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Is the Arctic Heating Up? Complicating the Picture of Arctic Securitization

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**I. ABSTRACT**

Why are states securitizing the Arctic as the next theater of great power competition? This research argues that if we wish to understand how and why securitization is happening, we need to look not only at the role of epistemic communities in national security policy formation, but also to the sense of biographical continuity that states are protecting. I develop a theory of sociological securitization with ontological security considerations, centering on understanding the taken-for-granted aspects of how and why something is framed as a security concern by epistemic communities, which is then taken up by governments. I claim that states are preemptively securitizing the Arctic as the next theater of great power competition to protect their sense of ontological security as climate change forces states to reimagine the region. I test this theory in the Arctic by focusing on the United States, Canada, Norway, and Russia – four key actors that are clearly securitizing the region. As great power competition permeates other regions of the world, this research will provide a general framework for understanding how states will act beyond the Arctic as well as facilitating a more nuanced understanding of Arctic security in particular. More broadly, this research will tell us more about securitizations as a class of events by raising the question of how epistemic communities play an important role in how a referent object is framed discursively as a threat and the extent to which ontological narratives shape that framing through repeated and embedded interactional patterns.

**II. INTRODUCTION**

After a hiatus, great power competition has returned in the twenty-first century. From the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea to competition between China and the United States over technology security and regional influence in the Indo-Pacific, it is clear that the world’s great powers are engaged in multi-regional and multi-dimensional contestation. Notably, the current confrontation is different from the Cold War. Not only is competition present between three rather than two powers, but the conflict is also not only along ideological lines. Instead, states compete over economic power, information exchange, and technological power. While Russia-US relations have to do with nuclear control, political and economic influence over Europe and the Arctic, China-US relations have to do with economic modernization and influence on a global basis but also regionally in the Indo-Pacific (Trenin 2019). While the emergence of competition is a relatively recent development for American policymakers, the leaders of Russia and China have seen this competition has enduring since the 1990s (Roberts 2020). This has led to revisionist actions from both states that aim to undo the US-led political order. The Arctic has been framed as the next theater of this competition politically and economically due in no small part to the presence of gas and oil resources as well as the geographic position that it holds as a strategic buffer between the US and Russia (Lanteigne 2020; Nicol 2020; Greaves 2021)

Paired with this competition, global warming is making the Arctic more accessible than it ever has been, opening the region for a variety of purposes including more intensive resource extraction, geopolitical competition, as well as shipping lane availability. This new accessibility is provoking states to change the way in which they reimagine the Arctic – particularly in the wake of the renewal of great power competition. Because the Arctic is a relatively undeveloped and extremely ecologically fragile part of the world, it matters how states imagine it. Climate change also has an outsized impact on the Arctic in terms of environmental security as well as food and societal security of the individuals who live there. However, what happens in the Arctic does not simply stay there, nor do geopolitical pressures happening elsewhere in the world have no effect in the High North. Of the eight Arctic states, some such as Iceland are opting to continue to treat the region as an exceptional area that remains separate from otherwise contentious global politics. However, others such as the United States, Canada, Norway, and Russia are beginning to change how they imagine the region and to some degree, are securitizing the region as a new theater of great power competition.

How and why do regions such as the Arctic become “securitized” as a zone of great power competition rather than, say, a zone of peace or cooperation? There is variance in different explanations (IVs) for how a region becomes securitized as a zone of great power competition (DV). Many scholars look at geopolitical competition as the main driver for securitizing behavior in the Arctic, particularly when discussing the actions of larger powers like the US and Russia (Conley and Rohloff 2015, Congressional Research Service 2021, Sliwa and Aliyev 2020, Osthagen 2021, Lundestad and Tunsjo 2015). These drivers can originate from domestic politics as well as both state’s reaction to the changing international order. These scholars generally agree that the Arctic has been securitized in the aftermath of the Russia annexation of Crimea (Zandee et al 2020). Others highlight economic cooperation and the extraction of natural resources as the primary movers of interests and actions (Goodman and Sun 2020, Heininen 2018, Atland 2008, Klimovna Kharlampyeva 2013, Gogoberide et al 2017). Other scholars still take a more holistic approach in analyzing actions in the Arctic. These scholars acknowledge that there are a variety of different motivations for state behavior (Bochkarev 2010, Godzimirski and Sergunin 2020, Xie 2019, Gritsenko 2016, Staun 2017).

What all these potential independent variables and approaches have in common is that they are deterministic and fatalistic. In other words, they can explain how and why great power competition is happening but offer no prescription for how such competition can be lessened or forestalled. They also do not consider seriously the role of human agency and sub-national activism in the development of ideas. This is where a sociological securitization framework with ontological security considerations comes into the picture. Rather than focus on an actor’s need for physical security, ontological security brings attention to security as *being*. In other words, ontological security refers to an actor’s need for a secure identity that contains a sense of biographical continuity and brings an emphasis to what stories and narratives we tell ourselves about ourselves, the relationship with have with others, and the land we conquer, live on, or occupy. Thus, rather than thinking of security purely as protection from a physical *Other* danger, ontological security helps to focus on the aspects of security that reside in our subconscious (Combes 2017).

