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### Joe Biden and Donald Trump's Rhetoric on the Arctic

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**Abstract.** This paper examines the evolution of US Arctic policy by comparing the approaches of the Trump and Biden administrations. An analysis of The New York Times shows that Trump shifted the focus from the traditional balance of interests to economic development, especially oil and gas production in Alaska, including drilling in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge. His administration justified this by economic benefits and the need to compete with Russia, planning infrastructure development, including the construction of icebreakers. The media image of Trump's policy reflected a pragmatic and unilateral approach, putting economic interests above environmental issues and international cooperation. Despite participating in the Arctic Council, Trump preferred bilateral negotiations, while proposals such as the purchase of Greenland undermined international trust. Militarization of the region to contain Russia and China was presented as a necessary measure. Biden, despite his declared commitment to international cooperation and the environmental agenda, continued Trump's confrontational course towards Russia and China, expressing concern about their activities in the region and using hostile rhetoric. Although the 2021 summit with Putin demonstrated a willingness to engage in dialogue on security and climate issues, mistrust persisted and was exacerbated by subsequent geopolitical events.

**Keywords:** *Arctic, US policy, economic development, resource extraction, international cooperation, confrontation, Russia, China*

### Introduction

The Arctic, which plays a key role in regulating the global climate, attracts worldwide attention. The melting of Arctic ice, which affects weather patterns around the world, reveals the economic and geopolitical potential of the region. The Arctic is a treasure trove of natural resources: according to experts, a quarter of the world's unexplored reserves are concentrated there. In addition, melting ice makes the Northern Sea Route increasingly accessible and profitable for shipping.

These factors turn the Arctic into an arena of geopolitical rivalry, which is reflected in the world media. Coverage of Arctic issues in the press serves as an indicator of international interaction, showing the level of cooperation and confrontation between countries in the struggle for resources and influence in the region [1, Dolgoborodova S.O., Avdonina N.S.].

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For a long time, US policy towards the Arctic has long been subordinated to one course, which consisted of ensuring national interests in the region, maintaining stability, protecting the interests of local populations, preserving the Arctic ecology, and establishing cooperation. However, these goals do not negate the fact that each administration sets new political priorities and uses different means to achieve long-term goals.

The US strategy in the Arctic recognizes the existence of manageable border conflicts with Canada (over the Northwest Passage) and Russia (over the Bering Sea). Scientific research, sustainable development, environmental protection, and trade protection have been declared priority areas. However, as noted by E.V. Rov [2], the US avoids defining the Arctic as a zone of peace, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of the tasks in the region and the need to ratify the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which the US, the only circumpolar state, has not yet ratified.

Donald Trump's presidency makes it relevant to study changes in Arctic policy to predict further US actions in the Arctic. The analysis involves materials from The New York Times, one of the leading media outlets in the United States, in order to track and study the ongoing changes in Arctic rhetoric [3, Konyshov V.N., Sergunin A.A., p. 227]. The authors understand that conclusions will be made exclusively on the materials of one media outlet, but it is precisely this media outlet that is unique to the US media landscape. The New York Times has its own unique editorial policy, rhetorical strategies and, at the same time, bias, which shapes its specific interpretation of events and the actions of government agencies. The New York Times stands out for its high standards of journalism, wide range of topics covered and innovative approach to media formats. On the one hand, the newspaper adheres to a neutral reflection and coverage of events and the rhetoric of politicians; on the other hand, it conveys their interpretation from the standpoint of the American elite.

### ***Rhetoric as a tool and mechanism for shaping public opinion***

This study examines rhetoric as a tool of political and media influence, focusing on its role in shaping public opinion, especially in the context of war. Rhetoric here is not just eloquence, but a mechanism of persuasion and propaganda that constructs reality for authorities, media, and society. The central question is to what extent each of these parties believes in the messages being broadcast and whether they are able to maintain "immunity" to their own propaganda.

Rhetoric shapes our perception of the world, using arguments and evidence to create, change, and fill the surrounding reality with meaning. In wartime, where each side believes itself to be right, this leads to distortion of information, stereotypes and increased suspicion.

