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EXPLORATION AND ASSIMILATION OF ARCTIC TERRITORIES BY RUSSIA

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ABSTRACT:
FOR CENTURIES, THE ARCTIC HAS BEEN A TERRITORY THAT DUE TO THE SEVERE CLIMATE HAS BEEN DIFFICULT TO EXPLORE AND ASSIMILATE. HOWEVER, FOLLOWING THE EXPANSION TO THE EAST, RUSSIA MANAGED TO ENCOMPASS THE TERRITORIES OF THE NORTH OF THE EURASIAN CONTINENT. FOLLOWING THE COMPLETION OF THIS PROCESS, WHICH LASTED SEVERAL CENTURIES, FOR A PERIOD OF TIME THE ARCTIC AREA MEANT FOR THE RUSSIAN LEADERS ONLY A BUFFER ZONE FROM WHICH THEY CANNOT BE ATTACKED. IT WAS NOT UNTIL LATER THAT THE SOVIETS UNDERSTOOD THE POTENTIAL OF THIS REGION AND TRIED TO ASSIMILATE IT WITH THE HELP OF SEVERAL AUTHORITIES IN ORDER TO EXPLOIT IT. DUE TO THE VASTNESS AND CLIMATIC CONDITIONS, THE SUCCESS OF THE SOVIETS WAS LIMITED. AFTER THE FALL OF THE SOVIET UNION, THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION CONTINUED THE SOVIET EFFORTS TO ASSIMILATE THESE TERRITORIES, MAKING THEM ONE OF THE NATIONAL PRIORITIES OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE. IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND HOW IMPORTANT THE NATURAL RESOURCES OF THIS REGION ARE, THE EFFORTS OF THE RUSSIAN STATE TO ASSIMILATE AND EXPLOIT THE POLAR TERRITORIES OVER THE CENTURIES WILL BE PRESENTED AND ANALYZED.

KEYWORDS: EXPLORATION, ASSIMILATION, RESOURCES, ARCTIC, RUSSIA

INTRODUCTION

The Arctic has been and is closely linked to the evolution of Russia over the centuries, representing a border difficult to explore even nowadays. Due to the immensity of these territories, Russia needed several centuries to explore and assimilate these territories. In the sixteenth century, Russia began to expand eastward by enlarging its territories beyond the Urals, managing in 1680 to extend to the Pacific Ocean, and in 1741 to occupy Alaska. This expansion was largely not conducted by the state, but by Russian traders in search of furs and other riches, thus the true potential of the Arctic was understood much later.

Despite the assimilation of the Arctic territories and their exploration, Russia's presence in the region was limited until the twentieth century, when the Soviets understood the potential of these territories that the countries perceived only as a buffer zone from which the Tsarist Empire could not be attacked. The Soviets began exploring these territories and tried to turn the Arctic into a base of resources, but were only successful to some extent due

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to technological limitations and extreme conditions. Instead, contemporary Russia, which has failed to develop its economy and remained dependent on the export of natural resources, has turned the development of the Arctic into a national mission as its currently exploited deposits are being depleted. For these reasons, the Arctic remained an undiscovered territory. Russia's assimilation of the Arctic territories represents a particular case as the natural order of events has been reversed. They have been able to assimilate huge areas of territories, but failed to fully explore them as opposed to the natural order where territories are generally explored and later on assimilated.

From the evolutionary context of the contemporary Russian economy (which is largely based on the export of natural resources), of the situation of the Arctic (which is one of the last unexplored territories) and the phenomenon of global warming, we draw the thesis of the present research, respectively how Russia assimilated these territories and why it has been involved in the development of exploitation projects of Arctic resources at an unprecedented level.

The research objectives are to present the evolution of events in order to understand the role that these territories have for the contemporary Russian state. The research questions are: What does the Arctic represent for Russia? How has Russia explored and assimilated the Arctic territories over time? Why did Russia need so much time to assimilate and explore the Arctic territories? Why is Russia currently looking to develop the Arctic territories?

