

## CLIMATE CHANGE MEETS GEOPOLITICS: U.S. ARCTIC POLICY UNDER TRUMP THROUGH THE LENS OF OFFENSIVE REALISM

### MUDANÇA CLIMÁTICA E GEOPOLÍTICA: A POLÍTICA DOS EUA PARA O ÁRTICO SOB O MANDATO DE TRUMP ATRAVÉS DAS LENTES DO REALISMO OFENSIVO

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#### Abstract

The Arctic region is an intersection of strategic competition and climate change. With the melting of glaciers in the Arctic, previously inaccessible natural resources and new sea trade routes have become accessible. Furthermore, according to data from the U.S. Geological Survey, a significant portion of the world's oil and natural gas reserves are located in the Arctic. This situation has made the region not only an area of environmental vulnerability but also a strategic area. Indeed, the United States (US), particularly during Donald Trump's presidency from 2017 to 2021, has significantly increased its interest in the Arctic. During this period, environmental regulations were pushed into the background, and environmental diplomacy was weakened through policies such as withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement. The main objective of this study is to examine the effects of climate change on US foreign policy in the context of the Donald Trump era and to reveal how these policies can be understood within the framework of the theory of offensive realism. Offensive realism is a theory developed by international relations theorist John Mershaimer. According to this theory, states do not merely seek to ensure their security; they are constantly engaged in the pursuit of power maximization and hegemony. In line with this, the study examined strategy documents published between 2019 and 2021 using content analysis and developed policy options for Trump's second term through scenario analysis. According to the findings of the analysis, the strategy documents

#### Resumo

A região do Ártico é um ponto de intersecção entre a competição estratégica e as mudanças climáticas. Com o derretimento das geleiras no Ártico, recursos naturais anteriormente inacessíveis e novas rotas comerciais marítimas tornaram-se acessíveis. Além disso, de acordo com dados do Serviço Geológico dos Estados Unidos, uma parte significativa das reservas mundiais de petróleo e gás natural está localizada no Ártico. Essa situação tornou a região não apenas uma área de vulnerabilidade ambiental, mas também uma área estratégica. De fato, os Estados Unidos (EUA), particularmente durante a presidência de Donald Trump de 2017 a 2021, aumentaram significativamente seu interesse no Ártico. Durante esse período, as regulamentações ambientais foram colocadas em segundo plano e a diplomacia ambiental foi enfraquecida por meio de políticas como a retirada do Acordo Climático de Paris. O principal objetivo deste estudo é examinar os efeitos das mudanças climáticas na política externa dos EUA no contexto da era Donald Trump e revelar como essas políticas podem ser compreendidas dentro da estrutura da teoria do realismo ofensivo. O realismo ofensivo é uma teoria desenvolvida pelo teórico de relações internacionais John Mershaimer. De acordo com essa teoria, os Estados não buscam apenas garantir sua segurança; eles estão constantemente empenhados na busca pela maximização do poder e pela hegemonia. Em consonância com isso, o estudo examinou documentos



are consistent with the basic assumptions of offensive realism. The study concluded that the perspective of offensive realism would be dominant during Trump's second term, that a balanced foreign policy was a limited possibility, and that a neighborhood-first policy was unlikely.

**Keywords:** Arctic Region. Climate Change. United States Foreign Policy. Donald Trump Presidency. Offensive Realism. International Security. Strategic Competition. Arctic Natural Resources. Environmental Diplomacy. Paris Agreement. Hegemony and Power.

*estratégicos publicados entre 2019 e 2021 usando análise de conteúdo e desenvolveu opções de política para o segundo mandato de Trump por meio de análise de cenários. De acordo com as conclusões da análise, os documentos estratégicos são consistentes com os pressupostos básicos do realismo ofensivo. O estudo concluiu que a perspectiva do realismo ofensivo seria dominante durante o segundo mandato de Trump, que uma política externa equilibrada era uma possibilidade limitada e que uma política de prioridade aos vizinhos era improvável.*

**Palavras-chave:** Região Ártica. Mudanças climáticas. Política externa dos Estados Unidos. Presidência de Donald Trump. Realismo ofensivo. Segurança internacional. Competição estratégica. Recursos naturais do Ártico. Diplomacia ambiental. Acordo de Paris. Hegemonia e poder.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Climate change, one of the issues closely affecting the future of the world, profoundly impacts the environment, economy, security, and foreign policy. The melting of polar ice caps, in particular, is reshaping not only ecosystems but also international policies. In this context, the Arctic region holds a critical position in terms of both climate change and geopolitical transformation. According to NASA data from 2022, Arctic sea ice has melted by 40% since 1979. Furthermore, it is predicted that by 2040, the summer months will be completely ice-free (NASA, 2002).

With the melting of glaciers in the Arctic region, previously inaccessible natural resources and new sea trade routes have become accessible. According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), the Arctic region is estimated to contain 90 billion barrels of oil, 1,670 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and 44 billion barrels of natural gas liquids (USGS, 2008). In addition, the melting of glaciers has opened up new routes such as the Northern Sea Route, the Northwest Passage, and the Transpolar Sea Route. The Northern Sea Route, in particular, has the potential to reduce travel time between Asia and Europe by 30% (Humpert, 2011). According to 2024 data, the amount of cargo transported on this route was recorded as approximately 37.9 million tons (Nuclear Asia,

2025). Furthermore, approximately 95% of the 97 transit shipments carried out on this route are based on trade between China and Russia (Humpert, 2024).

This transformation in the Arctic region has made it not only an environmentally vulnerable area but also a strategic one. Indeed, the United States (US), particularly during Donald Trump's presidency from 2017 to 2021, significantly increased its interest in the Arctic. During this period, environmental regulations were pushed into the background, and environmental diplomacy was weakened by policies such as withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement. At the same time, public investment in infrastructure and energy projects in the Arctic increased from \$1.2 billion in 2016 to \$1.6 billion in 2020 (US Government Accountability Office, 2021). The number of military exercises in the region has doubled. A special Arctic Strategy Document published by the US Department of Defense in 2019 has been an element that documents this orientation at the official level (Department of Defense, 2019). That same year, Admiral James G. Foggo of the U.S. Navy stated that the warming trend in the North Pole has increased interest in natural resources and new sea routes (Garamone, 2019).

This study aims to examine the U.S. foreign policy toward the Arctic region in the context of Donald Trump's two presidential terms. The first section analyzes Trump's policies between 2017 and 2021 within the framework of offensive realism theory. The second section develops a scenario analysis, evaluating whether similar trends will recur in the new period beginning in 2025, based on theoretical predictions and current strategic orientations. This both tests the explanatory power of the theory and offers an academic perspective on current developments.

This study examines the United States' Arctic policies during the Trump era within the framework of the theory of offensive realism. Offensive realism is a theory developed by international relations theorist John Mershaimer, which argues that states, in the anarchic structure of the international system, do not merely seek to ensure their security but pursue offensive strategies with the aim of constantly gaining more power. According to this approach, states pursue hegemony through means such as military capacity expansion, energy dominance, and geopolitical expansion. The Trump administration's Arctic policies largely align with this theoretical framework. The relegation of environmental protection priorities, the emphasis on energy security and resource control objectives, the intensification of military exercises, and the policy of withdrawing from multilateral environmental agreements are all strategic choices consistent with the basic

assumptions of offensive realism. In this context, the study seeks answers to the following fundamental questions:

- To what extent do the Arctic strategies pursued during the Trump era align with the assumptions of offensive realism theory?
- How do US energy and military interests play a role in shaping Arctic policy?
- Do current indicators regarding Trump's second term point to the continuation of a similar offensive foreign policy?

To answer these questions, content analysis was applied in the study's research methodology. Themes were created within the framework of the basic assumptions of Offensive Realism, and how these themes were reflected in the strategy documents published by US President Trump during his first term were analyzed. As a result of these analyses, tables related to the published strategy documents were created. In addition to the analysis of the strategy documents, a multi-layered analysis supported by quantitative indicators such as ice melt rates, energy investments, military activities, and public opinion data was presented to enhance the integrity of the study. Furthermore, in addition to content analysis, the study employs scenario-based analysis. The purpose of using this method is to outline possible policy scenarios for the Arctic region during Trump's current presidency.

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: OFFENSIVE REALISM AND ARCTIC GEOPOLITICS**

This study is grounded in Offensive Realism, which structures how concepts are defined and findings interpreted, and allows the Trump-era Arctic strategy to be read not only through climate change but also through power balances and competition.

### **2.1 Basic assumptions of offensive realism**

Classical realism explains international politics through states' pursuit of power, traced to selfish human nature. Drawing on Christian theology's depiction of humans as sinful and on Darwin's struggle for existence, classical realists argue that individuals and, by extension, states are power-seeking (Darwin, 2009: 45–47).

For Morgenthau, international politics is a struggle for power, and rational states seek power in order to survive (Morgenthau, 1948: 4–15), a view reminiscent of Hobbes' state of nature ( ). Waltz relocates this struggle from human nature to the anarchic structure of the international system and sees states as security-seeking actors that, in the absence of a higher authority, must rely on “self-help,” providing for their own security and merely hoping for, rather than relying on, others' assistance (Waltz, 1979: 88, 111, 126–128). Mearsheimer rejects this security-first limit and claims that the best way to survive is to become the most powerful state in the system; great powers are rarely satisfied with the status quo and, when opportunities arise, act expansionistically (Mearsheimer, 2001: 2). Offensive realism also stresses that states can never truly know one another's intentions. Because a state that appears status-quo oriented today may act offensively tomorrow, prudent states prepare for the worst (Mershaimer, 2001: 35). Like realism, offensive realism assumes an anarchic system, rational states, a survival imperative, uncertainty about others' intentions, and the possession and possible use of military force (Mershaimer, 2001: 30–35). Thus it explains offensive foreign policies that classical and structural realism cannot adequately account for.