Referring to Aristotle, it should be noted that rhetoric is the art of persuading the majority by appealing to both reason and emotion. In pre-war and war periods, deliberative rhetoric dominates, the purpose of which is to prepare the public for war by forming a certain perception of the future and political opponents. According to Simons [4], this is achieved through simplification and polarization of the image of the enemy, to which the author adds personification.

Particular attention is paid to the interaction of the authorities and the media. Three models are proposed:

1. **Obedient media:** publish propaganda without believing it, due to the lack of an alternative.
2. **Trusting media:** initially support the official line, but become disillusioned over time.
3. **Sceptical media:** immediately criticize official policy, but remain in the minority.

The authorities use various levers to control the media: censorship, manipulation of information, bribery, economic pressure. Thus, rhetoric in the media becomes a key instrument of political power, shaping public opinion and legitimizing military action.

### *Analysis of political rhetoric in the media*

Since Donald Trump came to power in 2017, it became clear that Arctic policy would change. The president actively promoted the idea of increasing oil and gas production in the Arctic, specifically in Alaska <sup>1</sup>. His administration sought to deregulate and simplify the process of issuing permits to energy companies. The administration also allowed oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which provoked debates due to environmental risks. However, the president relaxed environmental regulations for this purpose. Economic and infrastructure projects aimed at strengthening the state's economy and facilitating access to Arctic resources also received support. For example, the president announced plans to begin construction of new icebreakers for the Coast Guard. In his speech in May 2017, he said, "We're going to build a lot of them" <sup>2</sup>. This decision is especially important given the growth of shipping in the Arctic: the issue of a lack of emergency equipment along shipping routes undermines the attractiveness of Arctic routes. The fact that only one country, Russia, has an icebreaker fleet makes it relevant for the United States to build its own icebreakers [5, Gutenev M.Yu., p. 134].

During the debate on oil drilling in Alaska in Congress, it was noted that economic prosperity is "a very strong message to the American people that we are now on a completely different path" <sup>3</sup>. The state's economic prosperity is mainly seen through the extraction of minerals in the protected area: supporters of drilling see this as one of the measures of responsible energy development for the benefit of Alaska and the country. According to the non-party Congressional Budget Office, oil and gas production in part of the reserve will bring in \$1.1 billion over the next dec-

<sup>1</sup> Conservationists Face Once-Remote Prospect in Arctic Drilling Fight: Defeat. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/29/climate/anwr-alaska-drilling-senate.html?searchResultPosition=28> (accessed 24 January 2025).

<sup>2</sup> In the Blink of an Eye, a Hunt for Oil Threatens Pristine Alaska. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/01/us/politics/zapad-russia-military-exercise.html?searchResultPosition=11> (accessed 24 January 2025).

<sup>3</sup> Trump Orders Easing Safety Rules Implemented After Gulf Oil Spill. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/27/us/politics/trump-offshore-drilling.html?searchResultPosition=35> (accessed 24 January 2025).

ade. The president himself called it “the largest discovery in the world, as big as Saudi Arabia”<sup>4</sup>, which eloquently speaks about the role he assigns to the Arctic [6, Tsyplin V.G., p. 221].

During Trump's presidency, emphasis was also placed on the US military presence in the Arctic, as the region became an object of strategic interest. The issue of military presence became especially relevant in the context of competition with Russia and China. In 2019, a new strategy of the Department of Defense for the Arctic was released, which emphasized the need to strengthen the protection of American interests in the region and deter potential threats. The president supported the modernization of the military structure in Alaska (air defense systems) and spoke in favor of increasing the presence of the US Navy in the Alaska region. Six articles in the newspaper discussing NATO military exercises in the Arctic eloquently testify to US concerns about its interests in the Arctic<sup>5</sup>. Russia is directly named as a threat to the US in the Arctic. The expansion of the Russian icebreaker fleet has caused discontent in Canada and the United States. The states are trying to respond to Russia's “aggressive”<sup>6</sup> behavior by conducting joint exercises that have significantly tested the health of soldiers due to harsh climatic conditions. The increased presence of NATO forces in the Arctic underscores Trump's scepticism about international cooperation in the region. It should be noted that the issue of the militarization of the Arctic does not cause any concern among the country's leadership [5, p. 139].