The research hypothesis of this paper starts from the idea that the Arctic is very important for Russia and over time, in various forms, has influenced its history. To understand this, we analyze how Russia assimilated and explored the Arctic, the different forms the country took over time and what role these territories have played for Russians in each historical stage. This topic has also been addressed by authors such as Scott G. Borgerson, Marlene Laruelle and Paul R. Josephson.

The paper consists of an introduction that raises awareness to the subject, namely how Russia explored and assimilated the Arctic territories. The content of the paper consists of three parts, the first covering the period until the end of the Tsarist Empire, the second covering the period of the Soviet Union and the third covering the period of contemporary Russia. Based on the facts presented in the three parts, a series of conclusions will be formulated at the end of the paper.

1. THE EXPANSION OF THE TSARIST EMPIRE IN THE ARCTIC AND EXPLORATION OF THESE TERRITORIES

The Arctic area in the literature is identified as the frozen region in Earth's Northern Hemisphere located beyond the Polar Circle, more precisely beyond the latitudinal line of 66 ° 34 'North.[2] For centuries, due to its extreme natural and climatic characteristics, it was a frontier that was very difficult to reach. Despite the inaccessibility, it has attracted the interest of many countries due to the riches it presents. One of the states with a historical link to these territories is Russia, as presented below.

By the end of the 16th century, Moscow had managed to assimilate all the territories in the western part of the Ural Mountains. In 1581, the Russians managed to cross the Ural Mountains, in 1628 reached the Yenisei River and in 1680 reached the Pacific Ocean. In the next century, in 1741, they managed to cross the Bering Strait and occupy Alaska. Led by

[2] "What is the Arctic?", National Snow & Ice Data Center, accessed April 25, 2020, https://nsidc.org/cryosphere/arctic-meteorology/arctic.html.

merchants looking for furs[3], this expansion was directed to the East, but also included the territories in the North of present-day Russia, territories that in the following centuries became a security buffer that served as a protective wall for a state that always feared being surrounded.[4]

Even though Northern territories had been assimilated, Russian leaders did not explore them until they had to protect Russia's interests over them. Following this situation, at the beginning of the 19th century, a series of Russian expeditions were organized, such as those of F. Litke (1821-1824), G. Ber (1837) and P.P. Kruzenshtern (1862). In the second half of the 19th century, the Tsarist Empire was no longer interested in the Arctic, despite states such as Britain, Norway, Sweden and Germany showing an interest in exploring them in search of new areas for fishing and coal extraction from Spitsbergen Island. Proof of these actions is the fact that the Swedes arrived on Spitsbergen Island and the Germans arrived on Bear Island, both islands being part of the Svalbard Archipelago, an archipelago that in 1871 was annexed by the Swedes. Also, in 1872 the Franz-Josef territories were discovered.[5]

Due to the neglection of the Arctic territories by the Russians, the Norwegians began to take advantage of this situation by fishing in Russian waters and selling the catch to the Russians. Following the situation, Russian leaders began to assess the economic and strategic potential of the region and adopted local protection laws such as banning Norwegian fishermen from storing their catch in Russian ports and building new ports such as the port of Aleksandrovsk (now Polyarny).[6]

Following the development of ports in the North, the Russians, Germans and British began to develop the Kara Route on a small scale, used to transport materials needed to build the Trans-Siberian Railway. The use of this route revealed the need for exploration and mapping in order to be used in the transport of goods, resulting in a mission in 1897 to research the area. Despite the research of that region, it was not possible to operationalize this route. In the same year, the Murman Scientific Expedition Committee was set up to remedy the precarious situation of the Russian settlements on the Arctic shores, during which the possibility of fishing in the Arctic waters was discovered. Shortly after this discovery was made, English and German trawlers began fishing in Russia's Arctic waters.[7]

Following this situation, in 1899 the Tsarist Empire sent its first icebreaker, Yermak, to the Svalbard Archipelago in order to assert its rights to this archipelago. Following the voyage, it was found that an icebreaker can reach places that conventional ships cannot reach. At the same time, the Russian banker M.K. Sidorov and a number of Russian lawyers sought to demonstrate the partially closed sea status of the Kara Sea in order to turn it into national territory and to declare the Novaya Zemlya Archipelago Russian territory.[8]