## **2.2 The applicability of offensive realism to the arctic**

Offensive realism has been widely used to analyse great-power rivalry. In *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Mershaimer systematically outlines the theory and interprets hegemonic projects in this light (Mershaimer, 2001). In “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin” (2014), he explains Russian policy as a reaction to NATO enlargement and as a rational security reflex grounded in offensive realism. The same framework is applied to US–China relations, where Mearsheimer argues that China's rise is a quest for hegemony and cannot be peaceful, making conflict with the US likely (Mershaimer, 2001: 396–402). Similarly, Layne (2006) shows how the US projected power while maintaining a liberal image, promoted NATO expansion, and shaped the post-Cold War order in its own interests.

The Arctic is well suited to analysis through offensive realism. The region's growing strategic and economic weight means that the theory's emphasis on anarchy clearly applies. There is no central authority capable of imposing binding rules; international law is limited; and the US is not a party to UNCLOS (United Nations

Convention on the Law of the Sea), weakening that convention's sanctioning and binding force. The Arctic Council, founded in 1996 and bringing together the eight Arctic states, is only a consultative forum whose decisions are not binding and from which security and defence issues are largely excluded. Existing legal mechanisms are therefore too weak to resolve disputes.

Offensive realism's rational-state and survival assumptions also fit US Arctic policy. Newly accessible energy fields encourage the US, as a rational actor, to pursue hegemony in the region and to evaluate not only current but also future risks and opportunities. Survival includes pre-empting potential threats, securing access to resources that enhance power, and preventing rivals from gaining advantages. In the Arctic, the US faces two major competitors, Russia and China; maintaining a presence there thus appears as a geopolitical necessity rather than a discretionary choice.

### **3 ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES IN THE ARCTIC REGION**

Climate change is a global phenomenon, but its effects are especially visible in the Arctic, where temperatures are rising almost twice as fast as the global average, accelerating glacier melt and sea-level rise. These changes affect ecosystems and economic activities alike: new sea routes and accessible resources increase the region's geopolitical importance and may reshape international trade through routes such as the Northern Sea Route (RAND Corporation, 2018: 1). This section reviews climate change impacts in the Arctic, then considers trade routes and hydrocarbon reserves.

#### **3.1. Effects of climate change**

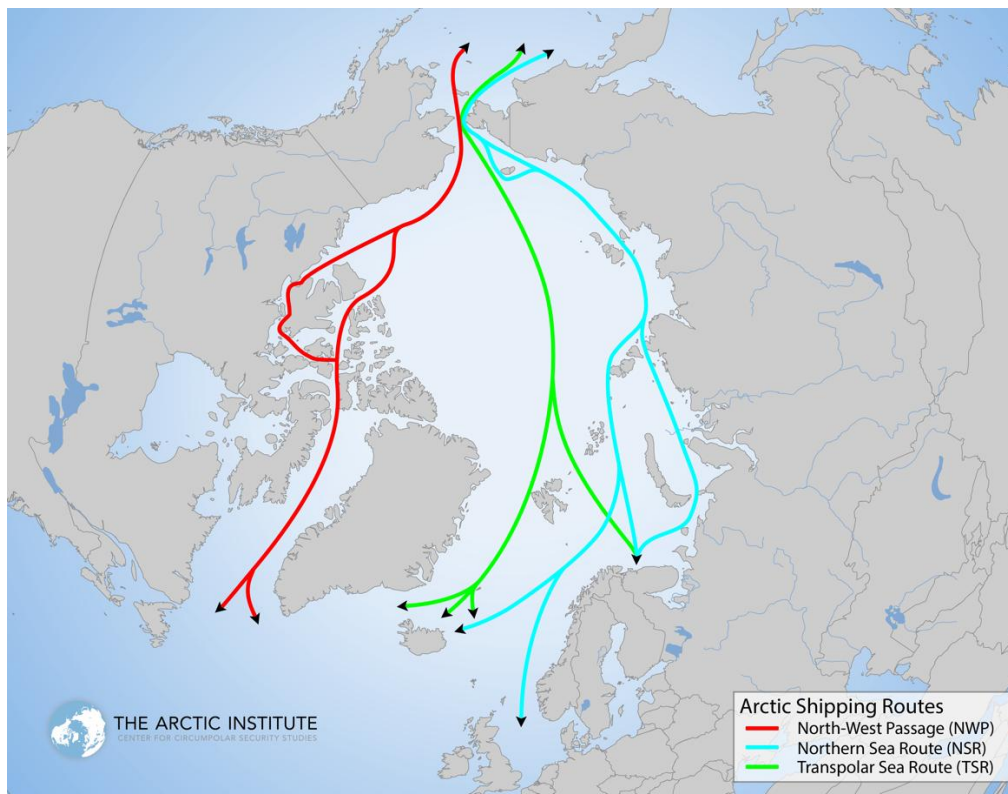
Climate change refers to long-term changes in temperatures and weather patterns (United Nations). Houghton (2009) defines it as a modification of the atmosphere's composition, radiation balance, and temperature caused by natural or human factors, but stresses that contemporary change is driven mainly by rising greenhouse gas concentrations linked to human activities and the large-scale use of fossil fuels since the Industrial Revolution.

The report *Climate Change 2021: Summary of All*, prepared by the IPCC with UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization, concludes that human factors have

been almost the sole cause of global warming over the last 200 years and highlights rising temperatures, shifting rainfall regimes, and more frequent extremes as key indicators (IPCC, 2021: 6–7). Climate change has extensive environmental, social, and economic consequences, from biodiversity loss and shrinking polar habitats to infrastructure damage and displacement (Thomas and Cheung, 2024: 1–4). Socially and politically, changing living conditions can trigger migration, particularly where food, water, and livelihoods are insecure (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). Macroeconomic impacts include reduced agricultural production, disrupted raw-material supplies for industry, lower labour productivity, and a declining capital stock (Kızılkaya and Mike, 2023: 404).

### **3.2 The emergence of new transportation routes**

The 2021 grounding of *The Ever Given* and week-long closure of the Suez Canal underscored the vulnerability of existing routes and the need for alternatives. During this period, Egypt is estimated to have lost 12–14 million dollars per day, while the daily damage to global trade reached about 10 billion dollars (Anadolu Agency, 2021). The Arctic has emerged as a prominent alternative corridor. The Polar Code and regulations adopted by the International Maritime Organization in 2017 are crucial for safe navigation in polar waters (IMO, 2024). Melting ice has opened three main routes: the Northern Sea Route, the Northwest Passage, and the Transpolar Sea Route, whose use is expected to increase (Arcticportal, 2024).

**Figure 1***Arctic Sea Routes*

Source: The Arctic Institute

In 1987, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev called for opening the Northern Sea Route as a shortcut between the North Atlantic and North Pacific and for allowing foreign ships to use it to export natural resources from the North Pole. The route was officially opened to non-regional ships in 1991, and expectations grew that it would attract international shipping (Brubaker and Ragner, 2010: 2). According to the Northern Sea Route Office, maritime traffic on this route increased by 194.5% between 2017 and 2020 (Northern Sea Route Office, 2020).

The Arctic Council Working Group’s 2024 report “Status of Arctic Ships” shows that between 2013 and 2023 the number of ships in the Arctic rose by 37%, from 1,298 to 1,782, while total distance sailed increased by 111%, from 6.1 million to 12.9 million nautical miles. In 2023, 723 ships were fishing vessels—more than one-third of all ships—and 533 were cargo ships; there were also 51 oil product tankers, 31 crude oil tankers, and 31 gas tankers (Pame, 2025).

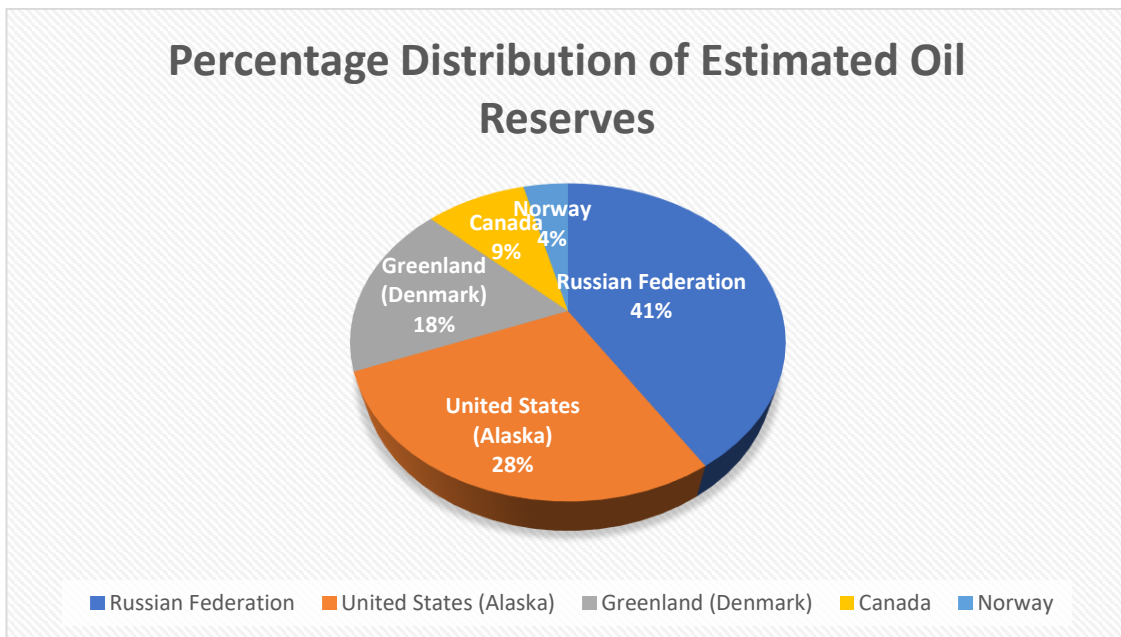
### 3.3 Accessibility of natural resources

Alongside new transport routes, the Arctic is attracting attention because of the energy resources revealed by melting glaciers. Research by the US Geological Survey estimates that the region contains 90 billion barrels of oil, 1,670 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and 44 billion barrels of natural gas liquids, almost 10% of the world's known conventional resources (USGS, 2008). Some authors suggest that 22% of the world's undiscovered oil and gas reserves lie in the Arctic (Yılmaz and Çiftçi, 2013: 4).