In terms of the environmental dimension of policy, the president was quite sceptical about climate change. The US withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement sparked protests in society, especially from environmental organizations<sup>7</sup>. The administration also shifted its focus from environmental issues in the Arctic, such as melting ice and rising sea levels, to the economic opportunities that the new conditions bring [6, p. 224]. In 2017 alone, 70 articles were devoted to this issue in the newspaper. They mainly expressed concern about the environmental damage to the region and the Alaska Peninsula in particular. The opening of a protected area for oil production sparked heated debate in Congress, but the president himself did not see a problem with climate change; moreover, he called global warming a “hoax”<sup>8</sup>. It should be noted that the greatest barrage of criticism in the publication fell on the president when he decided to open a protected area in Alaska for oil production. The following year, the situation changed: the newspaper mainly published articles about the current environmental situation and forecasts of scientists, and there

<sup>4</sup> Trump Orders Easing Safety Rules Implemented After Gulf Oil Spill. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/27/us/politics/trump-offshore-drilling.html?searchResultPosition=35> (accessed 24 January 2025).

<sup>5</sup> Military Drills in Arctic Aim to Counter Russia, but the First Mission Is to Battle the Cold. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/12/world/europe/global-warming-russia-arctic-usa.html?searchResultPosition=22> (accessed 24 January 2025).

<sup>6</sup> Vast Exercise Demonstrated Russia's Growing Military Prowess. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/01/us/politics/zapad-russia-military-exercise.html?searchResultPosition=11> (accessed 24 January 2025).

<sup>7</sup> Trump Moves to Open Nearly All Offshore Waters to Drilling. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/29/climate/trump-energy-dominance.html?searchResultPosition=153> (accessed 24 January 2025).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

were not so many articles criticizing the environmental policy of the government — only seven. Although supporters of environmental policy were repeatedly speaking out against economic projects in the Arctic, D. Trump remained steadfast in his chosen course: “I do not believe it”<sup>9</sup>. Thus, the softening of environmental standards for the development of new projects caused heated criticism of the president, who did not recognize climate change, but was ready to go all the way to the goal — the economic well-being and prosperity of the United States [6, p. 226].

International cooperation in the Arctic during D. Trump's first term was also reviewed. The president's approach was rather unilateral, taking into account exclusively the national interests of the United States. Work in the Arctic Council was continued, but due attention was not paid to the organization. This is confirmed by the very small number of publications devoted to any dialogue at the multilateral level in the Arctic<sup>10</sup>. Thus, in 2017, only one publication was devoted to international Arctic cooperation. It covered the problem of climate change and its impact on the Arctic, as well as cooperation between Arctic states, including the United States, on this issue<sup>11</sup>. At the same time, President Trump showed that he was ready to resolve issues at the bilateral level: the problem of uncontrolled fishing in the Arctic Ocean affects the ecology of the entire region, which forces governments to cooperate with each other. Therefore, the president expressed his readiness to negotiate with Russia on this issue: “I intend to work with Russia to solve common problems”<sup>12</sup>.

The proposal to purchase Greenland is mentioned in the newspaper only once — in 2019, noting that the president saw Greenland as “real estate” that he always paid attention to: “I will never get it out of my blood. Even as president, I ride down those streets, and I say, ‘Wow, is that place nice. Wow, what could you do with that?’”<sup>13</sup>. This significantly undermined international cooperation in the region and disrupted previously established ties between Arctic players<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, it can be concluded that the representation of the Arctic in the media during D. Trump's presidency reflects his approach to it. For Trump, the Arctic was primarily a source of resources that need to be obtained. Therefore, he was least concerned about the environment, as confirmed by his statements on climate change. US interests in the region were prioritized, so

<sup>9</sup> In the Blink of an Eye, a Hunt for Oil Threatens Pristine Alaska. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/01/us/politics/zapad-russia-military-exercise.html?searchResultPosition=11> (accessed 25 January 2025).

<sup>10</sup> Dingman E. Arctic Rhetoric. URL: <https://jsis.washington.edu/aic/2014/01/17/arctic-rhetoric> (accessed 25 March 2025).

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Pressure Blocks Declaration on Climate Change at Arctic Talks. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/07/climate/us-arctic-climate-change.html?searchResultPosition=45> (accessed 25 January 2025).

<sup>12</sup> Russia, U.S. and Other Nations Restrict Fishing in Thawing Arctic. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/30/world/europe/russia-arctic-ocean-fishing-thaw.html?searchResultPosition=14> (accessed 25 January 2025).