To protect its interests in the Arctic territories, Russia began to be more active in the region by exploring it in the early twentieth century. Thru these efforts, the Russians tried to make their presence felt after a series of Scandinavian expeditions in The Kara Sea in the second half of the nineteenth century, which represented more of the total number of expeditions than the ones led by Russia. Following these events, the Russians launched a

[3] Marlene Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2014), 25.
[4] Kathrin Hille, "Russia's Arctic Obsession", *Financial Times*, October 21, 2016, accessed April 25, 2020, https://ig.ft.com/russian-arctic/.
[5] Pier Horensma, *The Soviet Arctic*, (New York: Routlege, 1991) 8-10.
[6] Horensma, *The Soviet Arctic…*, 17-18.
[7] Horensma, *The Soviet Arctic…*, 18-19.
[8] Horensma, *The Soviet Arctic…*, 8-10.

large number of expeditions to the Arctic. One of the best-known expeditions is the Russian Polar Expedition from 1900 to 1902, which was led by the Russian geologist of Baltic origin, Eduard Toll, who conducted the expedition because he believed that navigation along the Siberian coast should be developed. Unfortunately, the expedition failed in 1902, after abandoning the ship Zarya and returning by the Lena River.[9]

Following this expedition, the Vice Admiral of the Imperial Navy Stepan O. Makarov tried to convince the tsarist leadership of the immense potential of the Kara Route and requested the construction of a fleet of icebreakers, but was refused. In 1904, war broke out between Russia and Japan, marking the moment when the potential of the sea crossings in the Arctic waters was accomplished, after the Trans-Siberian railway became overworked by military transport. As a result of this situation, the Kara Route became of use, with a successful expedition of 17 ships and an icebreaker. Unfortunately, this expedition was not large enough and failed to transport enough military equipment to the East, being one of the reasons why the Tsarist Empire lost the war with Japan in 1905.[10]

Following the loss of the war, the huge advantage of the much shorter sea route through the Arctic waters was found, and shortly after the war the Russian leadership began to finance the exploration of this sea passage. In 1906, a commission studied the Northeast Passage project and recommended the construction of two icebreakers to map the northern coast of Siberia. To carry out this project, a naval department was created to provide the two new icebreakers, which were built in Russia and were named Taymyr and Vaygach, named after the territories they were to explore. The two icebreakers were sent East to Vladivostok from where they would begin exploring the Arctic route to the West.[11]

In 1911, the Northwest Passage exploration operation was initiated, in which the two icebreakers started from Vladivostok and mapped the shores of Siberia from East to West. In 1914, the two were trapped in the ice near Cape Celiuskin, and the Russians sought help from the Norwegians, who offered their support and managed to unblock them. During this period, only once was it possible to cross the passage in 1914, by Nordenskiöld's expedition, which was made in 2 seasons after the ship was stuck in ice. In addition to successfully crossing the sea, Nordenskiöld's expedition discovered the Severnaya Zemlya Archipelago and helped identify the Northern territories that belonged to Russia.[12]

In 1916 Russia sent a diplomatic note to its allies and to the neutral states claiming the new islands it discovered, but also islands discovered by other states such as Bennett, Herald, Jeannette and Wrangel islands based on the principle of contiguity (neighboring territories), which meant that most of the islands that were discovered near the coast of Siberia would belong to Russia due to their position. Based on this diplomatic note from 1916, the northern border of Russia was described with relative accuracy for the first time. Unfortunately, the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution marked the end of the Russian Northern exploration.[13]

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Russia adopted a more active policy in relation to the territories of the Arctic only after feeling its sovereignty threatened in the region, when the Norwegians began fishing in Russian waters in the North - West and the Americans began to make their presence felt in the East. Only after these situations the Russians began to explore, develop and finally claim and delimit their northern territories. As

[9] Horensma, *The Soviet Arctic…*, 13-14.
[10] Marlene Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 25-26.
[11] Pier Horensma, *The Soviet Arctic*, 15.
[12] Horensma, *The Soviet Arctic…*, 15-16.
[13] Horensma, *The Soviet Arctic…*, 16.