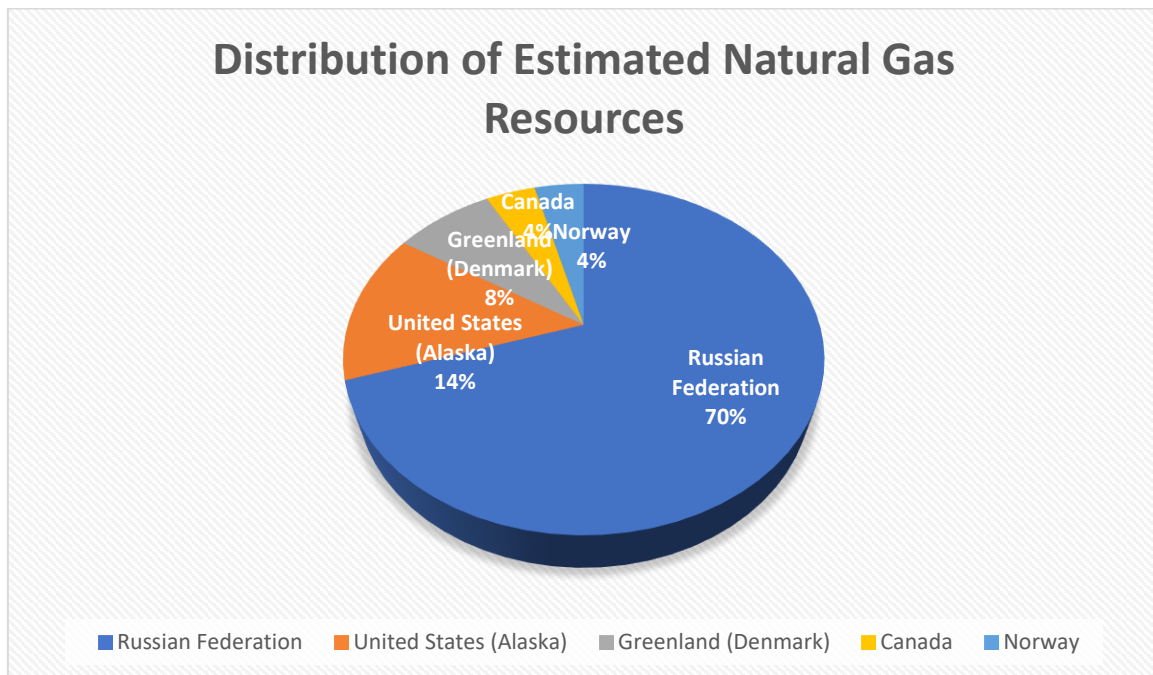
The Arctic, within the Arctic Circle, borders Russia, Norway, Canada, the US, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden.

**Figure 2**

*Distribution of Estimated Oil Resources*



Source: Lindolth and Glomsrød (2011). The role of the Arctic in future global petroleum supply

**Figure 3***Estimated Distribution of Natural Gas Resources*

Source: Lindolth and Glomsrød (2011). The role of the Arctic in future global petroleum supply

It is estimated that Russia controls 41% of Arctic petroleum resources. The US (Alaska) holds just under 28%, Greenland (Denmark) 18%, Canada 9%, and Arctic Norway 4%. For natural gas, Russia's share is about 70%, followed by the US (Alaska) with 14%, Greenland (Denmark) with 8%, and Canada and Norway with 4% each. The Yamal Peninsula, the Kara Sea, and the Barents Sea are particularly rich in natural gas.

Easier access to Arctic oil reserves and shorter sea transport routes herald a major geopolitical shift. The report *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*, published by the US National Intelligence Council, predicts that the world's centre of gravity will shift as accelerating climate change and competition for natural resources interact (National Intelligence Council, 2012: 5), suggesting a gradual move of strategic importance from the Middle East toward the Arctic.

#### **4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study is designed as a qualitative research examining the Arctic policy of the United States during the Donald Trump era (2017–2021) within the framework of offensive realism theory. The main objective of the study is to reveal the relationship

between the discourse emerging in the Trump administration's Arctic strategy documents and energy and military investments, and to produce theoretically grounded scenarios for a possible second Trump term based on these findings. Therefore, the methodology is based on a two-tiered structure consisting of both theoretically informed thematic content analysis and scenario-based analysis that carries these findings into the future.

In this context, the research first adopts the basic assumptions of offensive realism (anarchic structure, rational actor, power maximization, hegemony, and survival) as a theoretical framework. then systematically analyzes US Arctic strategy documents according to this framework; and finally, it develops three possible policy scenarios for the future by correlating the qualitative findings with quantitative indicators (such as ice melt rates, energy investments, military activities, etc.).

#### **4.1 Data sources and thematic content analysis**

The first data set of the study consists of four official Arctic strategy documents published during Trump's first term as president:

- Department of Defense Arctic Strategy (2019);
- U.S. Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook (2019);
- Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy (2020);
- U.S. Army Arctic Strategy: Regaining Arctic Dominance (2021).

These documents were chosen because they reflect the U.S. Arctic vision in its most explicit and institutionalized form. The summary, introduction, and conclusion sections of the documents were excluded from the scope of the analysis because they mainly contain general frameworks and repetitive formulations; the actual analysis was conducted on the analytical sections where strategic priorities, threat perceptions, and tool preferences are concretized.

In analyzing the texts, the qualitative content analysis approach commonly used in qualitative research was adopted (Schreier, 2012). This approach allows for the identification of recurring patterns of meaning in text-based data and their association with predefined theoretical categories. Within the scope of this study, the content analysis process proceeded as follows:

First, a theory-based (deductive) coding scheme was developed based on the fundamental assumptions of the offensive realism theory. Five main themes were defined within the framework of this scheme:

- **Theme 1:** Power maximization and power projection;
- **Theme 2:** Energy security and resource control;
- **Theme 3:** Military capacity and deterrence;
- **Theme 4:** Exclusion of environmental regimes and relegation of environmental diplomacy;
- **Theme 5:** Regional competition, great power rivalry, and hegemonic discourse.

Strategy documents were analyzed at the paragraph level, and each paragraph was matched with relevant themes based on the concepts it contained and its emphasis. Multiple coding was permitted for paragraphs reflecting more than one theme simultaneously; this was particularly evident in sections referring to power projection, energy security, and military capacity at the same time. In addition, each paragraph's degree of alignment with offensive realism assumptions was classified into three levels:

- If a paragraph contains multiple fundamental assumptions simultaneously, it is classified as “high alignment”.
- If it can be related to only one theme or assumption, it is classified as “medium alignment”.
- For paragraphs that cannot be directly related to fundamental assumptions, but rather contain references to the environment, local populations, legal regulations, or technical explanations, the “low alignment” category is used.

Thus, thematic tables were created for each document, containing the paragraph number, relevant theme code, level of alignment, page number, and a brief paragraph summary. These tables quantitatively and qualitatively reveal, on the one hand, which themes are concentrated within the documents and, on the other hand, the level of overlap with the assumptions of offensive realism. The coding process was carried out by a single researcher; to increase consistency, the documents were read multiple times, and after the initial coding, the code definitions were reviewed and the code book was refined. While this process does not ensure multi-coder reliability, it was conducted with an awareness of its limitations, aiming to increase internal consistency through systematic rereading and comparison.

The findings of the content analysis were not limited to document-internal distributions; the intensity of themes was interpreted alongside secondary quantitative indicators observed throughout the period, such as ice melt rates, energy infrastructure investments, defense expenditures, and the number of military exercises. This established a more comprehensive relationship between textual discourse and actual policy practices.

## 4.2 Scenario-based analysis

The second methodological pillar of the study is scenario-based analysis, which carries the qualitative findings into the future. Scenario analysis is an analytical tool that allows for the systematic consideration of different policy trajectories in areas of high long-term uncertainty (Bradfield et al., 2005). Studies in the international relations literature that highlight the importance of theory-grounded, policy-relevant scenarios (Sus & Hadeed, 2020) emphasize that scenario analysis is not merely about producing “predictions”; it also serves to test and discuss the possible real-world implications of theoretical assumptions.

This study uses two main pillars in constructing scenarios for Trump's possible second term:

- a. The thematic intensity and level of alignment with offensive realism evident in the strategy documents Trump produced on the Arctic during his 2017–2021 term,
- b. Empirical indicators such as energy investments, defense spending, military exercises, and environmental pressures observed during the same period.

Within this framework, three analytical scenarios have been developed in line with the expectations of the offensive realism theory: the “offensive hegemony” scenario, in which offensive realism becomes even more pronounced; the “balanced foreign policy” scenario, in which energy and security priorities are partially balanced by environmental sensitivities and alliance relations; and the “environment-centered policy” scenario, which prioritizes environmental regimes and multilateralism. These scenarios are not treated as definitive predictions; rather, they are analytical constructs that show how current trends and theoretical assumptions could produce different outcomes under different combinations.

As a result, thanks to this methodological framework, the study does not merely describe the Arctic strategy documents of the Trump era; it tests the claims of offensive

realism theory in a concrete policy field and relates these findings to possible power-policy patterns that could carry over into a second Trump term. Thus, both the theory–data relationship is strengthened and a methodologically consistent contribution is made to current geopolitical debates concerning the Arctic geography.