<sup>13</sup> Eyeing Greenland, Trump Again Mixes Real Estate With Diplomacy. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/16/us/politics/greenland-trump-real-estate.html?searchResultPosition=18> (accessed 25 January 2025).

<sup>14</sup> Dingman E. Arctic Rhetoric. URL: <https://jsis.washington.edu/aic/2014/01/17/arctic-rhetoric> (accessed 25 March 2025).

strengthening the military presence, which undermined the peaceful atmosphere in the region, was a necessity. Eccentric proposals to buy Greenland did not relieve the tension. At the same time, the president was ready to resolve issues with Arctic players, not in a multilateral format, but in the format of a bilateral dialogue, including with Russia.

After the elections, the rhetoric changed, since the new President of the United States Joe Biden slightly altered his approach to Arctic policy. He repeatedly emphasized that the Arctic was a strategic region. Environmental issues and climate change became a key postulate of the president's policy [7, Konyshov V.N., Sergunin A.A., p. 65]. Biden actively spoke about the consequences of climate change in the Arctic — melting glaciers, rising sea levels, and changes in natural ecosystems. The administration viewed it as a region where it was necessary to urgently reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move to a “green” economy. The United States returned to the ranks of countries participating in the Paris Agreement. Almost immediately after his inauguration, J. Biden cancelled D. Trump's decisions on oil drilling and oil and gas production in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. According to him, “America's national treasures are cultural and economic cornerstones of our country and he is grateful for the prompt action by the Department of the Interior to suspend all leasing pending a review of decisions made in the last administration's final days that could have changed the character of this special place forever” <sup>15</sup>. This rhetoric runs like a red thread through the new administration's Arctic climate policy [8, Konyshov V.N., Sergunin A.A., p. 67].

He also believed that international cooperation was necessary to maintain stability and peace in the region. The need for dialogue between the Arctic countries was repeatedly emphasized by the president and his new administration. At the same time, J. Biden was sceptical about the actions of Russia and China in the Arctic, expressing concern about the increased economic activity and military presence of the two states <sup>16</sup>. J. Biden basically continued the policy of D. Trump, who for the first time emphasized the problem of military security and the global resistance of the United States to China and Russia in the Arctic, slightly changing the line of the previous leadership. Dissatisfaction with Russia's advancement in the Arctic remains, as evidenced by the persistence of hostile rhetoric: “aggressive presence in the Arctic”, “tension in the region”, “peace and prosperity will be increasingly challenged by Russia and China, whose interests and values differ dramatically from ours”, “threat to use military force”, “Putin's language” (i.e. increased military presence), etc. <sup>17</sup> However, before 2022, the heads of state managed to discuss

<sup>15</sup> Biden Suspends Drilling Leases in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/01/climate/biden-drilling-arctic-national-wildlife-refuge.html?searchResultPosition=21> (accessed 25 January 2025).

<sup>16</sup> In the Russian Arctic, the First Stirrings of a Very Cold War. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/22/world/russia-us-arctic-military.html?searchResultPosition=5> (accessed 18 January 2025).

<sup>17</sup> ‘Are We Getting Invaded?’ U.S. Boats Faced Russian Aggression Near Alaska. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/12/us/russia-military-alaska-arctic-fishing.html?searchResultPosition=14> (accessed 22 January 2025).

the situation in the Arctic at the summit in Geneva in June 2021. Some of the areas for discussion concerned security, climate change and the problems of the Northern Sea Route in the Arctic [8, Vykochko M., p. 32]. The countries expressed their inclination to develop cooperation in the region and join forces. However, the dialogue was then broken off, and relations became even tenser after the start of the Special Military Operation.