a result of these events, the northern territories truly became territories under Russian sovereignty.[14]

2. INVOLVEMENT OF THE SOVIET UNION IN THE EXPLORATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARCTIC TERRITORIES

Shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution, the leadership of the Soviet Union in the 1920s began to realize the potential of the Arctic and to show increasing interest in this region in order to strengthen sovereignty through the development of the Northern Sea Route. The development of this passage was continued with the establishment of a research station in Murmansk, which mainly researched fishing, and was later transformed into the Northern Industrial Scientific Expedition. Also, for the research of Northern waters, the Floating Research Institute was created, which had the mission of mapping and researching all the Siberian rivers and their connections with the Arctic Ocean. Following the fast progress of aviation at that time, the Soviet Union began to develop trans-Arctic aviation, which stimulated research in the Arctic.[15]

Following the awareness of the potential of this region, the Soviet leadership set the goal of transforming the Northern territories into a production area. These territories presented a real challenge because, by the 1920s, the nearly 6000 kilometers of Arctic coast stretching from northern Europe from the Barents Sea to the Bering Strait were not even properly mapped.[16]

Despite the expansion of the borders to the Bering Strait, the great challenge for the Soviets was to establish administrative control over self-governing Arctic territories. In the first stage, the Soviets tried to establish local party cells or executive committees, which failed. The next solution during the 1920s was to assign responsibility to popular institutions, committees and commissariats, which coordinated their activity far too vaguely, which led to overlapping responsibilities and limiting Soviet activity in the region.[17]

All these efforts focused on these territories were carried out by the Soviets in order to establish the authority for the development of the economic potential of the Arctic. After managing to enter these territories, in the initial phase, the Soviets focused on the animal industry and foreign trade, which consisted of the development of fur collection centers and the export of timber from Siberia, and later the fishing industry was developed, which became one of the food sources of the Soviet Union.[18]

Despite attempts to assimilate and develop the Arctic territories, a major problem of the Soviets was that they did not have the necessary training and equipment to conduct economic activities in the region due to lack of scientific knowledge. Following this situation, during the 1920s, several scientific commissions and academies were set up to research the polar territories.[19]

Finally, the approach of using multiple authorities in the assimilation of the Arctic territories proved to be erroneous, at which point the Soviets adopted a new approach to the administration of the Arctic territories, which consisted of centralizing these agencies within a single authority. The authority chosen to coordinate maritime and economic activity along

[14] Horensma, *The Soviet Arctic…*, 19-20.
[15] Marlene Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 26.
[16] John McCannon, *Red Arctic – Polar Exploration and The Myth of The North in The Soviet Union*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5.
[17] McCannon, *Red Arctic...*, 5, 21-22, 23.
[18] McCannon, *Red Arctic...*, 22.
[19] McCannon, *Red Arctic...,*, 24.

the Northern Sea Route was the Committee of the Northern Sea Route (Komseveroput) which has existed since 1920, but became the main authority responsible for the Arctic only in 1928 with the launch of the First Five-Year Plan. Gradually, from the management of the waterway, this authority came to coordinate the work of several dozen agencies and to have more responsibilities that were established through the Five-Year Plans. This authority became very important after the Northern Sea Route was included as a key element in the Soviet Union's plans for the development of the Arctic territories, by developing the maritime transport network along the Arctic seas to be connected by Siberian rivers to Trans-Siberian railway.[20]

Komseveroput together with the Arctic Institute, during the 1920s managed to make a series of voyages that helped to successfully map the Novaya Zemlya Archipelago (1921), the Franz Josef Archipelago (1923), Wrangel Island (1924), the New Siberian Islands and Laptev Sea (1927) and make voyages on the rivers Ob, Yenisei, Kolyma and Lena. All these successes helped to strengthen the knowledge of the Soviets in order to build the infrastructure necessary for the operationalization of the North Sea Route, such as ports, supply bases and radio stations. These elements favored maritime and river transport in the region, which helped to develop trade by exporting raw materials and importing industrial equipment.[21]