But when we conceptualize the state, how can these ideational aspects of itself become realized in research? To address this, I propose using a practice research agenda approach to focus on the everyday informal practices and how practice is maintained over time (Graeger 2016; Adler and Pouliot 2011; Hassenteuefel and Genieys 2021). Taking this approach brings attention to the role of epistemic communities: networks of professionals that share a set of normative beliefs, a causal enterprise, notions of validity and a common enterprise (Haas 1992). In today’s globalized world, governance and policy issues are increasingly complex and technical, requiring expertise (Cross 2013). Thus, the role of epistemic ‘expert’ communities has become more important in promoting policy innovation, policy diffusion, policy selection, and policy evolution (Faleg 2012). Moreover, a practice-based approach highlights a micropolitics of security and can provide valuable insight and deeper understanding of larger security dynamics. For example, some scholars have argued that the EU’s foreign policy identity has changed due to the influence of epistemic communities, while others have suggested that the creation of the European Security and Defense Policy (CSPD) was shaped through these communities (Howorth 2004; Ortoleva 2008). In short, security epistemic communities are instrumental to understanding how a referent object becomes securitized and it is through understanding the ontological identity narratives at play in these communities that the reason *how* this object has been securitized can become known.

Using a sociological securitization framework is best suited for understanding this because it also provides hints for understanding the unpalatable parts of a state’s ontological identity because securitization as a process operates as a political technology that lifts the inhibition of neocolonial behavior that is always lurking in the shadows (Moffette and Vadasaria 2016). Further, the sociological securitization framework helps to take a practice-based approach to studying epistemic communities and security writ large because it brings attention to shared implicit understandings of how things *3* be done. The Arctic is the best place to study this interplay of securitization and ontological security. For Russia, Norway, and and Canada, the Arctic is undisputedly a hugely consequential part of their respective identity, narrative, and history. Because of this, exploring how these countries securitize and place the Arctic within their own ways of thinking and doing will reveal conscious and unconscious parts of their identity that they are protecting through the securitization process. For the United States, the Arctic is growing in terms of its importance to national security. This turn to the High North is notable because it forces the United States to use its ‘off-the-shelf’ way of thinking and doing to create policy – thus securitizing – the Arctic. Because of the Arctic’s wilderness geographic characteristics, it makes it a unique place for states because they must turn back the clock to how they have previously approached wilderness spaces. This inherent turn back to traditional ways of thinking of wilderness spaces reveals the ontological identities that I hypothesize are neo-colonial or imperial in nature.

This project aims to understand how and why securitization of the Arctic is taking place in the United States, Norway, Canada, and Russia. I have chosen these comparative cases as two middle powers (Norway and Canada) in contrast to two larger powers (the US and Russia). Understanding how and why securitization has taken place in each of these cases will 1) provide clues for ways in which desecuritization can happen or whether it is even possible, 2) explore the importance of ontological security in how states behave towards security threats, and 3) highlight the role of epistemic communities in policy diffusion - bringing attention to the role of human agency and sub-national activism.. The development of great power politics narratives and security discourse about the Arctic endangers the possibility of cooperation and collaboration measures that states need to adopt to effectively respond to collective action problems such as climate change and food security in the Arctic, which will inevitably impact all states. In short, being better able to explain factors that lead to securitization can both help us walk back from the brink by identifying cultures of securitization and change our attention to meeting other challenges that require collaboration of states as well as reevaluate how a state’s sense of ontological insecurity leads them to fall back on ‘off-the-shelf’ approaches that often have imperial and neo-colonial foundations. More broadly, this research will explore independent variables & explanations for securitization as a class of events – using the situation of the Arctic to imagine potential other geographies that are being securitized, i.e., the Indo-Pacific, as well as raise the question of how ontological narratives and epistemic communities can and should be brought into discussions of securitization.

**II. IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCH QUESTION**

As stated above, the proposed research will aim to understand why states are securitizing the Arctic as the next theater of great power competition, and more specifically, what part of their biographical continuity they are protecting in doing so: *To do so, this project will ask the following question: why are states securitizing the Arctic as the next theater of great power competition?*

This question seeks to move beyond a simple procedural question of how securitization is occurring by understanding both why and digging deeper into questions of ontological security. It aims to highlight the distal context that surrounds the securitization of the Arctic, as well as the question of state colonial and imperial characteristics in influencing the behavior of states today and which are key to their ontological security. In doing so, this project brings a sociological approach to securitization theory paired with ontological security considerations within epistemic community literature to the forefront. The objective of this project is to not only better understand why a region is being securitized but also to see if, by better understanding securitization, hints emerge for strategies of desecuritization for other theaters of great power competition and a reevaluation of the role of imperial legacies in securitization.

*Research Question*

* Why are states securitizing the Arctic as the next theater of great power competition?
  + How do security epistemic communities influence national security policy?
  + What parts of their biographical continuity are they protecting when they securitize?

