the analysis. It is categorised into five sectors: military, political, environmental, social and economic. Military, political and environmental have been identified as most relevant to the further analysis. The next chapter has outlined the methods employed in this thesis, detailing the case selection, the data collection and production and the subsequent framework for analysis. A case study was used as a research strategy, while qualitative content analysis provided the framework for empirical analysis. The findings were presented in two parts. The first part answers the subquestion: How do the Nordic countries construct security threats in the European Arctic in 2020-2022? This is done through a thorough QCA of the Nordic countries' Arctic policies to reveal the current securitisation grade. Building on this, the following section introduced the interview findings to answer the question: What are the dominant securitising narratives in the Nordic countries regarding the European Arctic post-Ukraine war? These are structured in three themes: Increasing militarisation and NATO membership of Finland and Sweden, The importance of the Arctic Council & environmental security, and On Arctic exceptionalism. Last, the findings and the concept of Arctic exceptionalism were related to each other and the theory of securitisation to answer the overarching research question.

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that the increasing dominance of military-political securitisation in the Arctic region poses a significant challenge to the notion of Arctic exceptionalism. This shift in the security narrative has overshadowed environmental security concerns and can disrupt cooperative initiatives such as the Arctic Council, a symbol of peaceful Arctic governance. However, it is essential to note that while the current geopolitical situation hampers political cooperation between Western Arctic states and Russia, cooperation with Russia has yet to be halted entirely. The interviewees emphasised that Russia has not been expelled from the Arctic Council, suggesting hope exists for restoring Arctic exceptionalism when the right time and political context permit. In light of these findings, it is crucial to consider desecuritisation as an ultimate goal for the securitisation processes in the Arctic. The study highlights the importance of peaceful governance in the European Arctic to alleviate tensions in the European borderland by linking Arctic cooperation to Gorbachev's Murmansk initiative of maintaining the region as a zone of peace. A

prosperous and peaceful Arctic contributes to the region's security and has broader implications for Europe. The analysis has confirmed that Arctic exceptionalism is insufficient for addressing current challenges. However, through a securitisation reading and emphasis on the underlying context, it proves to be a valuable concept for fostering desecuritisation of the Arctic region and ensuring its stability.

As this is topical research, further research is needed to determine the evolving relationship between securitisation and exceptionalism. Based on these conclusions, researchers should consider researching the securitisation of the Arctic region as a whole, including Canada, the US and Russia. This would undoubtedly reveal additional conclusions. Many secondary and primary sources are available on Arctic security so that future research could employ different materials and methods.

Looking ahead, the future of Arctic exceptionalism in the face of increasing securitisation remains uncertain, especially for as long as the Russian-Ukrainian war continues. However, potential pathways can shape a more positive outlook for the region. First, fostering dialogue and diplomatic engagement between the Western Arctic states and Russia is crucial. Despite the current challenges, maintaining communication channels and seeking common ground on security and environmental issues can help mitigate tensions and restore trust. This requires a commitment from all parties involved to prioritise cooperation over confrontation. Here, the smooth transition of AC chairmanship from Russia to Norway is crucial. Second, efforts should be made to balance military-political and environmental security concerns. Recognising the interdependence of these two dimensions is vital for sustainable governance in the Arctic. Initiatives that promote cooperation, such as joint resource management, shared scientific research, and collaborative environmental protection measures, can help bridge the gap between securitisation and environmental concerns. Last, a long-term perspective is needed when addressing Arctic issues. Climate change, resource extraction, and regional geopolitical dynamics are complex and ever-evolving. It is crucial to adopt a future-oriented approach that considers the potential challenges and implications of these changes, considering the interests of both Arctic and non-Arctic states. Especially non-Arctic states are likely to play a more important role in the long term. There is hope for a future where the Arctic can maintain its exceptional status as a region of peaceful cooperation, environmental stewardship, and sustainable development. Continued efforts towards desecuritisation, enhanced international cooperation, and a balanced approach to security and environmental concerns are instrumental in shaping a positive future for the European Arctic and preserving the notion of Arctic exceptionalism.