Repeated transport trips on the Kara route during the 1920s helped to strengthen the experience of Soviet navigators who increased the navigation period from 48 days in 1920 to 70 days in 1928, which contributed to the significant increase in the volume of transported goods. This experience helped to make further trips to the East and to increase the volume of trade in the Arctic, but they were not efficient because much of the volume of goods transported was for export and far too little for import. Despite economic problems, these trips helped to strengthen the Soviet presence in the Arctic.[22]

During the first Five-Year Plan, Komseveroput helped strengthen the Soviet presence in the Arctic by consolidating the infrastructure elements and increasing the number of trips to the region that led to a growth in the number of inhabitants in the Arctic territories. Despite establishing a permanent presence, the Committee failed to develop the agriculture needed to transform these settlements to be able to sustain themselves, which led to a very costly process for the Soviet Union, and ended up having to permanently supply these settlements with food.[23]

Despite the contribution to the assimilation of the Arctic territories, in 1932 Komseveroput was abolished because it could not meet the expectations in the Five-Year Plan, which deviated much from the initial plans to develop exports of timber, fishing and hunting to the development of natural resources. In 1932, the Chief Administration of the Northern Sea Route (Glavsevmorput) was set up to explore and develop the Arctic, and was led by explorer Otto Schmidt. This agency assimilated all Komseveroput staff and received much more power, managing the work of around 200,000 people and being responsible for the research, development, exploitation and transport of natural resources in the region. The new agency continued the development of the Northern Sea Route in order to operationalize the maritime passage and transport natural resources from the Arctic territories. In the 1930s, metals from the Kola Peninsula, coal from Vorkuta, oil and gas from Ukhta were exploited

[20] McCannon, *Red Arctic...*, 5, 24, 25.
[21] McCannon, *Red Arctic...*, 26-27.
[22] McCannon, *Red Arctic...*, 28-29.
[23] McCannon, *Red Arctic...*, 31-32.

with priority, and in the 1940s the exploitation of metal deposits began in the Norilsk region, in the context of the Soviet Union adopting a new strategy for the rapid development of the industry.[24]

Glavsevmorput became the most powerful authority to gain control of all Soviet forces in the North, but because of its complexity it failed to determine its main purpose, namely scientific research or industrial development. In 1933 the agency turned to economic development, neglecting research due to pressure from the Soviet leadership, seeking to use the polar stations in the development of the Arctic territories.[25]

In an attempt to operationalize the Northern Sea Route, since 1932 Glavsevmorput has organized a series of expeditions along the entire maritime passage to be completed in a single season, succeeding in 1936 to organize the first commercial voyage consisting of a convoy of 14 ships carrying cargo. After that, the agency aimed to develop navigation on Siberian rivers by extending the length of navigation routes.[26]

In terms of exploration, Glavsevmorput distinguished itself by sea voyages along the Northern Sea Route, by conducting trans-Arctic flights and landings at the North Pole such as the 1937 landing, and by establishing the first outpost at the North Pole. All these expeditions strengthened the prestige of the Soviet Union in the Arctic.[27] Despite the great successes, Glavsevmorput failed to live up to expectations after encountering a number of logistical and economic difficulties due to accidents, which came to affect its funding, as it failed to capitalize on the Arctic territories due to the failure to coordinate the work of his staff.[28]

Eventually due to the poor economic results Glavsevmorput was demoted in favor of Dalstroy (Main Administration for Construction in the Far North) which led to the transfer of economic responsibilities and staff to the new authority responsible for the Arctic. This authority was chosen because it had results through its approach. It initially developed the infrastructure and only later the exploitation of natural resources (these results are found in the way the gold deposits in the Kolyma River area were exploited after developing the infrastructure in the region). In 1938, in turn, Dalstroy was assimilated and integrated into the GULAG system, which addressed the development of the exploitation of the Arctic territories with the help of forced labor camps that lasted until 1956. This approach was changed with the rise of Nikita Khrushchev to the leadership of the Soviet Union, who made the decision to use paid labor instead of forced one.[29]