**III. SURVEY OF EXISTING LITERATURE**

Scholars have looked specifically at how certain geographies become securitized, particularly looking at the Indo-Pacific. For example, research has been conducted on the securitization of the Natuna Islands in the Indo-Pacific by Indonesia, focusing on a broad combination of discourse analysis that explored media securitizing language and behavior (Meyer, Nurmandi, and Agustiyara 2019). Other research has explored the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute, specifically the process of China securitizing the islands while Japan acted to both securitize and desecuritize the geography mostly attributing the explanation as originating from geopolitical issues (Danner 2014). The issue of fisheries in the South China Sea has similarly been studied as a phenomenon of securitization (Zhang and Bateman 2017). While many scholars have focused on islands and fisheries disputes, others have looked at the securitization of China within the Indo-Pacific (Garcia and Breslin 2016; Chang and Garcia 2017). Garcia and Breslin (2016) suggest that in the context of Japanese and South Korean capacity building in response to China’s growth, littoral states surrounding the South China have used this competition to advance their own interests.

Outside of the Indo-Pacific, research has also explored Turkey as a ‘securitized country’ where security considerations override all other concerns. Aydin (2003) suggests that this nature of securitization comes from Turkey’s historical experiences as well as its unique geo-strategic location. Scholars have also studied a securitization of cosmopolitan urban centers because of the war on terror and the consequent heightened perception of terrorist risk, which encourages cities to build resilience (Coaffee and Wood 2006).

In the Arctic, securitization has been studied from a variety of different angles. Some scholars have looked at securitization behavior (or not) by Inuit and Sami in the Canadian and Norwegian Arctic regions (Greaves 2016). Greaves (2016) concluded that differences in securitizing behavior originates from ecological differences, different experiences of environmental insecurity, the relative degree of social inclusion and geography. Other scholars have focused on combining a post-structuralist approach with securitization theory, suggesting that in Norway, the Norwegian government has polarized the region – leading the region open to an increasing number of securitizing discourses (Jensen 2012). Still others have taken a more traditional approach to securitization by engaging in discourse analysis. McCormack (2020), for example, looks at the Harper government in Canada (2006-2015) and their Arctic security discourse, suggesting it was difficult for the government to translate discursive securitization into tangible policy outcomes. Researchers have additionally studied the Arctic as a security region but argue that the nature of great power competition such as the close relationship between Russia and China as well as the response from the US and its allies are responsible or suggest that security actors in the region have a unique practice of security (Lanteigne 2020; Nicol 2020). Other securitization scholars suggest that the Arctic is a regional security complex, and that it is fragmenting due to climate change and geopolitics (Greaves 2021). Still others analyze cases such as evolving Russian security perceptions towards Norway’s Svalbard policy from the 1990s to the 2000s – suggesting that securitization behavior continues for Russia despite geopolitical changes in the Russia-Europe relationship (Atland and Pedersen 2008).

Scholars focusing on aspirations and motivations for different state actions in the Arctic explore different explanations of what is important when examining how the Arctic is conceptualized, tending to prioritize certain explanations over others. Many scholars look at geopolitical competition as the main driver for behavior in the High North, particularly when discussing the actions of the US and Russia (Conley and Rohloff 2015, Congressional Research Service 2020, Sliwa and Aliyev 2020, Osthagen 2019, Lundestad and Tunsjo 2015). These scholars generally agree that the Arctic has been securitized in the aftermath of the Russia annexation of Crimea (Zandee et al 2020). As part of this growing geopolitical contest, each state has engaged in securitization in different ways – reframing and reimagining the Arctic as a potential future source of conflict. Others highlight economic cooperation and the extraction of natural resources as the primary movers of domestic interests and actions (Goodman and Sun 2020, Heininen 2018, Atland 2008, Klimovna Kharlampyeva 2013, Gogoberide et al 2017). Other scholars still take a more holistic approach in analyzing actions in the Arctic. These scholars acknowledge that there are a variety of different motivations for state behavior (Bochkarev 2010, Godzimirski and Sergunin 2020, Xie 2019, Gritsenko 2016, Staun 2017).

For defensive neorealists, the basic anarchic state of the international system and state’s inability to be certain about the intentions of other states would lead an explanation of securitization to discuss how states in the Arctic were acting in terms of survival and the security dilemma. Offensive realists would point to a state’s will to achieve dominance and hegemony as a reason through which states sporadically expand. Liberal institutionalists would suggest that a lack of economic interconnectedness would lead to great power competition. Thus, the way to walk back would be to engage through economic standards to get so-called rogue states such as Russia and China to accept the rules and norms of the world order. Constructivists suggest looking at the role of changing norms, ideas, and regimes as an explanation for how states began to securitize a particular region. However, what these schools of thoughts lack is an ability to consider not only the social construction of security, but also the context in which an issue becomes a security threat.