## 5 RESULTS: ARCTIC POLICY DURING THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

The Arctic region is becoming a vibrant international region rich in natural resources and high economic potential. Under this heading, the strategy documents published during Trump's first term between 2017 and 2021 were analyzed from an offensive realism perspective, the US's energy and military investments during this period were presented with quantitative data, and scenario analyses were conducted for Trump's second term.

### 5.1 Trump's 2017-2021 arctic strategies: an offensive realism perspective

During Trump's 2017-2021 term, four *strategy documents targeting the Arctic region* were announced: *the Department of Defense Arctic Strategy* (2019), *the U.S. Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook* (2019), *the Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy* (2020), and *the U.S. Army Arctic Strategy: Regaining Arctic Dominance* (2021). While analyzing these strategy documents in this study, their introduction and conclusion sections were excluded from the scope of analysis. This is because these sections contain general summaries.

The *Department of Defense Arctic Strategy* strategy document, published by the Department of Defense in June 2019, consists of a total of 18 pages. This document summarizes the strategy for the Arctic region based on three main points. These points are: raising awareness about the Arctic region, developing Arctic operations, and strengthening the rules-based order in the region. In the analysis of this strategy document, six headings other than the summary, introduction, and conclusion were examined. These headings are as follows:

- Assessment of the Arctic Security Environment;
- U.S. National Security Interests in the Arctic;
- Risks to U.S. National Security Interests;

- Arctic Objectives of the Department of Defense Strategy Document;
- The Department of Defense Strategy Document's Approach to the Arctic;
- Arctic Routes and Vehicles.

The thematic analysis table created after examining these headings is as follows:

**Table 1**

*2019 Department of Defense Arctic Strategy Document Thematic Analysis*

Paragraph Number	Theme Code	Institutional Alignment	Page Number	Paragraph Summary
1	T1, T2	High	3	National Security Interests, Power Projection, Strategic Corridor
2	T4	Medium	3	Status of the Arctic Region, 8 Independent States in the Region
3	No Theme Code	Low	3	Physical Changes in the Arctic Region
4	No Theme Code	Low	4	Multilateral Cooperation, Desire for a Peaceful and Stable Region
5	No Theme Code	Low	4	Emphasis on International Law
6	T5	Medium	4	Competition between Russia and China in the Arctic Region
7	T2-T5	High	4	Russia is seen as a military threat, while China is seen as an economic threat
8	T1-T3	High	5	Importance of military presence, increase in military capabilities, emphasis on power
9	No Theme Code	Low	5	International Norms, Emphasis on Regional Cooperation
10	T1-T5	High	5	Strategic Competition, Great Power Rivalry, Aggression, Global Power Projection
11	T2	Medium	6	Economic Competition, Strategic Region
12	T5	Medium	6	Russian and Chinese Threat in the Region, Regional Competition
13	T5	Medium	6	Regional competition against China and Russia
14	T5	Medium	6	Strategic Competition, National Security Interests

15	T1-T3	High	6	Emphasis on the defense of the Arctic region, Military capacity
16	T5	Med	7	Emphasis on strategic rivals and regional competition
17	T3	Medium	7	Military purposes
18	No Theme Code	Low	7	The importance of targets and strategy documents for the Arctic region
19	T3-T5	High	7	Regional competition, emphasis on deterrence to protect the interests of the US and its allies
20	No Theme Code	Low	7	Emphasis on mutual interests, rules-based order, and mutual cooperation
21	T3-T5	High	8	The importance of military capacity and deterrence against regional rivals
22	T5	Middle	8	Activities of the US's strategic rivals in the region
23	T3	Medium	9	Expectations from the US Northern Command
24	No Theme Code	Low	9	Explanations regarding the climate conditions and geographical structure of the Arctic region
25	T3-T5	High	9	Emphasis on increasing military capacity in response to the Russian military threat
26	No Theme Code	Low	10	Policies pursued and operations conducted jointly with other allies
27	No Theme Code	Low	10	The importance of operations conducted with other allies
28	T3	Medium	10	The importance of the Defense Meteorological Satellite Program in supporting military operations
29	No Theme Code	Low	10	The importance of meteorology and observation data
30	T3	Medium	10	Supporting Coast Guard units for the US presence in the region
31	T3-T5	High	11	Improving military operational capabilities and emphasizing NATO in certain operations
32	No Theme Code	Low	11	Military training

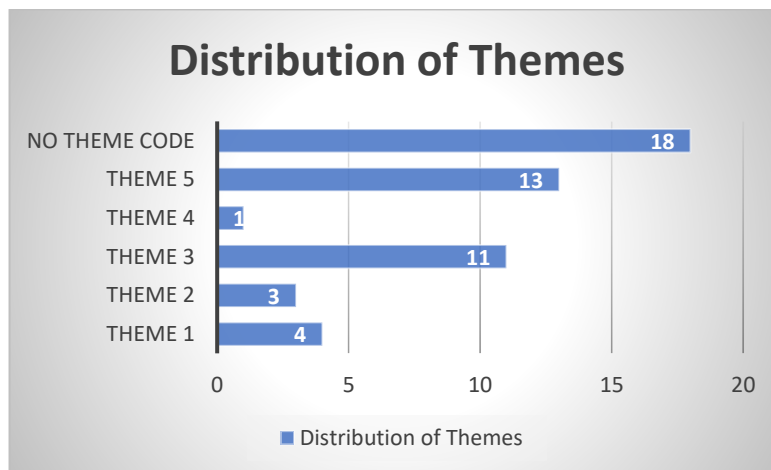
33	No Theme Code	Low	11	Emphasis on task distribution in exercises
34	No Theme Code	Low	11	Civilian and military training against cold weather
35	T3-T5	High	12	Emphasis on global power capability, hegemony, and military capacity
36	No Theme Code	Low	12	Strengthening federal units for cooperation
37	No Theme Code	Low	12	Emphasis on international law and rule-based order
38	No Theme Code	Low	13	Emphasis on collective security and cooperation
39	No Theme Code	Low	13	Emphasis on NATO cooperation
40	No Theme Code	Low	13	Freedom of navigation and flight, emphasis on international law

Source: Created by Authors

The graph of the themes that stand out *in the reviewed Department of Defense Arctic Strategy Document* is as follows.

#### Figure 4

*Distribution of Themes According to the Department of Defense Arctic Strategy Document*



Source: Created by Authors

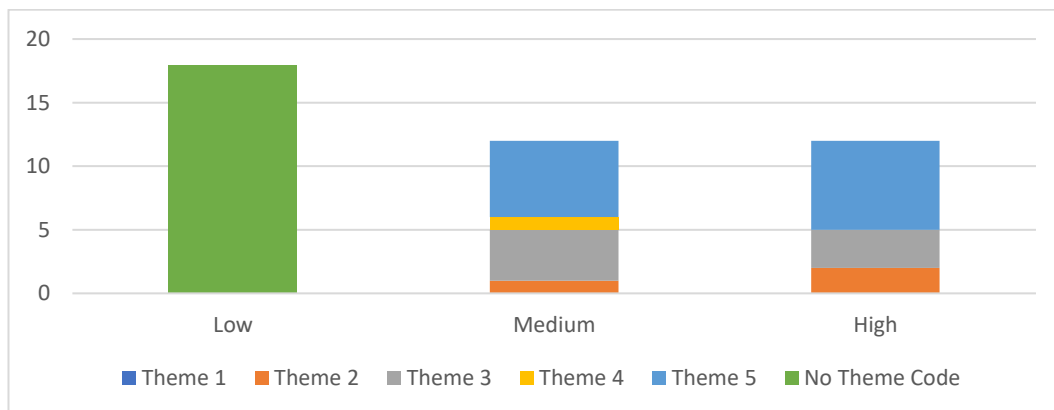
When examining the distribution of themes, Theme 5, which is associated with regional competition and hegemony, stands out compared to other themes. In particular, Theme 5 emphasizes regional competition, specifically between Russia and China. After

Theme 5, Theme 3 is one of the most frequently encountered themes in this strategy document. In Theme 3, which is associated with military capacity, the need to increase military capabilities against the Russian and Chinese threats in the region is most frequently mentioned. This shows that this strategy document is largely shaped around military deterrence and great power competition. Furthermore, although fewer in number compared to other themes in the thematic distribution, power maximization, energy security, and the exclusion of environmental regimes are also addressed.

Another important point in this strategic document is that a large number of paragraphs in the table fall under the category "No Theme Code." These paragraphs are mostly related to international law, environmental changes, and multilateral cooperation. These concepts are far from offensive realism. In conclusion, while the overall orientation of this strategy document is security-centered and military-focused, it also includes references to international law, cooperation, and multilateralism.

### Figure 5

*Compatibility of Themes According to the Department of Defense Arctic Strategy Document*



Source: Created by Authors

When examining the level of alignment of the themes, a large portion of the paragraphs in the high alignment category contain the codes Theme 1, Theme 3, and Theme 5. These paragraphs address power-maximization, the enhancement of military capacity, and the threats posed by Russia and China in the region. Paragraphs with a medium level of alignment emphasize energy and economic competition in Theme 2 and regional threats in Theme 5. The "No Theme" category reflects concepts such as rule-based order, cooperation, and international law in the paragraphs. Ultimately, this

document aligns with the basic assumptions of offensive realism but also includes concepts of cooperation and international law.