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Appendices

Appendix 1- List of interviews

Interview 1: Finnish diplomat involved in the Arctic Council, online interview on 05.04.2023

Interview 2: Norwegian diplomat involved in the Arctic Council, online interview on 12.04.2023

Interview 3: Professor of Arctic Politics at the University of Lapland, online interview on 14.04.2023

Interview 4: Danish diplomat involved in the Arctic Council, online interview on 25.04.2023

Interview 5: Icelandic diplomat working at the MFA Iceland, online interview on 28.04.2023

Interview 6: Senior researcher at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute, Oslo, online interview on 02.05.2023

Interview 7: employee at the North Sweden European Office, Brussels, online interview on 11.05.2023

Appendix 2- Interview guide example

Topic	Open-ended questions	Follow-up questions
Introduction	Could you briefly describe your academic work in relation to the Arctic? Which theories do you focus on?	
Finland's approach	<p>What makes Finland's approach unique in comparison to the other Nordic countries?</p> <p>What factors influence Finland's Arctic approach?</p> <p>How do you explain the shift in priorities? (from prioritising economic benefits to climate change?)</p> <p>How has the discourse in relation to peace and stability changed? (2013, 2016, 2021, now)</p>	<p>What are Finland's current priorities (2021)?</p> <p>(transition) Could you provide some more details about Finland's approach to security and governance?</p>
Securitisation	<p>Are you familiar with the notion of securitisation?</p> <p>What are the biggest threats the European Arctic is currently facing? (military, political, economic, societal, environmental)</p>	How has the security discourse changed since the Crimean annexation?
Finland and the EU	In your view, How does Finland position itself vis-à-vis the EU in the Arctic context?	Will cooperation with the EU increase following Russia's invasion of Ukraine?
Arctic Exceptionalism	Scholars argue it's the end of Arctic Exceptionalism, do you agree?	

	<p>What do you see for the future in relation to security and governance in the European Arctic?</p> <p>Can Arctic exceptionalism be restored?</p>	
Russia	<p>How do the effects of Russian aggression hinder the implementation of Finland's Arctic policy strategy (2021)?</p> <p>Could you elaborate on the relationship with NATO?</p>	
End	<p>Do you have any final reflections that you would like to add?</p>	

Appendix 3- Coding of policies

Sector/Code	Example	Referent object Who needs to be protected?	Perceived threat Who or what is presented as posing a threat?	Exceptional measures What is the solution to the threat?	Securitisation grade * 2020-2022
<p>Military security Political security</p>	<p>“At the same time, turmoil in international policy and military tensions in the rest of the world are also reflected on the Arctic region, where the political interest of great powers may result in confrontations.” p.17</p>	<p>Arctic area as a whole</p>	<p>Lack of cooperation Strategic interests by great powers</p>	<p>Create an Arctic summit specifically for discussing security policy matters</p>	<p>Securitisation move</p>
<p>Environmental Security (including instances of social and economic security)</p>	<p>“Climate change mitigation and adaptation are relevant to all actors in the Arctic region from individual residents to municipalities, the regional level, states and businesses.” p.17</p>	<p>Arctic environment & population</p>	<p>Climate change (unpredictable winters and forest fires)</p>	<p>Regular measures under Paris Agreement and EU Green Deal Economy of wellbeing</p>	<p>Politicised</p>

Finland

Sector/Code	Examples	Referent object Who needs to be protected?	Perceived threat Who or what is presented as posing a threat?	Exceptional measures What is the solution to the threat?	Securitisation grade * 2020-2022
<p>Military security</p> <p>Political security</p>	<p>“Sweden will continue to closely follow the development of the security situation in the Arctic, including detecting and countering attempts to exert influence in and destabilising the region.” p.21</p>	<p>The region’s peace and security</p>	<p>Increasing international interest by outside actors Resource competition Russian military build-up Military cooperation between Russia and China</p>	<p>/</p>	<p>Securitisation move</p>
<p>Environmental Security</p> <p>(including instances of social and economic security)</p>	<p>“Sweden will therefore focus on action that contributes to achieving results in three main areas: limiting Arctic warming by reducing global emissions of both long-lived and short-lived greenhouse gases; conserving biodiversity in the Arctic including its marine environment; and establishing a global non-toxic circular economy.” p.6</p>	<p>Arctic climate</p>	<p>Climate change (loss of biodiversity, ocean acidification, nuclear materials)</p>	<p>/</p>	<p>Politicised</p>

Sweden

Sector/Code	Example	Referent object Who needs to be protected?	Perceived threat Who or what is presented as posing a threat?	Exceptional measures What is the solution to the threat?	Securitisation grade * 2020-2022
<p>Military security</p> <p>Political security</p>	<p>“The Armed Forces must be visibly present in and around Greenland and the Faroe Islands with regard to the enforcement of sovereignty and surveillance.” p.20</p> <p>“Because rising tensions in the Arctic constitute a threat against the entire Danish Realm and against global security” p.23</p>	<p>Denmark’s sovereignty</p> <p>Global security</p> <p>Maritime safety</p>	<p>Russian military build-up</p> <p>Increasing strategic activity and territorial claims</p>	<p>DKK 1,5 billion capacity package to strengthen Danish Armed Forces</p>	<p>Securitized</p>
<p>Environmental Security</p> <p>(including instances of social and economic security)</p>	<p>“Climate change has major implications for the global, regional and local climatic and environmental conditions and requires global action.” p.9</p>	<p>Arctic environment</p>	<p>Global warming</p>	<p>Nothing exceptional</p>	<p>Politicised</p>