Within International Relations, securitization theory offers a particularly fitting explanation for changes in how security problems are constructed, suggesting that they are processes of political contestation (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde 1998). In their work *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, they define their approach as a constructivist methodology that seeks to differentiate securitization from politicization in its level of intensity. In short, security problems do not just exist in the world, but rather they are created by processes of political contestation. When an object or idea is securitized, it means “the issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure” (Buzan et al 1998). This contestation arises out of a securitizing move, a speech act that defines something as an existential threat to the survival of a referent object such as the state, identity, or an ecosystem. Because security is socially constituted, the Copenhagen School maintains that these socially constructed norms become stable, and that analysis therefore must be based on their continued existence.

However, with this research, I aim to take a more sociological view of securitization. I will do this by looking both at the speech acts and audience behavior that indicate securitization, but also by a sociological approach that considers identities, forms of knowledge, techniques, and visibility that are taken for granted aspects of this process (Balzacq 2015). Focusing on these taken-for-granted aspects allows scholars to look behind the curtain and not only understand the mechanisms through which something becomes a security threat, but also explore more thoroughly the role of a state’s ontological identity in doing so. In the same way that much of US identity focused and continues to focus on the concept of Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism, Russia’s role as an outsider in Europe’s periphery shapes Russian behavior today. Similarly, Canada’s identity as a mediator and compromise-based state and Norway’s consistent narrative against occupation further shapes their securitization behavior (Adams 2003). To protect these base ideals, these states must find Others to securitize. Neither realism, liberalism, nor constructivism addresses the role of a state behaving in this way. I further take, in this research, a practice-oriented approach that looks at the growing importance of epistemic communities and how these shared and implicit taken-for-granted aspects of securitization are formed and reinforced in policy diffusion processes of securitization (Graeger 2016; Faleg 2012; Ortoleva 2008; Adler and Pouliot 2011; Cross 2015).

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| **Sociological Securitization Framework** | | | | | | |
| Main rationale: A referent object becomes securitized because it becomes institutionalized (a process of political technology) through regimes of security practice | | | | | | |
| Q1: In what political system?  *context* | Where is power located? Who matters? | How does policy formation operate? | | | Socio-cultural and historical setting | |
| Q2: How did the object emerge?  *emergence* | Exogenous Event | | Meetings and documents | | | |
| Q3: How did the object move from rhetoric to policy?  *stickiness* | What is the field of visibility that characterizes this regime? | By what means, mechanisms, techniques, and vocabularies is the regime constituted? | | What forms of thought, knowledge, or rationality are employed in the regime? | | What forms of identity are presupposed by the regime? |
| Q4: How did it evolve?  *evolution* | Does discourse match material security measures? | Have the underlying social conditions changed? | | Did the political context change? | | Has the outcome changed? |

Table 1. Gricius (2021)

Using a sociological securitization framework is also best suited for working backward to find those unconscious and unpalatable parts of a state’s ontological identity within epistemic security communities. This is because this framework resides on the rationale that a referent object becomes securitized because it becomes institutionalized through regimes of security practices that become evident through shared implicit understandings of knowledge, techniques, and vocabularies. Dean’s (2010) analytics of governmentality framework provides a great starting point to think about the taken-for-granted ways of thinking, techniques, and identities that make up a regime of practice. The four-step framework provided above addresses the three stages of a securitizing process as well as asks questions that target the political context in which the securitization process occurs. In the first stage, I ask questions that focus on the underlying power relations, the importance of specific actors, broadly ask about the policy formation process and focus on the socio-cultural and historical setting. This is primarily to set the stage for thinking about the context in which a securitization process occurs. The second stage focuses on the emergence of the securitization process, specifically focusing on what, if any, exogenous event drove the rise of the topic as well as asks specifically about important meetings or documents that illustrate this. The third stage is the most important because it addresses how the rhetoric became sticky and turned a security issue into a regime of practice that institutionalized it into routine. The four questions I ask here come from Dean’s analytics of governmentality framework and target those underlying and taken-for-granted aspects of a regime of practice. This is key because it helps to determine what sort of taken-for-granted short-cuts that experts utilize – providing hints and suggestions as to the same type of identities that drive and shape security processes. The final stage is question of evolution. The questions I ask in this phase specifically focus on the extent to which the security regime has evolved over time. In comparison to Balzacq’s (2011) levels of analysis, I focus on the distal contextual level of analysis primarily because studying the context of security acts and regimes provides important groundwork. While I do touch on underlying power relations from his agential level, I do so to better place how power is distributed in a particular political system. Using this framework will bring more clarity to the questions need to uncover the parts of ontological identity that exist in the taken-for-granted aspects in security practices. Moreover, the framework helps to provide a nuanced case description.