Following the demotion of Glavsevmorput, that was not disbanded but was given a single mission, the operationalization of the Northern Sea Route, which it did in 1939. The operationalization of this maritime passage proved very useful with the beginning of World War II in 1939, reaching to transfer its military fleet, natural resources and supplies received from the Americans with the help of the Northern Sea Route.[30] After the war, the Glavsevmorput was recognized by the Soviets as a success and was honored for its support of the Red Army, resuming its activity and having the largest fleet of icebreakers and aircraft operating in the Arctic until 1970, when it was replaced in 1971 by the Administration of the Northern Sea Route.[31]

[24] Marlene Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 26.
[25] John McCannon, *Red Arctic – Polar Exploration and The Myth of The North in The Soviet Union*, 34-40.
[26] McCannon, *Red Arctic...*, 55-56.
[27] McCannon, *Red Arctic...*, 68-78.
[28] McCannon, *Red Arctic...*, 145-146.
[29] McCannon, *Red Arctic...*, 168-170.
[30] Pier Horensma, *The Soviet Arctic*, 68-69.
[31] John McCannon, *Red Arctic – Polar Exploration and The Myth of The North in The Soviet Union*, 173-176.

In 1950 the Soviet Union resumed the Polar Expeditions by establishing floating stations at the North Pole, which were continued until the late 1980s. These expeditions helped to discover an underwater mountain range, namely the Lomonosov Ridge and the accumulation of information for submarines by researching the salinity of seawater that influences the operation of sonars. During these expeditions, in 1977, another success was recorded by navigating to the North Pole with the help of the Arktika nuclear icebreaker.[32]

In the context of the Cold War, throughout the Arctic, exploration received a military connotation in which the Soviet Union competed with the United States in the construction and use of submarines in navigation under the ice of the Arctic Ocean, in order to develop strategic advantages in the situation of a nuclear attack.[33]

Exploring these territories proved useful in helping to resume commercial transport activities, which in 1956 were highlighted by Nikita Khrushchev who called for the transformation of the Northern Sea Route into a mass transport route. Following this request, freight transport was reorganized in the region, new vessels capable of navigating Arctic waters were purchased and new, more powerful icebreakers were developed. One of the consequences of this request was the development of nuclear icebreakers that were much more powerful, the first such ship being put into operation in 1957, named Lenin.[34]

Continued exploration and research in the Arctic have paid off for the Soviets, who in the 1960s and 1970s made a number of important discoveries such as a number of important oil and natural gas fields in the Kara Sea, the Yamal Peninsula and the West of Siberia. An extensive project was developed on the deposits in Western Siberia, which involved the construction of a natural gas pipeline from Siberia to Western Ukraine, by transporting the necessary materials and equipment through the Northern Sea Route.[35]

Despite technological progress, the construction of new port facilities in the North and the development of a new fleet of ships capable of navigating Arctic waters, every few years there is an anomaly that makes the ice much more resistant, which shows that the Arctic area was not fully understood. Such anomalies took place in 1965, when 40 ships were damaged, in 1979 when 124 ships were damaged and in 1983 when about 70 ships were blocked in the western section of the Northern Sea Route, several ships were damaged and one of them sunk. These incidents reveal the technological limitations of the Soviet Union, which, despite sustained efforts to develop the Arctic, has failed to gain full control over these territories.[36]

3. CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA AND THE EXPLOITATION OF ARCTIC NATURAL RESOURCES

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, projects for the Arctic began to face a state of uncertainty about their future. Shortly after the collapse, wages and buildings in Arctic cities lost their state subsidies, leading to a sharp decline in the urban population of the Arctic from 2.7 million to 2 million inhabitants. As a result of this event, many small towns in the Arctic have been abandoned or their population has fallen sharply.[37]

During the 1990s, Russia faced a number of economic problems caused by the transition to a market economy that severely affected economic activities that led to the abandonment of many settlements in the region and the suspension of many exploration

[32] Pier Horensma, *The Soviet Arctic*, 108.
[33] Horensma, *The Soviet Arctic*..., 107-110.
[34] Horensma, *The Soviet Arctic*..., 118-119.
[35] Horensma, *The Soviet Arctic*..., 130-133.
[36] Horensma, *The Soviet Arctic*..., 121.
[37] Paul R. Josephson, *The Conquest of the Russian Arctic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 334.