**Table 2**

*United States Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook Document Thematic Analysis*

Paragraph Number	Theme Code	Institutional Alignment	Page Number	Paragraph Summary
1	T1-T2	High	4	Linking US security to the Arctic, maximizing power and controlling resources
2	T1-T3	High	4	Emphasis on the importance of military capacity for power maximization and sovereignty
3	T1-T5	High	4	Emphasis on power and definition of strategic lines
4	T2-T3	High	4	Emphasis on military capacity for national interests
5	T1-T3	High	5	Emphasis on the importance of power, sovereignty, and military capacity
6	No Theme Code	Low	5	Emphasis on multilateral cooperation
7	T1-T5	High	5	Emphasis on power projection and Arctic regional competition
8	T2	Medium	6	Economic corridors and opportunities
9	T5	Medium	6	Russia and China Competition in the Region
10	T5	Medium	6	Russia and China's challenge to the US
11	T1-T3	High	6	Capacity expansion for defense
12	T5	Medium	7	Increased presence of strategic rivals
13	T3-T5	High	7	Emphasis on military deterrence and regional competition
14	T5	High	9	The transformation of the Arctic region into an arena of competition
15	T5	High	10	China's policies toward the region
16	T5	High	10	Russia's military infrastructure and superiority

17	T1-T5	High	10	Power maximization and emphasis on NATO allies
18	No Theme Code	Low	11	Arctic region definition
19	No Theme Code	Low	11	The United States' official definition of the Arctic region
20	T1	Medium	11	U.S. borders, power projection, and base distances
21	No Theme Code	Low	12	Melting glaciers and fragility in the region
22	T1-T2	High	12	Energy resources, NSR, and power maximization
23	No Theme Code	Low	14	Vulnerability of indigenous peoples
24	T2	Medium	14	Resource extraction and traffic risks
25	T1-T5	High	14	The security dimension of the Arctic region and regional competition
26	T1-T5	High	15	Power projection and increasing regional risks
27	T1-T3	High	16	The Coast Guard's long-term role.
28	No Theme Code	Low	18	Emphasis on rule-based order
29	T2	Medium	18	Economic security
30	T4	Medium	19	Community vulnerability
31	T1-T3	High	19	Power projection and three strategic target lines
32	T5	Medium	20	Emphasis on alliance
33	T5	Medium	20	Strategic partnership with Canada
34	T5	Medium	21	Alaska peoples and security
35	T1-T5	High	21	Power projection and the region's critical role
36	T1	Medium	22	Leadership role
37	T1	Medium	22	Power projection and innovation
38	No Theme Code	Low	23	Joint research and academic support
39	T1-T3	High	24	US dominance and military capacity enhancement
40	T1-T3	High	26	U.S. sovereignty and military needs
41	T1-T3	High	26	Power maximization and increased military investment
42	T2	Medium	26	Innovation for economic resources
43	T1	Medium	26	Power projection and operational alignment
44	T2-T4	High	27	Continuous situational awareness is essential for the Arctic
45	T2	Medium	27	MDA security

46	T2-T4	High	27	Coast Guard responsible for national Arctic awareness
47	T2-T4	High	28	CG is increasing Arctic awareness through partnerships and investments.
48	T1-T3	High	28	Intelligence gathering and information conversion strengthen national security
49	No Theme Code	Low	29	Emphasis on weak communications in the Arctic
50	No Theme Code	Low	29	Closing the communication gap is the shared responsibility of all institutions
51	No Theme Code	Low	29	Strengthening the communication infrastructure
52	T5	Medium	30	The importance of the CG role in the region
53	T5	Medium	30	CG reinforces order by setting an example in international maritime affairs.
54	T5	Medium	32	CG is committed to strengthening the order based on transparency and respect for sovereignty.
55	No Theme Code	Low	32	It continues international cooperation through the Arctic Council and multilateral agreements.
56	T5	Medium	33	Defends US interests within the framework of CG, IMO, and maritime law
57	No Theme Code	Low	33	CG strengthens cooperation and trust through multilateral operations such as ACGF
58	T5	Medium	33	Maintaining order in the region
59	T5	Medium	34	Deterrence against rivals with allies
60	T5	Medium	34	Defense priorities for regional deterrence
61	T5	Medium	34	Protection of regional order and sovereignty
62	T5	Medium	34	Prevention-intervention models
63	No Theme Code	Low	34	Alaska Native communities
64	No Theme Code	Low	35	Opportunities for cooperation in response

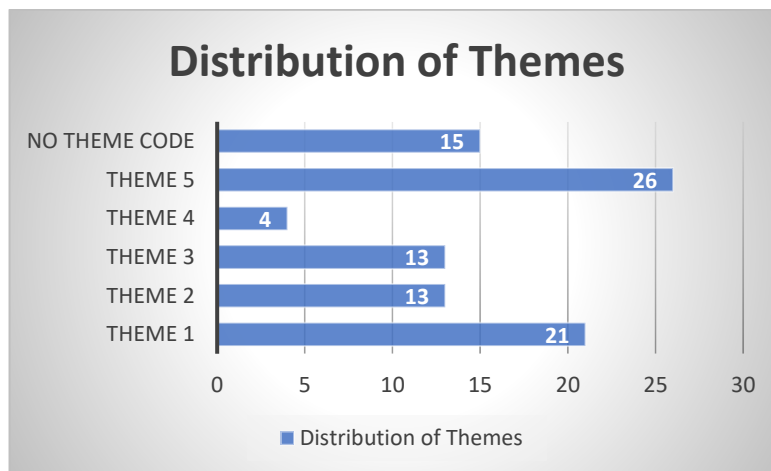
				to challenging conditions in the region
65	No Theme Code	Low	36	Crisis preparedness and multilateral cooperation
66	T3	Medium	37	Legal and security compliance
67	T2	Medium	37	Control of economic resources and fish stocks
68	T3	Medium	37	Security capacity in combating crime and illegal migration
69	T5	Medium	37	Regional competition and strategic transportation
70	T2	Medium	37	Resource control and energy security

Source: Created by Authors

The distribution of themes in the reviewed United States Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook Document is as follows.

**Figure 6**

*United States Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook Document*



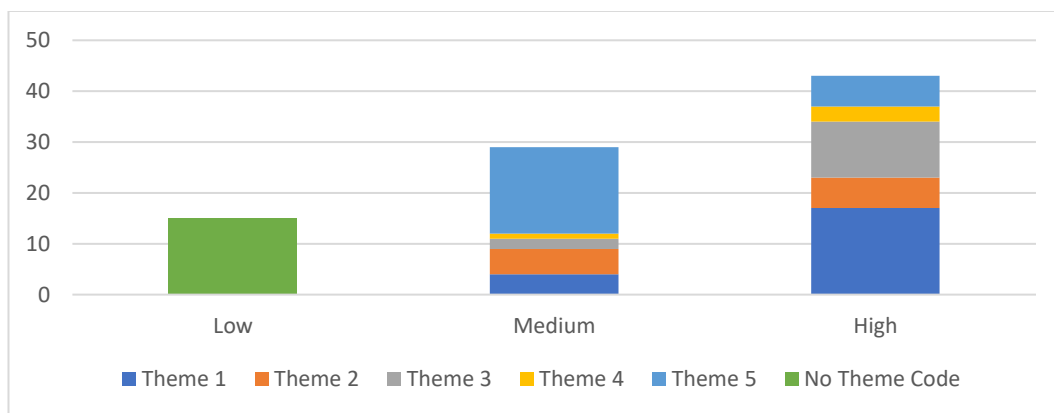
Source: Created by Authors

When examining the distribution of themes, it is evident that this strategy document primarily addresses Theme T5, which is related to regional competition and hegemony. This indicates that great power competition and the goal of achieving strategic superiority are of high importance to this strategy document. The T1 theme ( ), related to power projection and national security, reflects the US's goal of strengthening its military presence in the Arctic. The T2 theme, related to energy security and control of economic resources, and the T3 theme, related to military capacity, are addressed in the context of energy corridors, strategic sea lanes, and the development of military infrastructure. The

T4 theme, related to the exclusion of environmental regimes, was the least emphasized theme. In 15 paragraphs, no theme code was found. This indicates that some sections of the examined strategy document address topics that do not include the main themes of offensive realism, such as climate change, the situation of local populations, multilateral cooperation, and communication infrastructure.

### Figure 7

*Compatibility of Themes According to the United States Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook Document*



Source: Created by Authors

When examining the alignment of the themes in the above graph with the perspective of offensive realism, it is seen that this strategy document is highly consistent with offensive realism theory. Highly aligned paragraphs are primarily shaped around themes T1, related to power projection and national security; T3, related to military capacity; and T5, related to regional competition and hegemony. The emphasis on regional competition highlights competition with Russia and China in the region. The competition with Russia and China, perceived threats from these countries, and the issue of hegemony also come to the fore in the moderately aligned paragraphs. The low-alignment paragraphs address environmental factors, legal regulations, multilateral cooperation, and the vulnerabilities of local populations in the region. This strategy document, in its general framework, directly aligns with the basic assumptions of offensive realism.

*The Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy (2020)* document, published by the Air Force in 2020, is approximately 15 pages long. This strategy document is structured around four main headings: Vigilance in All Domains, Projecting Power

Through a Combat-Credible Force, Cooperation with Allies and Partners, and Preparation for Arctic Operations. The document's main objectives are to create a secure and stable Arctic region, protect US national interests, and enhance international cooperation.