**IV. IDENTIFICATION OF HYPOTHESES**

I hypothesize *that states are preemptively securitizing the Arctic as the next theater of great power competition to protect their sense of biographical continuity* (ontological security) and that *this securitization comes from the influence of security epistemic communities*. Part of the United States’ ontological security relies heavily on American exceptionalism and the assumption that Western democracy and values are universal. Thus, when the United States sees Russian actions in the Arctic, they see an inherent threat to those core principles as Russia militarizes the region. Russia’s ontological security focuses on the development of a Russian civilizational identity that the Russian elite constructed by drawing on the collective trauma from the fall of the USSR and a need for spatiality, particularly in the Arctic. Seeing American interest in the Arctic and the melting of sea ice, Russia aims to protect its freedom of spatiality in the Arctic and against perceived American incursion. Canada’s ontological security relies on a notion of compromise and interdependence. As climate change has become an overarching threat in the Arctic, Canada sees a necessity to securitize the region to address this transnational threat. Norwegian ontological security is shaped by both its geographic position between Russia and Europe as well as its need to never be occupied again. As great power competition forces Norway to rethink this key ontological insecurity, so too must Norway securitize the Arctic to protect its identity.

*To protect these ontological securities, key security epistemic communities engage in securitization processes that are institutionalized. This results in them falling back onto ‘off the shelf’ approaches to creating security recommendations that then are the bedrock of national security policies*. *By studying these securitization processes using a sociological approach that highlights context and taken-for-granted aspects of security culture, we can better understand what part of these ontological securities states are protecting.*

The causal chain that I am proposing begins with the assumption that epistemic communities matter in security policy diffusion. The role of these communities has also been understudied on a national security level. Thus, when studying how states securitize, we need to study how epistemic communities securitize. I begin by asking the question of *why epistemic communities are securitizing the Arctic.* To answer this question, I use OST literature to come up with possible independent variables such as ‘homesteading’ behavior, attempting to manage existential anxiety, as well as dealing with power transitions that come about via globalization, climate change, and global geopolitical competition. The role of professional incentives also plays an important role. To answer this question, I propose to study these ontological narratives through discourse analysis of documents from epistemic communities through coding in NVivo, process tracing, as well as an ethnographic study of the communities. The second question that comes up with the issue of securitization – how are these communities securitizing the Arctic? To answer this question, I use a sociological securitization approach as outlined above. I will use discourse analysis again to find evidence of linguistic securitizing practices matched with process tracing, interviewing elites and an ethnography to find the socio-aspects of securitization as well. If I am correct, we will expect to see patterns of narratives throughout these discourses and actions from 2014-2021 despite changes in administrations and different geopolitical conditions. If I am wrong, we will expect to see varying responses and narratives over time, as well as security actions that are justified via material security concerns.

The underlying question here is who makes up epistemic communities and how can we prove that they exist? To deal with this issue, I will utilize Hassenteufel and Genieys’ (2021) programmatic action framework. This begins with a positional and sociological analysis – identifying key positions holders, their social origins, training, and professional careers. I will then analyze the existence of a programmatic group through discourse and relational analysis – finding personal links to identify such a group as well as the role this community has played in policy change. Last, I will analyze the power of that group by analyzing the effects that these groups have on policy formulation as well as the resources they possess. I will double-check the veracity of these groups by interviewing select people to ask who they think are Arctic security experts.

The second part of the study begins with the diffusion process. To prove that these communities are effectively diffusing their securitization practices to the state level, I will use the data I have collected through the methods above and compare it with similar styles of discourse analysis and process tracing on the state level. Should I be correct, we would expect to see patterned behavior that matches the intensity and type of securitization at the epistemic community level to the state level both in discourse and in practice both in the ontological security narratives as well as the securitization behavior. This begs the question of why certain epistemic communities are more successful than others in promoting their message. To answer this question, I turn to epistemic community literature that suggests that the type of problem matters when determining the influence level of these communities, the role of state interest in these narratives as well as the political culture and structure.

This research matters because it highlights the role of sub-national activism and agency in securitization processes as classes of events. Too often, state-level securitization is treated as a matter that can only be controlled via internal state processes. My research will show that in fact if we can trace securitization to epistemic communities, then agency plays a really important role in securitization. Thus, we do not have to think of securitization as a fatalistic process, but rather one that can be changed through group action on a sub-national level.

**V. RESEARCH METHOD**

To answer the research question and test the hypotheses, I propose a variety of qualitative methods to triangulate, using a combination of discourse analysis and elite interviews.

1. **Subjects of Study**

The universe of Arctic cases is eight: The United States, Russia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Greenland, Russia, and Canada. To facilitate qualitative analysis, I propose employing a multi-case method with four cases. I chose a multi-case study as multiple cases are often considered more robust and compelling (Yin 2018, 54). The four cases that I have chosen to analyze are the United States, Canada, Norway, and Russia as these cases represent critical cases that all represent cases of where states are securitizing the Arctic. Here, this represents Most Different Systems Design (MDSD) as all states are securitizing the Arctic to an extent but may possess different underlying conditions. Moreover, these four cases present an interesting comparison between two middle powers (Canada and Norway) and two large powers (the US and Russia). For this research, I will have two units of analysis: the state and epistemic communities. For these four case studies, I will begin with conducting a discourse analysis of Arctic policies and official state documentation considering the Arctic from 2014-2021 along with interviews with policy makers to demonstrate how the Arctic is being securitized. The most important aspect of my analysis will be interviews with members of each national epistemic security community, where I will attempt to determine why the Arctic is being securitized. The documents I analyze will be official defense/security documents such as a country’s National Security Strategy, individual military branches’ Arctic strategies, and regional Arctic strategies. By determining what kind of regime of practice characterizes this securitization within the documents and by asking questions of government officials. I will aim to talk with individuals who are related to the Arctic policy process as well as broadly security policy processes in each of the case countries. I also propose conducting a 1–3-month ethnographic study in contexts of these epistemic communities to better understand sociological aspects of securitization. I have chosen 2014 as a cut-off point for my case studies as it was the year that Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine and significantly changed the geopolitical stage and represents the resurgence of great power competition. I will use process tracing to draw out socio-cultural and historical factors that drive what kind of context the securitization process is happening in within each state.