Denmark

Sector/Code	Example	Referent object Who needs to be protected?	Perceived threat Who or what is presented as posing a threat?	Exceptional measures What is the solution to the threat?	Securitisation grade * 2020-2022
<p>Military security Political security</p>	<p>“NATO is the cornerstone of Norway’s security and our defence and deterrence policy is based on effective national defence and the guarantee of Allied reinforcements in the event of war and crisis.” p.3</p>	<p>Norway’s national defence Maritime security</p>	<p>Possible war or crisis Russian military modernisation</p>	<p>More NATO involvement Increasing spending on Norwegian defence Conduct operations in the Barents sea</p>	<p>Securitized</p>
<p>Environmental Security (including instances of social and economic security)</p>	<p>“The rapid warming of the Arctic is endangering Arctic species and ecosystems that are dependent on ice and snow, and also poses a threat to local communities and the way of life and culture of indigenous peoples.” p.8</p>	<p>Arctic environment Local communities</p>	<p>Climate change</p>	<p>No exceptional measures</p>	<p>Politicised</p>

Norway

Sector/Code	Example	Referent object Who needs to be protected?	Perceived threat Who or what is presented as posing a threat?	Exceptional measures What is the solution to the threat?	Securitisation grade * 2020-2022
<p>Military security Political security</p>	<p>“Despite this, the tension level in the region is rising, with the main cause being increased Russian military developments and activities and the Western response to them.” p.21</p>	<p>Arctic region</p>	<p>Russian military developments Rising tensions in the region</p>	<p>/</p>	<p>Politicised</p>
<p>Environmental Security (including instances of social and economic security)</p>	<p>“The climate threat poses a challenge that is not confined by borders” p.14</p>	<p>Arctic ecosystems & environment</p>	<p>Global warming & climate change</p>	<p>/</p>	<p>Politicised</p>

Iceland

Appendix 4- Interview Coding

Securitisation narratives	Sub-categories	Findings
Militarisation & NATO	Sweden & Finland's NATO application	"On security, from yesterday we are now a member of NATO. The NATO membership will enhance and improve the security and predictability in the Arctic region. The first priority is to ensure that also Sweden becomes a member asap."
Arctic Council & environmental security	Pausing of Arctic Council meeting Restoring Arctic Council activity Chairmanship of Arctic Council Environmental research Climate change threat	"The Arctic Council plays a key role in Arctic governance. The AC is the forum where the Arctic states come together to discuss issues of common concern."
Arctic exceptionalism & desecuritisation	Was there ever Arctic exceptionalism? Can Arctic exceptionalism be restored?	"Fundamentally, exceptionalism has meant that the Arctic region has been isolated from problems elsewhere and has managed to remain a zone of peace and cooperation. The common aspiration is that the region will continue to be a region of peace and cooperation, but it is no longer immune to things happening elsewhere."

Interview 1

Securitisation narratives	Sub-categories	Examples
Militarisation & NATO	Sweden & Finland's NATO application	"The AC does not deal with security, military or NATO. I do not deal with NATO issues at all, so I do not want to get into any discussion on this issue."
Arctic Council & environmental security	Pausing of Arctic Council meeting Restoring Arctic Council activity Chairmanship of Arctic Council Environmental research Climate change threat	"We haven't expelled Russia, formally they are still part of the Arctic Council." "To continue multilateral Arctic cooperation without Russia is less meaningful than having them somehow included."