missions. But during the 2000s, several states such as the United States, China and Canada became more involved in the region, attracting the attention of the Moscow leadership, which revised its vision on the Arctic territories after it came under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. Since 2001, Russia has organized a series of research expeditions to collect data related to the claim of the continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean.[38]

Russia's new strategy for the Arctic has been outlined by Vladimir Putin, who believes that the exploitation of natural resources will underpin the development of Russia's new economy. In Putin's view, Russia's vast reserve of resources would turn it into a major economic power through the development of the natural resource extraction and processing industry. Under these conditions, during the 2000s, the Russian president pursued a policy of gaining control of the state over the reserves of natural resources and their development.[39]

Within this strategy, the huge deposits of natural resources that were discovered in the Arctic territories were transformed into one of the main directions of development pursued by the Russian state. Under these conditions, the Russian leadership has adopted a series of laws by which Russia strengthens its sovereignty over the area of economic exclusivity and the continental shelf. In 2001, Russia has submitted additional claims in connection with the continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean, in an attempt to extend the area of economic exclusivity up to the North Pole, which covers an area of about 1.2 million km^2. Russia's claim was incomplete and rejected, which is why the Russians adopted a policy to conduct research in the Arctic in order to assimilate these territories, launching a series of new expeditions. One of the best known of these expeditions took place in 2007 when Russia, with the help of submarines, mounted its flag on the bottom of the Arctic Ocean at the North Pole.[40]

After experiencing a period of economic prosperity during the 2000s due to the export of natural resources, it was even more determined in the development of the exploitation of the Arctic natural resources. This determination was found in the creation in 2011 of a special army corps for the Arctic and the development of the third generation of nuclear icebreakers. In 2012, only for the mapping of the Lomonosov Ridge, Russia allocated a budget of 70 million dollars and made an anniversary expedition with the Arktika icebreaker to the North Pole.[41]

Within this ambition, the development of the Northern Sea Route plays a central role in the progress of the exploitation of Arctic natural resources. That is why the development of a new generation of nuclear icebreakers is very important, as their mission is to support freight journeys between Asia and Europe along the Northern Sea Route, and their most important activity is to facilitate access to hydrocarbon extraction areas. The reason behind the interest for these deposits found in the Arctic, is because are among the largest deposits of unexplored natural resources in the world. To understand how valuable these territories are, in 2012 alone, about 11% of Russia's GDP and 22% of Russia's export earnings were generated from the Arctic territories which are occupied by only 1% of the country's population.[42] Under these conditions, Vladimir Putin signed a law in 2012 by which he created the Northern Sea Route Administration, which would deal with the management of the sea passage.[43]

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[38] Josephson, *The Conquest of the Russian Arctic*…, 337-339.
[39] Josephson, *The Conquest of the Russian Arctic*…, 340.
[40] Josephson, *The Conquest of the Russian Arctic*…, 343-345.
[41] Josephson, *The Conquest of the Russian Arctic*…, 345-346, 348.
[42] Josephson, *The Conquest of the Russian Arctic*…, 350.
[43] ***, "Putin signed the law on the establishment of the administration of the Northern Sea Route", *Ria Novosti*, July 30, 2012, accessed April 27, 2020, https://ria.ru/20120730/712578195.html#ixzz2WbacgHFe.

In addition, Russia's determination to exploit natural resources is also reflected in how it perceives climate change as a phenomenon that favors access to areas that were previously inaccessible to exploitation. In these circumstances, one of the reasons why Russia has begun to support expeditions and scientific research on the Arctic, is to find the best methods of exploiting natural resources in an environment that is in the process of change due to climate changes. Under these conditions, climate change is perceived by Russian specialists as a result of the natural cycle, and they seek to highlight the benefits they bring such as the opening of the Northern Sea Route. This stream of benefits from climate change has ultimately led to the influence of Russia's policy on this issue. An example of a political decision taken in this regard was in 2010, when Russian President Dmitry Medvedev withdrew Russia from the Kyoto Protocol, arguing that the limits set in this protocol are intended to limit Russia's actions to assimilate natural resources.[44]