The thematic analysis table for this strategy document is as follows

**Table 3**

*Thematic analysis of the Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy (2020) document*

Paragraph Number	Theme Code	Institutional Alignment	Page Number	Paragraph Summary
1	T3	Medium	4	Emphasis on military capacity
2	No Theme Code	Low	4	Countries in the Arctic region
3	No Theme Code	Low	4	Geographical features of the Arctic region
4	T1-T3	High	4	The geostrategic position of the Arctic region and emphasis on military capacity
5	T1-T3	High	4	The importance of strategic deterrence and military capability
6	No Theme Code	Low	4	Information related to search and rescue missions
7	No Theme Code	Low	6	Climate change and its negative impact on air forces
8	T2	Moderate	6	Energy potential and economic gains
9	T5	Medium	6	Regional competition and emphasis on Russia
10	T5	Medium	6	Regional Competition and China Focus
11	No Theme Code	Low	7	Emphasis on stability, respect, and rule-based order
12	Theme Code Path	Low	7	Capabilities of the military presence in the region
13	T3	Medium	7	Emphasis on military capacity
14	T3	Medium	8	Military capacity and the importance of air forces
15	No Theme Code	Low	8	Arctic region weather conditions
16	T1-T3	High	9	The importance of power maximization and military capacity
17	T3	Medium	9	Increasing military capacity with F-35 fighter jets

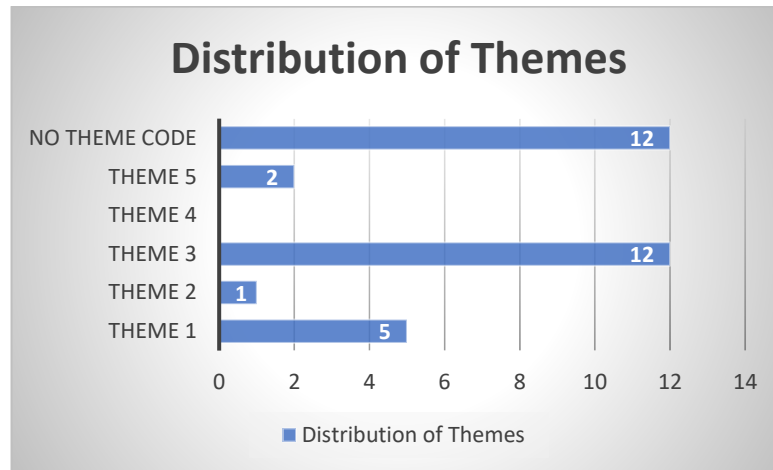
18	T1-T3	High	9	Supporting military institutions for power maximization and deterrence
19	T3	Medium	10	The importance of military capacity in logistics
20	T1	Medium	11	Power maximization and the geopolitical importance of the Arctic region
21	No Theme Code	Low	11	Alliance relations with NATO and other countries
22	No Theme Code	Low	11	Emphasis on alliance and cooperation
23	No Theme Code	Low	11	Emphasis on alliance and joint action
24	T3	Medium	12	The importance of military training in strengthening US national security
25	T3	Intermediate	12	The importance of strengthening military infrastructure and training in the Arctic region
26	T3	Medium	12	Increasing military capacity for civil and military rescue operations
27	No Theme Code	Low	13	R&D work in technology
28	No Theme Code	Low	13	Current skills of personnel

Source: Created by Authors

The graph of the themes that stand out *in the reviewed Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy (2020) document* is as follows.

**Figure 8**

*Distribution of themes according to the Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy (2020) document*

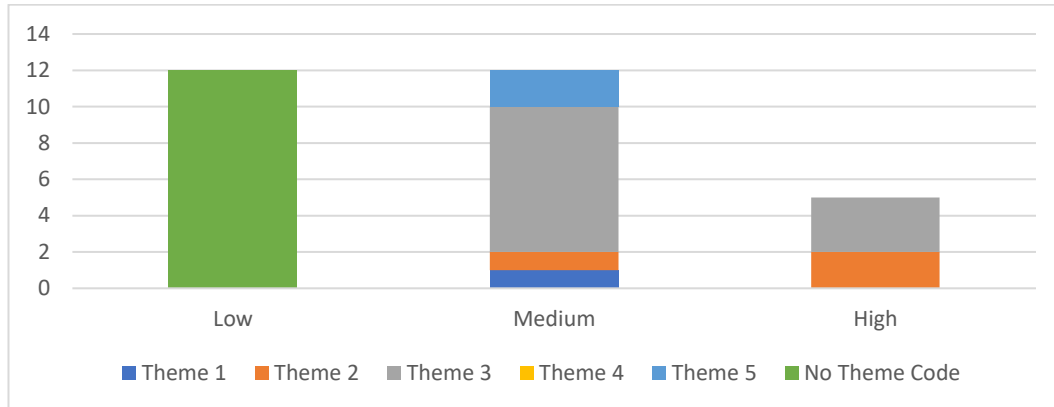


Source: Created by Authors

When both the table and the distribution of themes are examined, the themes are predominantly concentrated on Theme 3. Theme 3 is related to military capacity and operational capabilities. Paragraphs associated with Theme 3 emphasize elements such as military capacity and deterrence. Theme 1, associated with national security and power maximization, is addressed with high and medium alignment, presenting a consistent picture with Theme 3. Theme 2, related to energy security, is only mentioned in one paragraph in the context of energy and economic gains. Theme 5, associated with regional competition and hegemony ( ), found its place in two different paragraphs with the threat of Russia and China. The "no theme" category mainly included topics such as climate change, allied relations, NATO relations, geographical conditions, and personnel competencies.

**Figure 8**

*Alignment of themes according to the Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy (2020) document*



Source: Created by Authors

When examining the levels of alignment in the table, it is seen that the paragraphs in the high alignment category are shaped around themes such as Theme 1 and Theme 3, which relate to military capacity, deterrence, and power maximization. The paragraphs with a medium level of alignment mostly cover topics such as increasing military capacity and Russian and Chinese competition. Paragraphs in the low alignment category mostly deal with descriptive geographical information, environmental factors, cooperation, and technical details. Consequently, this document shows strong alignment with the offensive realism perspective, particularly emphasizing military capacity enhancement, deterrence, and great power competition.

The strategy document *Regaining Arctic Dominance – The U.S. Army in the Arctic*, published in 2021, broadly explains the geopolitical importance of the Arctic region and the presence of the U.S. Army in the region. This document also addresses climate change in the region and its impact on geographical conditions. The Arctic region is defined as a strategic environment in the document, and the activities of Russia and China in this region are highlighted. This document is approximately 48 pages long.

**The thematic analysis of this strategy document is as follows:**

**Table 4***Thematic Analysis of the U.S. Army Arctic Strategy: Regaining Arctic Dominance (2021)**Document*

Paragraph Number	Theme Code	Institutional Alignment	Page Number	Paragraph Summary
1	No Theme Code	Low	1	Geographical descriptions of the region
2	T5	Middle	2	Regional competition and potential conflicts in the region
3	T2	Medium	3	Potential economic opportunities and resource control
4	No Theme Code	Low	4	Effects of climate change
5	No Theme Code	Low	4	The impact of climate change on the air force
6	No Theme Code	Low	5	The military's presence in the region
7	T1	Medium	5	Power maximization
8	T3	Medium	5	The importance and activities of the army in the region
9	T1-T3	High	6	The importance of military capacity for deterrence and power maximization
10	No Theme Code	Low	6	The Army's Areas of Operation
11	No Theme Code	Low	7	Army organization
12	No Theme Code	Low	7	Current number of soldiers in the army
13	No Theme Code	Low	7	The army's areas of operation
14	No Theme Code	Low	8	Army Space and Missile Defense Command duties
15	No Theme Code	Low	10	The Army's current training system
16	T3	Medium	10	Enhancement of military skills
17	T3	Medium	11	Enhancing military capabilities and their importance
18	No Theme Code	Low	11	Army Mountain Warfare School training
19	No Theme Code	Low	12	Alaska-based training activities
20	No Theme Code	Low	12	Special Operations Advanced Mountaineering School activities
21	No Theme Code	Low	13	The Army's Situation in the Arctic During World War II
22	No Theme Code	Low	13	The Army's Situation in the Arctic After World War II
23	No Theme Code	Low	14	The Army's training activities after the Cold War
24	T3-T5	High	15	Russian and Chinese competition in the region and the importance of military capacity
25	T3-T5	High	16	The background of Russia and China's presence in the region, the importance of military deterrence

26	T3-T5	High	17	Russia's policies toward the region and its threat to NATO
27	T5	Medium	18	Russia's threats to the US
28	No Theme Code	Low	18	The characteristics of Russia's geography
29	No Theme Code	Low	18	Russia's potential energy resources in the region
30	No Theme Code	Low	19	China's reasons for presence in the Arctic region
31	No Theme Code	Low	19	China's Silk Road project
32	No Theme Code	Low	19	China's economic policies
33	No Theme Code	Low	19	Reasons for the rapprochement between China and Russia in the region
34	No Theme Code	Low	20	Economic cooperation between China and Russia
35	T5	Medium	20	China and Russia posing competition for the US
36	T3	Medium	20	Enhancing the military's capacity to address challenges
37	T3	Medium	21	Increasing the operational strength and training of the army
38	T3-T5	High	21	Preparing the army for regional competition
39	T3	Medium	21	Recommendations for the military and enhancing deterrence
40	No Theme Code	Low	22	The military's current duties
41	T1-T5	High	22	Military power projection and competition in the region
42	T1-T3	High	22	Power projection and increasing the military's capacity
43	T1	Medium	24	Power projection
44	T3	Medium	24	Enhancement of operational capabilities
45	T3-T5	High	24	The importance of the army for great power competition
46	No Theme Code	Low	25	The Impact of Climate Conditions on Operations
47	T3-T5	High	26	The importance of the military for regional power competition
48	T3	Medium	27	Strengthening the military against climate conditions
49	T3	Medium	27	Developing the army's capacity and needs
50	T3	Medium	28	The army's strategic approach
51	No Theme Code	Low	28	The Current State of the U.S. Military
52	T3-T5	High	29	Developing the military's capabilities for regional competition
53	T3	Medium	30	Development of military capabilities
54	T3	Medium	30	Equipment and capacity enhancement required by the military