Arctic exceptionalism & desecuritisation	Was there ever Arctic exceptionalism? Can Arctic exceptionalism be restored?	“I do not argue against the argument that Arctic exceptionalism is over because what happened now was that security issues became after all a part of the balance. There was no possibility to ignore what happens outside the Arctic.”
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Interview 2

Securitisation narratives	Sub-categories	Examples
Militarisation & NATO	Sweden & Finland's NATO application	“After the war had been started it had become more obvious, since then NATO membership has dominated the whole discourse of Finland's foreign and security policy.” “To this day, there are no armed conflicts in the Arctic region, none, zero. (...) The ironic thing is that now when there is a hot war in Europe, there is still this stable situation in the Arctic, with no armed conflicts. But of course, the politicians do not highlight this.”
Arctic Council & environmental security	Pausing of Arctic Council meeting Restoring Arctic Council activity Chairmanship of Arctic Council Environmental research Climate change threat	“It is of course the climate crisis, all of the environmental catastrophes combined. The rapidly advanced climate change in the Arctic combined with a collapse of biodiversity and pollution. The surprising thing is that states or decision makers on state level think that they can differentiate military threats from environmental threats. Even environmental degradation is a threat against state sovereignty.”
Arctic exceptionalism & desecuritisation	Was there ever Arctic exceptionalism? Can Arctic exceptionalism be restored?	“This is the reason why some of us were saying that the Arctic was exceptional. But I mean that didn't mean that it is some kind of determined situation. What I mean is simply that there were now common interests between the A8 and supported by indigenous peoples and some other non-state actors, this was rather new in a way.”

Interview 3

Securitisation narratives	Sub-categories	Examples
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Militarisation & NATO	Sweden & Finland's NATO application	(abstained from discussing NATO)
Arctic Council & environmental security	Pausing of Arctic Council meeting Restoring Arctic Council activity Chairmanship of Arctic Council Environmental research Climate change threat	"It's fine with all these military and security people talking about military and security policy in the Arctic and the new geopolitical order. But the challenges for those that work within the Arctic for many years are the effects of climate change, environment and socioeconomic development."
Arctic exceptionalism & desecuritisation	Was there ever Arctic exceptionalism? Can Arctic exceptionalism be restored?	"I think if you have exceptionalism anywhere it is because the states or organisations believe that it is better to work together than not to work together. So why is there a need to put the 'exceptionalism' stamp on it?"

Interview 4

Securitisation narratives	Sub-categories	Examples
Militarisation & NATO	Sweden & Finland's NATO application	(abstained from discussing NATO)
Arctic Council & environmental security	Pausing of Arctic Council meeting Restoring Arctic Council activity Chairmanship of Arctic Council Environmental research Climate change threat	"You can't talk about the Arctic without talking about climate change, it is that prominent."
Arctic exceptionalism & desecuritisation	Was there ever Arctic exceptionalism?	"That did prove to be quite useful, not just to maintain good relations with Russia but also because if you include discussions of military affairs a table, there is no room for civilians. That would have meant that the AC would not have benefitted from the

	Can Arctic exceptionalism be restored?	Arctic indigenous people's participation. I think their participation has helped maintain the Arctic exceptionalism. I wouldn't say that the Arctic exceptionalism was functioning for the time being, that it has been put on hold."
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Interview 5

Securitisation narratives	Sub-categories	Examples
Militarisation & NATO	Sweden & Finland's NATO application	"This change could be dangerous because you talk more about security in a hard fact and less in human/environmental security terms." "I think the war made it easier to some extent, in a way that the threat perception became the same. It is now Russia against the West, and how can we deter any Russian aggression?" "Overall the very fact that Finland and Sweden have joined NATO, that we are talking about this NATO hard-military issues about the Arctic, changes the Arctic."
Arctic Council & environmental security	Pausing of Arctic Council meeting Restoring Arctic Council activity Chairmanship of Arctic Council Environmental research Climate change threat	"The issues are rather soft. The AC does not address military security questions. I think you could relatively easy return to discussing softer issues."
Arctic exceptionalism & desecuritisation	Was there ever Arctic exceptionalism? Can Arctic exceptionalism be restored?	"Something unique has been created after the Cold War, but there was so much intention in this uniqueness." "A lot of steps have been taken to make the Arctic not exceptional, but conflict-free."

Interview 6

Securitisation narratives	Sub-categories	Examples
Militarisation & NATO	Sweden & Finland's NATO application	"Sweden is joining NATO, Sweden is building up its own military capacities."

<p>Arctic Council & environmental security</p>	<p>Pausing of Arctic Council meeting Restoring Arctic Council activity Chairmanship of Arctic Council Environmental research Climate change threat</p>	<p>“I know the AC still has meetings among seven like-minded partners. The reason they haven’t been able to do it officially is because Russia has been chairing the Arctic Council.”</p>
<p>Arctic exceptionalism & desecuritisation</p>	<p>Was there ever Arctic exceptionalism? Can Arctic exceptionalism be restored?</p>	<p>“Frankly speaking, most people here in the EU bubble are talking about the Arctic exceptionalism as a term that will definitely never come back.”</p>

Interview 7