I first propose the United States as one case to examine. Beginning with the Obama Administration and continuing with the Trump, and Biden Administrations, the United States’ actions in the Arctic reflect key indicators of securitization, particularly political in nature, both within policy documents coming from various administrations as well as the increasing pace of dialogue surrounding the Arctic that references security threats. American security language and interest in the Arctic has significantly increased since 2018. Because the United States has historically not been as invested in projecting power and its security in the Arctic, this increase in security discourse will be particularly relevant in seeing the extent to which a protection of its ontological self is instrumental.

My second case for analysis is Russia. Since the planting of an underwater Russian flag on the North Pole seabed in 2007, Russia’s interest and investment in the Arctic has grown significantly. The move from politicization to securitization has occurred over the past six years as Russian oil and gas investment has grown in the region.

My third case for analysis is Canada. Canada’s actions in the Arctic are perhaps the most well-documented and institutionalized of the four cases. However, the move towards securitization has happened relatively recently as the resurgence in great power competition has changed the way in which Canada must act. As Russian militarization has grown more intense and Arctic politics has become an arena of political contestation, so too has Canada responded. Moreover, the climate crisis has been securitized as an important security issue in the Arctic for Canada, as many of its citizens live in areas that may become unstable for food security reasons.

My final case is Norway. Norway’s actions in the Arctic have been acknowledged as securitizing in nature by many scholars (Wilhelmsen 2021). Some argue that this securitization is to do with the continued oil and gas extraction that the Norwegian government supports while others suggest that it can be characterized more as a response to Russian securitization and the overall turn to security in the Arctic.

Within these four cases, I propose to examine discourse on the Arctic as well as to look at epistemic communities through which regions such as the Arctic may be securitized such as through influential think tanks such as the Valdai Club in Russia, NUPI in Norway, the Brookings Institute in the US, and the Canadian Global Affairs Institute in Canada. I aim to look at the literature and networks established by Arctic scholars as well as conduct elite interviews which will be elaborated on below.

1. **Measurements**

For this research, I am defining the following variables as follows.

**Securitization**: Securitization is the process by which a security threat is created through a set of discursive and contextual practices, including its production, diffusion, and translation, that are mobilized by a securitizing actor, prompting an audience to build their own series of practices through a referent object is imbued with such a sense of danger and threat that policies are created to address it. A sociological approach to securitization also brings attention to regimes of practices, context, and the power relations that underlie these relationships. From a sociological perspective, thus, securitization is like a social contract (Balzacq 2015).

**Epistemic Communities**: Epistemic communities are networks of professional experts that have recognized expertise in a particular issue area, with a corresponding claim to policy-relevant knowledge (Adler and Haas 1992). These communities promote policy innovation, policy diffusion, policy selection, and policy evolution (Faleg 2012).

**Ontological Security**: Ontological security refers to an actor’s need for a secure identity that contains a sense of biographical continuity and brings an emphasis to what stories and narratives we tell ourselves about ourselves, the relationship with have with others and the land we conquer, live on, or occupy. Taking this lens focuses on the relationship between anxiety and identity, bringing attention to how autobiographical narratives and routines manage existential identity as a daily yet often unconscious process. In short, it asks the question how do specific narratives anchor state self-identity and implies that these narratives have an impact on current stressors and problems (Mitzen 2018).

1. **Qualitative Data Collection Methods**

Here I will outline specific methods I aim to employ in my research.

1. **Document analysis**

One of the most substantial part of my research project will be document analysis and discourse analysis. I propose to collect and code government Arctic policies and speeches from my four cases: The United States, Canada, Norway, Russia, from 2014 to 2021. I also propose finding specific meeting documents, when possible, that help to contextualize how the Arctic became a securitized region. I will also look at important and influential epistemic community documents to match up with government Arctic policies and speeches to see the level of influence and carry-over from one to the other. This research will first help me to identify key instances of securitization in text to illustrate the phenomena and second, it will help fill in information in my sociological securitization framework for determining where power is located, how policy formation operates, documenting the emergence of the security threat, and how the threat moved from rhetoric to policy – particularly looking at the role of security epistemic communities. Documentation is a useful source of evidence because it is broad, specific, unobtrusive, and stable (Yin 2018, 114). To gather this evidence, I will visit official state websites and download information in English and Russian. I speak Russian and English and thus can analyze four cases’ documents successfully. For Norway, I will rely on official translations and assistance from Norwegian colleagues. This document analysis will help to answer my sub-question on how securitization is occurring and provide data for the taken-for-granted aspects of security regimes of practices that reveal aspects of ontological security.