55	No Theme Code	Low	31	The army's current capabilities
56	T3	Medium	31	Reorganization of army doctrines and capacity enhancement
57	No Theme Code	Low	32	Military training activities
58	No Theme Code	Low	34	Military training courses
59	No Theme Code	Low	35	Training activities against climate conditions
60	No Theme Code	Low	36	Climate-related educational activities
61	No Theme Code	Low	36	Utilizing indigenous knowledge
62	No Theme Code	Low	36	Climate conditions and educational activities
63	T3	Medium	36	Restructuring and strengthening of operational units
64	T3	Medium	37	Modernization and strengthening of the army
65	T3	Middle	37	Enhancing and strengthening the army's maneuverability
66	T3	Medium	38	Army needs and their enhancement
67	T2	Medium	38	Energy production systems
68	No Theme Code	Low	38	Facility capabilities
69	No Theme Code	Low	38	Medical assistance for military personnel and civilians
70	No Theme Code	Low	39	The impact of climate change on military capacity
71	No Theme Code	Low	39	Environmental changes and medical issues
72	T3-T5	High	40	Competition and increasing the deterrent power of the military
73	T3	Medium	40	Strengthening military capabilities
74	No Theme Code	Low	41	The impact of environmental conditions on the military
75	No Theme Code	Low	42	The needs of the military
76	No Theme Code	Low	42	Joint exercises
77	No Theme Code	Low	43	Cooperation carried out by the army
78	T3	Medium	43	Arctic environment and enhancement of military capabilities
79	T1-T3	High	43	Power maximization and development of the army
80	T3	Medium	43	Strengthening the military for defense purposes
81	No Theme Code	Low	43	The army's cooperation with the local population
82	T3	Medium	44	Enhancing the army's capacity and capabilities
83	No Theme Code	Low	44	Unmanned technologies
84	T3-T5	High	44	Development of the military for great power competition
85	No Theme Code	Low	44	Joint forces in the Arctic
86	T1-T3	High	45	Power maximization and strengthening the military

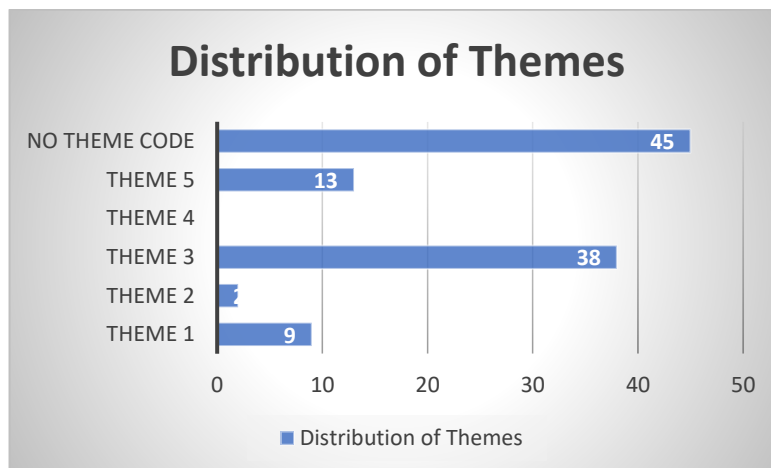
87	T3	Medium	45	Strengthening military communication systems and capacity
88	T3	Medium	46	Cybersecurity and development of cyber capabilities
89	T1-T3	High	46	Power projection and strengthening the military
90	T3	Medium	46	Strengthening the military's capabilities
91	No Theme Code	Low	47	Integration among other army units
92	T1-T3	High	47	Power maximization and army development

Source: Created by Authors

The graph of the themes that emerge in the document *Regaining Arctic Dominance – The U.S. Army in the Arctic* (2021) is as follows.

**Figure 9**

*Regaining Arctic Dominance – The U.S. Army in the Arctic* (2021)



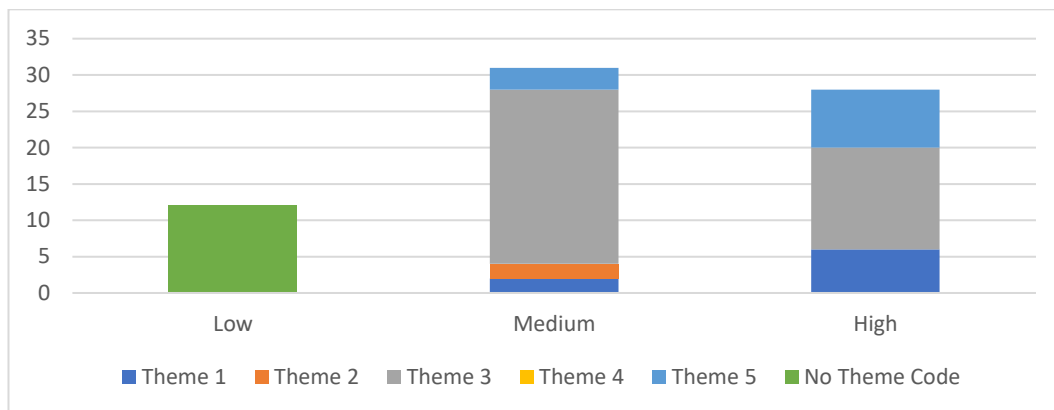
Source: Created by Authors

When examining the distribution of themes in this strategy document, paragraphs with a high degree of theoretical consistency generally revolve around themes such as T1 (power projection and national security), T3 (military capacity enhancement), and T5 (Russia-China). The emphasis on increasing military capacity, the importance of deterrence, and multidimensional operations reflects the US's objectives for the Arctic region ( ). Moderately coherent paragraphs generally highlight topics such as economic opportunities, increasing military capabilities, and technological modernization. The low-

alignment paragraphs are related to topics such as geographical definitions, environmental changes, educational infrastructure, and allied cooperation.

### Figure 10

*Theme alignment according to the U.S. Army Arctic Strategy: Regaining Arctic Dominance (2021) document*



Source: Created by Authors

When examining the graphic alignment of themes, the high alignment category reflects the US's goal of achieving military deterrence and strategic superiority in the Arctic region. In the high alignment category, power projection, military capacity enhancement, and regional competition are prominent themes. In the medium alignment category, the military capacity theme is prominent, supported by the themes of economic opportunities and regional competition. The low alignment category includes elements that are not in line with offensive realism, such as geographical definitions, climate change, educational infrastructure, and cooperation activities. Ultimately, this graph shows that this strategy document is aligned with offensive realism.

## 6 DISCUSSION: US ENERGY AND MILITARY INVESTMENTS: THE PRACTICAL REFLECTION OF STRATEGY DOCUMENTS

US President Donald Trump's campaign slogan Make America Great Again reshaped US policy priorities. The vision behind this slogan placed US interests and autonomy at the center and favored unilateral choices when multilateral commitments were perceived as constraints. This orientation was clearly reflected in energy policy. During Trump's first term, the notion of energy independence formed the core of energy

and climate policy (Telli, 2025:23). Soon after taking office, Trump announced US withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, signaling that fossil-fuel-based growth would be prioritized over climate cooperation (Schonhadt, Colman, & Mathiesen, 2025). On March 28, 2017, he signed the executive order Promoting Energy Independence and Economic Growth, calling for the removal of regulations deemed to hinder production and for the “safe development of all energy sources” (National Archives, 2017). Against this background, this section examines Trump’s energy and military investments between 2017 and 2021 to show how far the priorities articulated in the Arctic-related strategy documents were translated into practice.

### **6.1 Energy investments (2017–2021)**

Between 2017 and 2021, the US entered a period of intensive energy investment and structural change. Fossil-fuel-based production expanded strongly, renewables continued to grow, and coal remained in structural decline. In 2019, total US energy production exceeded consumption for the first time in about 62 years, turning the country into a net energy exporter (EIA, 2020a). Supported by shale technologies and favorable regulation, crude oil output rose from roughly 9.3 million barrels per day in 2017 to around 12.3 million barrels in 2019, the highest annual level in US history (EIA, 2024). Policy decisions such as approving the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipeline projects, opening parts of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) for exploration, and easing offshore drilling restrictions signaled sustained political support for oil investment (White House, 2021). Although the COVID-19 shock in 2020 temporarily reduced demand and production, output partially recovered in 2021, and the structural increase in daily production persisted.

Natural gas formed the second pillar of this “energy dominance” narrative. The US, already the world’s largest gas producer since 2011, strengthened this position as shale gas investments expanded. Between 2017 and 2019, production reached 34.9 quadrillion BTU (White House, 2021). The commissioning of LNG facilities turned the US from a net importer into a net exporter of natural gas in 2018; by early 2020 the US ranked among the top three LNG exporters, and LNG shipments hit a record in January 2020 (White House, 2021). Six large LNG export terminals went into operation and construction began on two more, raising export capacity to about 10 billion cubic feet per

day (White House, 2021). Domestically, gas consumption climbed to a historic high of 32.1 quadrillion BTU in 2019 as gas displaced coal in the power sector (EIA, 2020b). These developments consolidated the US position as a natural gas “superpower” in both production and exports.

By contrast, the coal sector continued its secular decline. Despite political rhetoric about “bringing back coal,” market forces favored cheap natural gas and increasingly competitive renewables. Between 2017 and 2019, coal demand fell rapidly; in 2019 consumption dropped by 15% to 11.3 quadrillion BTU, the lowest level since the mid-1960s (Clarion Energy, 2021). Coal’s share of total US energy consumption fell to 11%, nearly equal to renewables, and renewable energy consumption surpassed coal for the first time in 130 years of US history (EIA, 2020b). The administration lifted the federal coal leasing moratorium and relaxed environmental rules such as Clean Power Plan-related restrictions (White House, 2021), but these moves could not reverse the structural erosion of coal’s competitiveness, employment, or investment.

Nuclear power experienced no major capacity expansion but achieved high output through efficiency gains. In 2019, US nuclear plants operated at a 94% capacity factor, setting a production record (EIA, 2020b). The Trump administration treated nuclear energy as a critical pillar of baseload and provided R&D support for advanced technologies such as small modular reactors (White House, 2021). Several older plants were nevertheless shut down during 2017–2021, while construction continued on projects like Vogtle 3 and 4, and the US signed civil nuclear cooperation agreements with partners such as Poland and Romania to support exports of US technology (White House, 2021).