Research and studies conducted by the Russians in the Arctic have revealed that the area is undergoing changes such as the shrinking of ice-covered water surface and has proven the existence of global warming. These findings are used by the Russians to support economic interests. It can be seen that the Russians are aware of the danger that climate change represents, but take the risk and get involved in the exploitation of resources in the fragile environment of the Arctic.[45]

Following the discovery of the immense potential of the Arctic territories and the legacy of knowledge gained by the Soviet Union, contemporary Russia has the determination and ambition to develop large-scale projects in assimilating Arctic natural resources, ignoring any danger that may arise in the Arctic. One example is the fact that the development of large-scale exploitation of natural resources requires an enormous amount of electricity, a problem for which Russia has found the solution to build floating nuclear reactors to power the Arctic shores.[46]

All of the above show the determination of contemporary Russia in the exploitation of natural resources in the Arctic. This action represents a new stage in the history of Russia, a country that most often tried to compensate for its weaknesses through its actions. After the defeats suffered during the Second World War, Russia pursued the development of military technology and during the Cold War, after falling behind from a technological stand point, it developed the industry strongly, a phenomenon that repeats itself even today.[47]

CONCLUSIONS

In the period before the disappearance of the Tsarist Empire, the Arctic was perceived more as a buffer territory that provided security from which Russia could not be attacked. Russia's expansion was not directed towards these territories, but was directed towards the East, including in its course the Northern territories. Russian tsars began to be interested in this region in order to claim it so would not be assimilated by other states, this happened only after other states began to explore them. Under these conditions, the Russians were too late in realizing the potential of the Arctic, only after the Tsarist Empire lost the war with Japan.

Instead, the Soviet Union had a different view of the Arctic territories, which it sought to assimilate in order to exploit natural resources. Over time, in addition to exploration

[44] Paul R. Josephson, *The Conquest of the Russian Arctic*, 371-372.
[45] Josephson, *The Conquest of the Russian Arctic*…, 376-377.
[46] Kenneth Raponza, "Russia's First Floating Nuclear Power Plant Turns On, Set To Replace Coal", *Forbes*, December 19, 2019, accessed April 28, 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2019/12/19/russia-first-floating-nuclear-power-plant-turns-on-set-to-replace-coal/#3798882a1e3d.
[47] Paul R. Josephson, *The Conquest of the Russian Arctic*, 382.

missions, the Soviets used various agencies that had different approaches to assimilate and exploit the Arctic territories, such as: Komseveroput, which made expeditions to develop naval transport; Glavsevmorput, which developed polar stations to be used in the assimilation and exploitation of these territories; Dalstroy and GULAG, that used forced labor penitentiaries to exploit Arctic resources; the Northern Sea Route Administration, which used the sea passage to facilitate the exploitation of hydrocarbon deposits in the Arctic territories. All these expeditions and agencies, despite their limited economic success, helped to strengthen the Soviet presence in the Arctic during the twentieth century.

Contemporary Russia, which has developed an economy dependent on the export of natural resources, has made the development of the Arctic one of the main directions of development of strategic importance. Russia is currently seeking to compensate for its weak economy based on the export of natural resources that is not sufficiently developed to export finite products, seeking to cover this weakness by developing the Arctic as a miracle of Russian technology. Because of this, natural resources are very important for contemporary Russia, which recognizes the fragility of the Arctic but has a positive view of global warming that facilitates the operation of the Northern Sea Route and the access to natural resource deposits in the Arctic. The Russian perspective on global warming and the rapid development of exploitation over the Arctic by the Russian state, today can have very serious consequences for the future of the country, given that the first negative effects of climate change have already appeared on the territory of Russia. One of the phenomena caused by climate change that took place in Russia was a huge fire that took place in the summer of 2019 in Siberia and became a calamity that by its size came to be considered a threat to the environment.[48]

[48] Lynn Jenner, "Huge Wildfires in Russia's Siberian Province Continue", *NASA*, August 16, 2019, accessed April 29, 2020, https://www.nasa.gov/image-feature/goddard/2019/huge-wildfires-in-russias-siberian-province-continue.

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