1. **Archival Records and Internet Research**

The second part of my research project will be conducting using archival research and Internet research. I will look at a variety of sources to determine the context in which securitization happens. To answer question 1 of my framework, I will investigate previous research both within political science as well as other disciplines to understand where power is in different political systems and how policy formation operates within a particular socio-cultural and historical setting. Beyond research, I will explore work from think tanks as well as more archival research that better approaches socio-cultural factors as well as to help understand within which think tank particular socio-cultural factors are highlighted. Archival records will also help me to understand underlying social conditions and the changing political context for Question 4 as well as find evidence for what type of ontological identity each state is trying to protect. Broadly, I will look at government bodies and publicly available data to determine the extent of institutionalization of regimes of practices within the securitization of the Arctic in each case.

1. **Interviews**

The third part of my research project will be conducted with semi-structured expert interviews. Interviews represent a research partnership between the researcher (interviewer) and respondent (expert) (Weiss 1994, 65). Thus, I see the interviews I wish to conduct as essential to my research because it will help me to better understand the nature of power, policy formation, and socio-cultural & historical setting. Interviews will also help me to ask questions and back up secondary research onto aspects of ontological security that each state is protecting.

I will begin my interviews with members of security epistemic communities to firstly act as additional evidence supporting my documentary analysis that supports securitization in each of the two cases. For these interviews, I will talk with these security experts about their assumptions about the world, their connections with their respective national governments, and other questions aimed at figuring out particular variables regarding implicit and explicit knowledge. This is aimed at getting at the *why*. For a second set of interviews, I will primarily discuss with government officials who have been a part of the security discussions to get at the *how*. While I have connections and see possibilities to talk with American, Norwegian, and Canadian officials, I foresee potential issues of access with Russian officials. Because Russian security culture extends outside of the government, I propose first attempting to gain interviews with Russian government officials but acknowledge that I will likely need to speak with scholars and policy makers from key nationalist think tanks in Russia such as the Valdai Club. Because this research takes the position that key security epistemic communities are emblematic of state security policy, talking with members of these influential think tanks is central to my research.

As it is possible, I aim to have in-person interviews (although I suspect that many of these interviews will only take place online via Zoom) that will last for around an hour. I propose that for each expert, I will arrange two-part interviews to allow for follow-up opportunities.

The interviews will provide a good opportunity to match my documentary research as well as answer my second sub-question that pertains to the audience aspect of securitization theory. My questions will focus thus on language, policies, and behavior that suggest securitization as well as ask specific questions that target questions of power, security regimes, and change over time. I will not conduct random sampling as my goal is to engage with experts. However, I will engage in snowball sampling, and ask experts for referrals for others they think might be useful for my research (Weiss 1994, 25).

1. **Ethnography**

The fourth part of my research project will be conducted through a series of short ethnographies. I propose conducting a series of 1–3-month ethnographies in selected epistemic communities in the cities such as Washington DC, Oslo, Ontario, and potentially Moscow. There exist potential security issues in conducting such an ethnography in Moscow as it stands, however, that may change. Ethnographies are key to my research methodology as it gives agency to individual actors, checking if a given explanation fits with insider views, and highlighting causal links (De Volo and Schatz 2004; Weeden 2010; Emerson et al 2011). As a research method, ethnographies are best used when triangulating other research methods to produce a checks and balance system to ensure that they acquire different data to explore one phenomenon.

After finding the selected epistemic communities, I would aim to work with a particular think tank that is central to that community to work with them as a Visiting Researcher for a short period to integrate myself into their day-to-day routines. I would take field notes and seek to uncover insider perspectives on political and social life.

1. **Analytical Tools**

After completing my data collection, I will use a variety of different qualitative methods to analyze the data. For my document analysis looking at the policies of my four cases, I will code these documents to find key examples of securitization over time. Here my goal is to see the extent of securitization, when it occurred, and if there are key indicators that illustrate how policy formation operates, by what means, mechanisms, techniques and vocabularies security is created, and what forms of knowledge, thought and rationality are used to justify the security regime. In addition to coding, I will engage in discourse analysis to clearly identity and illustrate the presence of securitization. I will mainly use critical discourse analysis and process tracing backed by interviews to understand how the referent object emerged as a potential security threat and the extent to which epistemic communities played an important role. I will do this by creating a timeline through which the Arctic became a security issue in each case, matching that with the discursive environment created through documents that discuss meetings and confirm that knowledge with government individuals who may have been aware. For my archival research and Internet research, I will also explore the socio-cultural and historical context under which the securitization is occurring. Using both the information and data from my documentary analysis and archival research, I will create a case description that describes each case in depth (Yin 2018, 171). For my interview data, I will record all interviews and transcribe them. Then, I will code my interviews in a similar fashion to the policies referenced above to see not only themes discussed but also to match up instances of securitizing language and examples to documentary analysis (Lofland 2006).

