

Implications of Russia, China, the US and NATO on the Emerging Arctic

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The geostrategic importance of the Arctic has shifted since a Russian submersible claimed much of the polar region for mother Russia by planting a flag at the geographic north pole in 2006. As climate change continues to shape the Arctic both geographically and politically into a global catalyst, the entire world is awaiting its chance to stake a claim in what could become the most strategically promising area in the world for both resource extraction and transport routes. Prior to 2006, many viewed the Arctic region as a quaint land of ice and polar bears with little strategic importance. The Russian's actions in 2006 were a significant turning point. The Arctic was suddenly the center of major global turmoil as the Russians attempted to claim an obscure portion of the world's territory because "they got there first." The Arctic was once again thrust into the spotlight when China claimed itself as a "near-Arctic state" in 2018. The US and its NATO allies followed closely behind these two global superpowers to ensure the US and NATO countries stay protected while pursuing research and resource extraction efforts. The Arctic's place in politics will continue to change as access to the region evolves due to climate change.

The "estimated 90 billion barrels of oil and 1,669 trillion cubic feet of natural gas now believed to be located in the Arctic" further fuel these international arguments as oil is a vital part of countries becoming energy independent and profiting (Conely). Russia has already invested over \$300bn into oil and gas in the Arctic (Turner). China has equally eager aspirations for the Arctic, claiming itself to be a "near-Arctic state" and announcing plans to develop a "polar silk road" that would revolutionize global shipping routes if it were to be implemented (Clingendael). The US and its NATO allies continue to be at the forefront of Arctic development, looking to capitalize on its research and resource potential while countering Russian militarization and protecting the homeland remain top priorities.

Russia is continuing to spearhead development in the Arctic, and some sources say that this may mean a "return to a Cold-War Like environment" for the US (Rummer, Sokolsky). Russias motivation for Arctic conquest is fueled by a desire to secure nuclear launch capabilities, the remote possibility of war in Europe, ambitions to grow power, and resources to pay for their ever-growing arms race with the west (Rummer, Sokolsky). The likelihood of Russia being able to realize these goals remains unclear as many of their military forces in the northwest continue to be vulnerable to NATO weapons. However, Russia continues to push forward with its mission to develop systems to protect future missile submarine operations in the North Atlantic despite fewer resources and adversaries growing in capabilities (Rummer, Sokolsky).

Under UN Law of the Sea Conventions, Russia continues to pursue aggressive claims to Arctic territory, further fueling tensions with other Arctic nations (Rummer, Sokolsky). Tensions with the west heightened with the invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and have yet to be resolved (Rummer, Sokolsky). Russia continues to house 120,000 troops on the Ukrainian border, a point of contention with many western nations (Willams, Emmott).

Russia's motivation to stake such a large claim in the Arctic may not be as beneficial as first thought. Aside from the apparent military access this territory provides, the resource extraction that Russia so desperately wants may be more costly than profitable. "Huge capital investments" and advanced technology that Russia does not have are required to research and extract natural resources effectively (Rummer, Sokolsky). Meanwhile, these resources are available elsewhere in Russia with much easier access. Despite climate change creating possible new trade and fishing routes, the Arctic region still lacks infrastructure (Rummer, Sokolsky). This would be yet another costly expenditure the Russian government would have to endure to

make this area commercially viable. The question remains as to why Russia is so fixated on the Arctic when they lack the money and resources to make it economically prosperous.

Russia's irrational Arctic territory claims are matched by China's claim to be a "near-Arctic state." A Chinese paper titled "China's Arctic Policy," issued in January 2018, claimed that Arctic issues now extend beyond the region itself and that what occurs in the region is of high interest to the whole international community (Fang). China went on to claim itself as "an important stakeholder in Arctic affairs" (Fang). The US dismissed China's claim as there is currently no third category of Arctic states (Fang). China recently undertook controversial actions in the South China Sea and continues to attempt to obtain critical infrastructure in Greenland that may be problematic for the US and Denmark (Fang). These political stunts continue to cause unease with western countries. China continues to attempt to infiltrate western countries in less conventional ways, especially in Greenland. These actions include the purchase of 1/8 of Greenland's mineral stock by the Chinese company Shenghe Resources in 2016, the launch of a satellite unknown to Greenland authorities in 2018, and a Chinese communications construction company bidding to build airports in Greenland in 2018 (Clingendael).

China's announcement in 2018 included the important notion of the development of the Polar Silk Road (Clingendael). They hope to model it after the Belt and Road Initiative and foster economic and social development in the Arctic (Clingendael). The Polar Silk Road is a combination of new and old projects, all aimed at growing China's Arctic presence in a region where they have no territory (Clingendael). However, this initiative will likely not be realized for several years. For now, China plans to focus on the development of liquified natural gas and the eventual opening of the Northern Sea Route due to **Climate Change (Clingendael)**.