Renewables, though not politically favored to the same extent as fossil fuels, benefited from cost declines, state-level policies, and existing federal incentives. Renewable energy consumption increased for the fourth consecutive year in 2019, reaching about 11% of total US energy use and overtaking coal (EIA, 2020b). Solar electricity generation roughly doubled between 2016 and 2019, while wind output grew by 32% (White House, 2021). In 2020, amid pandemic-induced demand shocks, renewables were the only energy category whose consumption increased and again set a record (EIA, 2021). Despite Trump’s withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, private-sector investment and sub-federal policies sustained the momentum of wind and solar capacity additions between 2017 and 2021.

In sum, the Trump years saw record levels of oil, gas, nuclear, and renewable production, but within a policy narrative that prioritized fossil fuels and energy independence. This configuration aligns with the Arctic strategy documents' emphasis on energy security and resource control, while environmental concerns remained clearly secondary.

## **6.2 Military investments (2017–2021)**

The same period witnessed growth in US defense spending and modernization, including capabilities relevant to the Arctic. Trump reversed previous budget caps and pushed through major increases. The FY2017 defense budget stood at roughly 606 billion dollars; Trump's first budget for FY2018 raised this to about 670.6 billion dollars, with subsequent authorizations of approximately 685 billion and 738 billion dollars for FY2019 and FY2020 and about 740 billion dollars for FY2021 (McCarthy, 2020; Korb, 2020). In total, defense spending during his four-year term exceeded 2.9 trillion dollars, underpinning Trump's claim that the US military had been "completely rebuilt" and that more than 2.5 trillion dollars had been invested in defense (McCarthy, 2020). These funds supported training, pay raises, and modernization but also widened the federal deficit from around 600 billion dollars in 2017 to roughly 1 trillion dollars in 2020 (Korb, 2020).

Globally, the US maintained an unparalleled network of around 800 overseas bases and facilities (Keller, 2017). While alliance commitments in Europe and Asia remained formally intact, the Trump administration frequently criticized burden-sharing and demanded higher defense spending from allies. In response to perceived threats from Russia and China, US force posture in NATO's eastern flank and the Indo-Pacific was largely preserved. Debates about stationing additional forces in Poland and the proposal to establish a permanent base labeled "Fort Trump" illustrate the administration's willingness to consider more forward deployments; Poland even offered 2 billion dollars to host a permanent US armored division, though the project was ultimately not realized, and rotational forces were expanded instead (Copp, 2018; Lopinot, 2018; Jureńczyk, 2021).

Arctic-specific initiatives gained prominence as Russia expanded its military footprint across the region and China sought economic influence. In 2019, the Pentagon released its first comprehensive Arctic Strategy, framing the region as strategically vital

to the US (Department of Defense, 2019). Trump drew attention to Greenland's geostrategic value and floated the idea of purchasing the island, sparking intense debate (Roy and Masters, 2025). Although the proposal went nowhere, the US retained key infrastructure such as Thule Air Base in Greenland. In 2020, the US Navy sent destroyers into the Barents Sea for the first time in the post-Soviet era, and joint exercises in Alaska and northern Canada, including Arctic Edge and Northern Edge, enhanced cold-weather and multi-domain skills. On the capability side, the US Coast Guard launched a tender in 2019 for a new heavy icebreaker (Polar Security Cutter), and Congress allocated nearly 1 billion dollars to begin building the first new-generation vessel. Given Russia's large icebreaker fleet and extensive Arctic infrastructure, modernizing US icebreaking capacity was a critical step toward sustaining presence along Arctic sea routes.

Technological modernization formed another pillar of Trump-era defense investments. The Department of Defense's Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation (RDT&E) budget rose each year, reaching 109 billion dollars in FY2020, a 10% year-on-year increase and a cumulative five-year rise of 42 billion dollars (Thomas, 2020). These funds prioritized prototyping and testing in areas such as hypersonic weapons, AI-enabled command and control, cyber defense, directed-energy systems, and space infrastructure (Thomas, 2020).

Institutionally, the most enduring innovation was the establishment of the US Space Force in December 2019. Recognizing space as an independent warfighting domain, the new service focused on satellite protection, space situational awareness, and missile warning. Its first full budget request for FY2021 amounted to about 15.4 billion dollars, transferred from the Air Force (Department of the Air Force, 2020; Insinna, 2020). Analysts argue that these investments seek to build a resilient space-based defense architecture against emerging threats (Farley, 2020). In parallel, nuclear force modernization accelerated: programs to replace aging ballistic-missile submarines, ICBMs, and bombers moved forward, including Columbia-class submarines, the B-21 Raider bomber, and the GBSD program. Overall, the US plans to spend more than 1 trillion dollars over 30 years to modernize its nuclear deterrent (Zengerle, 2017).

The 2018 National Defense Strategy framed these efforts within renewed "great power competition," emphasizing modernization and high-end readiness (2018 National Defense Strategy ( )). By the end of Trump's term, many observers judged that readiness

and equipment levels had improved relative to 2016, even though numerous modernization outcomes would only materialize in subsequent years.

Taken together, Trump's presidency combined an "energy dominance" agenda with historically high defense spending and modernization. Energy policy pushed record production of oil and gas while renewables advanced due to market forces. Defense policy increased budgets, upgraded capabilities, and re-emphasized the Arctic as a strategic theater through exercises, infrastructure, and icebreaker investments. This dual track directly reinforces the themes of power projection, military capacity, and energy security highlighted in the Arctic strategy documents and in the offensive realism framework.

### **6.3 Possible policy scenarios and theoretical implications for trump's second term**

Building on thematic analysis, quantitative indicators, and scenario methodology, this study outlines three potential trajectories for a second Trump term: Offensive Realism, Balanced Foreign Policy, and Environment-Priority Policy. The empirical record of Trump's first term shows strong convergence between strategy documents and practice around themes T1 (Power Projection), T3 (Military Capacity), and T5 (Regional Hegemony). This suggests that the Arctic is conceived primarily as an arena of great-power competition in which the US seeks hegemony, deterrence, and energy security vis-à-vis Russia and China.

The Offensive Realism scenario extrapolates these trends. Strategy documents stressing competition, military build-up, and control over energy resources, together with policies such as withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, are fully consistent with offensive realism's assumptions and point toward more exercises, tougher competition for the Northern Sea Route, and expanded public investment in Arctic energy and infrastructure.

The Balanced Foreign Policy scenario is less likely. Alliance management, economic interdependence, and reputational concerns could encourage some moderation, for example, more active use of the Arctic Council or incremental sustainability measures in shipping, but Trump's first-term record of withdrawing from environmental accords and emphasizing fossil-fuel-based energy independence suggests limited willingness to prioritize multilateral environmental regimes or local vulnerabilities.

The Environment-First Policy scenario appears almost impossible under Trump. An environment-centered Arctic strategy, implying curbs on fossil fuel exploration, a

reduced military footprint, and alignment with global climate regimes, would contradict the energy independence rhetoric and the investment patterns observed between 2017 and 2021. The doubling of exercises, expansion of the icebreaker program, and fossil-fuel-focused energy agenda all indicate that such a scenario would be extremely weak in practice.

When strategy documents are read together with energy and military investments, they clearly reflect an offensive realist perspective. Prioritizing energy security, increasing military spending, and framing the Arctic in the context of rivalry with Russia and China all point toward a hegemonic project in the region. It is therefore highly likely that, in a second Trump term, Arctic competition would intensify, investments in energy security would deepen, and military deterrence would remain a central pillar of US foreign policy.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

This study, which employs the theory of offensive realism, provides a comprehensive assessment of the United States' Trump-era policies toward the Arctic region, where climate change and geopolitical competition intersect. The melting of ice in the Arctic region has created new trade routes and made energy resources accessible, placing the region in a strategic position. In this respect, the region has become the focal point not only of climate change but also of energy security, military strategies, and great power competition.

The strategic documents examined in the study, along with the tables and graphs prepared, show that the strategy documents published during Trump's first term are highly consistent with the basic assumptions of offensive realism. These strategy documents and tables reveal that the US's Arctic vision is fundamentally based on the pursuit of hegemony and security. In the strategy documents, the security of sea lanes and control of energy resources have come to the fore as elements complementing military deterrence.

The findings show that the Trump administration's Arctic policy is directly linked to energy and military investments. Military investments such as base modernization in Alaska, expansion of the icebreaker fleet, advanced surveillance and satellite projects, and increased multi-domain exercises have progressed in direct proportion to the strengthening of logistics routes on the NSR and support for LNG exports to ensure

energy security. In contrast, environmental factors and local communities have remained peripheral to Trump's Arctic strategy.

Scenario analyses conducted based on findings from strategy documents and tables indicate that among the three scenarios predicted for Trump's second term, a policy focused on offensive realism emerges as the most likely outcome. This is because the strategy documents and policies pursued reflect the fundamental assumptions of offensive realism: power maximization and the logic of competition. Although the balanced foreign policy scenario finds support in economic opportunities and an emphasis on alliances, this policy is far from being a dominant orientation. Environmental interest policies, on the other hand, are considered the least likely scenario, as they are based solely on limited expressions of environmental sensitivity and the policies pursued in energy investments.

This study contributes to the literature from different angles with the data obtained and the analysis performed. The use of the offensive realism theory in the context of US Arctic policies has allowed the theory to be tested through a current and concrete political example. Furthermore, the study combines the security and energy dimensions within a single analytical framework by demonstrating how military and energy investments complement each other as strategic tools. Ultimately, this study reveals that the US Arctic policy during the Trump era is highly compatible with offensive realism, with the thematic intensity in strategic documents and scenario analysis pointing to the same conclusion.

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### **Authors' Contribution**

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

### **Data availability**

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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