Like the predecessor, he supported sustainable economic development in the Arctic. The president opposed uncontrolled mining, so in 2021 he suspended the issuance of new licenses for oil and gas production in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska [8, Vykochko M., p. 35]. Industrialists were dissatisfied, but environmentalists strongly supported this decision. However, sustainable development and a “green” economy cannot develop without the use of coal, gold, copper, zinc and other metals that are needed to build alternative energy sources. These metals are extracted from a mine that requires a road to be built, and the shortest route would go through Gates of the Arctic National Park. Although the administration did not name the most preferred route, activists were already sounding the alarm. The question of whether to approve the route contradicted President Biden’s Clean Power Plan, which required copper and other metals for wind turbines, solar panels and other clean energy technologies, and his promise to protect pristine tundra and indigenous lands. However, the administration believes that mining is necessary for the transition to a clean economy: “This project is urgent, as it provides access to critical mineral deposits across the region. Mining is critical for U.S. national security, reaching decarbonization targets, implementation of existing climate laws, and to build a stronger economy in rural Alaska” <sup>18</sup>.

In the area of security, it should be noted that J. Biden recognized the need to strengthen the US defense potential in the region, including the modernization of military infrastructure [9, Makhmutova E.V., Chachua T.G., p. 80]. At the same time, he called for restraint and compliance with international law in order to avoid tensions in the region. However, after the start of the Special Military Operation in Ukraine, the administration participated in imposing sanctions on Russia and supported the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO <sup>19</sup>. There were active accusations of military threats from China and Russia in the Arctic: “China has also been busy trying to establish itself in the region and use new unfrozen routes, one reason NATO considers China a significant security challenge... Russia has said it wants to make the Arctic its own — a fifth military district, on a par with its other four” <sup>20</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> In Alaska, a Road to Metals Needed for Clean Energy Could Also Cause Harm. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/13/climate/alaska-ambler-road-mine.html?searchResultPosition=15> (accessed 12 January 2025).

<sup>19</sup> Arctic Risks Loom Large as Blinken Tours NATO’s North. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/31/world/europe/blinken-arctic-nato-russia.html?searchResultPosition=4> (accessed 16 January 2025).

<sup>20</sup> With Eyes on Russia, the U.S. Military Prepares for an Arctic Future. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/27/us/army-alaska-arctic-russia.html?searchResultPosition=1> (accessed 18 January 2025).

Thus, Joe Biden's rhetoric on the Arctic combined an environmental agenda, calls for international cooperation, and a cautious approach to geopolitical challenges. The policy was aimed at ensuring a balance between environmental protection, economic interests and national security, reflecting the complexity and multifaceted nature of Arctic issues.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, it can be noted that with the change of leadership, the rhetoric regarding the Arctic also changed. During the leadership of D. Trump, the Arctic was viewed rather as a source of resources that should be protected and an area where the country's interests had to be defended quite aggressively. During the presidency of J. Biden, the policy in the region changed: the environmental agenda was in the foreground. Arctic ecology became a leading component of the new administration's policy. The president supported international cooperation on various Arctic issues, but almost all of its forms were frozen due to the start of the Special Military Operation in Ukraine, and this affected the rhetoric in the Arctic — it became much tougher, with Russia emerging as the main enemy<sup>21</sup>. [11, N. Hong, p. 37]. In general, it can be said that The New York Times adheres to the model of trusting media, which is typical for any major media outlet. However, this trust does not necessarily mean agreement with the rhetoric of politicians; rather, it is manifested in the desire for objective and comprehensive coverage of events. The newspaper teaches its readers to critically perceive information, emphasizing the need to analyze different points of view and contexts. It does not simply broadcast political statements, but actively examines them, providing readers with in-depth analysis and factual verification. In this context, trust in the media takes on special significance: it is based not on unconditional support for a political agenda, but on the confidence that the newspaper is doing everything possible to ensure transparency and truth. This also implies that readers should be active participants in the process of information consumption, ready to ask questions and critically think about the presentation of materials.

Thus, the model of trustworthy media represented by The New York Times promotes a deeper understanding of political rhetoric and its context, encouraging readers not to simply accept information on faith, but to reflect on it, which is an important aspect of the modern information society.

However, with the beginning of the presidency of Donald Trump in 2025, many analysts and scientists expect warming of relations, including in the Arctic. Whether the main tenets of his rhetoric will remain unchanged during his new term is an open question, because despite the warming of relations between Russia and the United States, it is still unknown how long this period of détente will last.

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<sup>21</sup> Hong N. Who owns the Arctic? Trump's vision and the global power struggle. URL: <https://www.thinkchina.sg/politics/who-owns-arctic-trumps-vision-and-global-power-struggle> (accessed 15 April 2025).

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