Although China first claimed to be a "near-Arctic state" in 2018 and ramped up its Arctic effort, its "longstanding ambition" in the region must not be ignored (Clingendael). China began its first Arctic-related engagements in the late 1800s, participated in Soviet research in the Arctic in 1951. The China Arctic and AntArctic Administration (CAA) was set up in 1996, followed by the setup of Arctic research stations in the early 2000s. China was accepted as a permanent observer of the Arctic council in 2013. The paper laying out plans for the "Polar Silk Road" was published in 2018 (Clingendael). We must view the 2018 paper as not a statement of China's plans to pursue the Arctic but rather an announcement of continued commitment to Arctic exploration, research, and the quest for power. Chinese officials often reference the Spitsbergen Treaty of 1925 to prove their "historically legitimate presence" in the Arctic (Clingendael). This Treaty "recognizes the sovereignty of Norway over the archipelago of Spitsbergen (Svalbard), while giving all signatories equal rights to engage in commercial activities on the islands" (Clingendael). At the time of the signing, China did not have the capabilities or the geopolitical presence to prosper or influence the regions affairs (Clingendael). The 2018 uptick in Chinese Arctic ambitions was due to China's considerable global power and economic influence that allowed them the capacity to be a true powerhouse in the Arctic.

The US and its NATO allies want to benefit from the likely prosperity of the Arctic while monitoring the two great yet unpredictable powers of China and Russia. Five of the eight Arctic states are members of NATO (Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, United States) (Auerswald). Many believe NATO should have a limited yet direct role and help protect the safety of the Arctic as the growing competition will lead to more violence (Auerswald). Exercises such as the 2018 Trident Juncture that tested the abilities of NATO allies to defend their populations and work together are viewed as very productive while not risking antagonizing Russia (NATO).

However, these five NATO member Arctic states have yet to develop a common Arctic policy (Auerswald). Many Southern and Eastern European NATO countries may be opposed to NATO's spending in the Arctic as this takes resources and attention away from conflicts and issues in the eastern European regions. (Auerswald). Other countries, including the Arctic State members, are in full support of Arctic progression. An agreement will likely be reached in the future regarding expenditures and emphasis placed on NATO's efforts in the Arctic.

According to Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework, the country hopes to be a "strong, self-reliant people and communities working together for a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable Arctic and northern region at home and abroad, while expressing Canada's enduring Arctic sovereignty." (Government of Canada) They want to improve infrastructure and make the region prosperous while the well-being of its Arctic citizens is of utmost concern (Government of Canada). Canada is also committed to ensuring its sovereignty in the region and building a military presence to show dominance (Government of Canada). However, many Southern and Eastern European NATO countries may oppose NATO's spending in the Arctic as this may take resources and attention away from conflicts and issues in the eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans, Ukraine, or the Baltic Sea (Auerswald).

The US is not afraid of taking a powerful and controversial stance on the Arctic. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo "called out Russian and Chinese Arctic behavior in the May 2019 Arctic Council ministerial meeting" (Auerswald). The US has more advanced fighter planes stationed in Alaska than exist in any other place in the world. The US 2nd Fleet was reactivated to Counter the Russian Navy in the North Atlantic due to increased Russian Patrols (The Maritime Executive). The Defense Department, the Coast Guard, and the Air force have all recently released Arctic strategies to follow (Auerswald). The US is looking to focus its efforts in

the Arctic on scientific research and resource extraction while protecting the homeland and countering Russian militarization.

Climate change has caused the Arctic to garner worldwide interest and has altered the geopolitics of the Arctic greatly. The region is warming at two to three times the rate of the rest of the world, resulting in a loss of permafrost, ice melt, high waves, erosion, and more frequent wildfires (Auerswald). However, many countries are more concerned with the potential for economic gain the region offers as resource extraction and maritime activity become easier to access. Trade and shipping routes in the Arctic region are predicted to fully open up around 2030. This will allow for easier access to a commercially prosperous trade route that will make the transport of goods far quicker and easier (Auerswald). As the ice further recedes, it is becoming easier to identify and extract oil, natural gas, and rare earth minerals, making the Arctic a possible site for economic development and prosperity. Although the US, Russia, and China are at the forefront of the movement to improve the infrastructure of the Arctic and make the region economically viable, the whole world is looking to take its share of this resource-rich region.

It is unlikely that we will see a return to the calm and less convoluted political scene in the Arctic that existed prior to the Russian declaration in 2006. As climate change continues to change the geography of the Arctic, resource extraction and trade routes will become an ever-growing point of contention between Arctic countries and the rest of the world. It is undeniable that China, Russia, and The US will be spearheading this movement, but NATO and the rest of the world will be watching closely. The continuous militarization of the Arctic by Russia and China's bold claims and plans will continue to be top concerns for the US while it continues its own pursuit of research, exploration and extraction.

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