**VI. SCHEDULE**

Prepare proposal by November 2022

Complete literature review by January/February 2023

Complete political context analysis by April 2023

Complete epistemic community positional and sociological analysis by May 2023

Complete coding of Arctic government and epistemic community docs by August 2023

Complete interviews with policymakers and epistemic communities by May 2024

Complete coding of interviews with government policymakers by May 2024

Complete Ethnographies by May 2024

Complete case description by August 2024

Complete empirical analysis by August 2024

Complete dissertation first draft by November 2024

Defend dissertation May 2025

**VII. OUTLINE OF RESEARCH**

1. Introduction
2. Literature Review
   1. Securitization
      1. Copenhagen vs. Paris vs. Aberystwyth
   2. Ontological Security
      1. Relational vs. reflexive
   3. Epistemic Communities
3. Methodology and Research Approach
   1. Critical Discourse Analysis & NVivo
   2. Interviews
   3. Potentially Ethnographies
   4. Process Tracing
4. Theoretical Case and Framework Explanation
5. United States
   1. Evidence that securitization is happening in state (how)
      1. *Using sociological securitization framework*
   2. Who are the people in ECs that matter in this case? What is the makeup of ECs in the US related to Arctic? Why do they matter in the Arctic more? Why do these ECs have influence? (how)
      1. Using programmatic action framework to find people
   3. Evidence of them securitizing in their documents, interviews, ethnographies (how)
   4. Evidence of that diffusion process and sub-national activism and agency making a real difference here – show patterns from government to ECs (how)
   5. Why? – Role of ontological security narratives as potential reason (IV)
   6. What are those narratives in the US?
   7. Are they present in the securitizing language/behavior across both state and ECs?
6. Russia
7. Norway
8. Canada
9. Conclusions and Implications

**VII. BUDGET**

NVivo Software for Coding $584.00

Potential Budget for Travel to Interviews $1,000 (subject to change)

\*\*\*\* Need funding for visiting stays

Total $1,584.00

**VIII. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH QUESTION**

1. **International Relations Community and Arctic Scholars**

This research is useful to the International Relations community for a few different reasons. The most important reason for this research for the IR community applies to constructivist, great power competition, and security policy scholars. Constructivist scholars look at the development of norms, and thus exploring how security is socially constructed in a relatively underdeveloped region will be critical to seeing how states will behave and develop norms in the Arctic as climate change makes the region more accessible. For security and great power competition scholars, the Arctic in many cases represents the next theatre of this competition. These scholars tend to conceptualize the Arctic as a zone of geopolitical competition based purely on the geographic closeness between the United States and Russia. By moving the discussion away from purely determinate aspects such as geography and existing power relations and towards the sociological context of security as well as ontological security, this research will help to facilitate a more nuanced understanding of Arctic security, a field which is often dominated by more realist approaches. Moreover, focusing on the role of key epistemic communities as emblematic of the state – I aim to work within the ‘practice turn’ within IR – which aims to move beyond dichotomies such as agency-structure and ideational-material. For scholars that do focus on great power competition, this research will help to illuminate why the Arctic is being conceptualized in such a framing and what that says about the organizational culture of governmental institutions as well as the role of epistemic communities on a broad scale. Further, this research is worthwhile because the political science discipline tends to ignore the works of non-political scientists and thus misses critical knowledge that could advance the discipline. Taking an interdisciplinary approach counters that tendency towards isolation. More broadly, this research will tell us more about securitizations as a class of events by raising the question of how epistemic communities play an important role in how a referent object is framed discursively as a threat and the extent to which ontological narratives shape that framing through repeated and embedded interactional patterns.

For specifically Arctic scholars, this research will play an important role for a few reasons. Firstly, this research considers the complexity of security issues in the Arctic and aims to appreciate nuance rather than find easy policy solutions. Secondly, this research also looks specifically at the importance of ontological security in thinking about Arctic security. Thirdly, this research will begin a focus on security experts as important objects of study alone. Thus, this research will take a broader and more comprehensive examination of state behavior in the Arctic to try and look beyond short-term explanations.

1. **Policy Community**

In addition to this research’s importance to the international relations community, this research also plays an important role in the policy community. By further understanding the process of securitization, focusing on the taken-for-granted aspects of policymaking, finding ways to desecuritize is more possible. With the resumption of great power competition, increasing tensions are not only happening in the Arctic, but also throughout other parts of the world. By better understanding how great power competition is unfolding in the Arctic, policymakers will hopefully better understand how dynamics of this competition will or have already unfolded elsewhere. Members of the policy community, particularly those who focus on diplomacy, will also find this research useful because it will highlight the importance of history and how security issues do not happen in a vacuum. Moreover, it will bring the importance of epistemic communities to the fore, an area of the discipline that has been sorely lacking.

**VIIII. SOURCES**

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