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Great Power Competition

In the Arctic Region and Changing Regional
Dynamics

Great Power Competition in the Arctic Region and Changing Regional Dynamics

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Abstract

The Arctic region is important because of its rich minerals and resources. Amid rising multi-polarity, the Arctic region is emerging as the new front for great power confrontation. Once considered the peripheral region of great power competition, the region now faces looming threats related to climate change and the competition among the United States of America, Russia, and China over the untapped resources of the Arctic region. Undoubtedly, most Arctic states have peacefully advanced their economic capabilities and they look determined to follow the same trends in the future. However, Washington's 2021 Arctic Strategy, and Moscow's expansion and modernization of military bases in the Arctic region, including Rogachevo on Novaya Zemlya, are ushering serious concerns. Moreover, China's white paper on the Arctic, ascertaining its initiative of the Polar Silk Road, has alarmed the West. Washington has announced the beginning of its Willow Project in Alaska after years of pause in its development in the Arctic. Such dynamics can redefine the state of the political economy in the Arctic region. This research paper analyzes the attitudes of the US, China, and Russia and how their political and economic dealings shape the latest debate regarding the future of the Arctic region.

Keywords: Arctic Region, Great Power Politics, Multipolarity, Polar Silk Road.

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Introduction

It is a common understanding among scholars of international relations that every region has a distinct set of challenges that require unique problem-solving mechanisms; the same is true for the Arctic region. The region's political environment is unique, owing to its geographical location toward the north and its intense winters. Interestingly, the Arctic region has been considered cold in international politics but offers several incentives to great powers to serve their major interests. There are different approaches to accounting for the Arctic. While some consider it a symbol of peaceful cooperation, great powers see it as a zone of peaceful competition. These activities carry effects, but to make matters more complicated, the region has no treaty on territories emerging from the effects of climate change.² As the new territories contain massive oil and gas reserves, the activities of three powers – Russia, the US, and China – in the Arctic need to be evaluated.

Russia's focus on including the new territories in its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) can strengthen its political and economic standing.³ Russia has been attempting to gain leverage in the region through several initiatives, such as carrying out a stream of developments for the extraction of hydrocarbons in Siberia and transforming the Northern Sea route into an important channel.⁴ These initiatives indicate that Russia has been making various strategic gains and moving ahead in the Arctic region. The US has been busy pursuing its interests in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, and has now begun its strategic and economic advancement in the Arctic.⁵

Russia is not alone in approaching the Arctic region. China is also engaged in polar exploration. The Chinese model of the Northern Expedition encapsulated in the "Polar Silk Road" project and various other infrastructure projects in Greenland may dent the American

2. Molly Watson, "An Arctic Treaty: A Solution to the International Dispute over the Polar Region," *Ocean and Coastal Law Journal* 14, no. 2 (2008).

3. Mathieu Boulegue, "The Arctic Component of Russia's New Maritime Doctrine," Wilson Center, November 22, 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/no-17-arctic-component-russias-new-maritime-doctrine>.

4. Grzegorz Kuczynski, "Russia Seeks for New Hydrocarbon Deposits and Struggles to Extract Crude," Warsaw Institute, 2022, <https://warsawinstitute.org/russia-seeks-new-hydrocarbon-deposits-struggles-extract-crude/>.

5. Anu Sharma, "China's Polar Silk Road: Implications for the Arctic Region, Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs," Air University, 2021, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2820750/chinas-polar-silk-road-implications-for-the-arctic-region/>.

status quo in the Arctic region. China now claims to be a “near-Arctic state,” so it plans to take hold of its fair share of natural resources.⁶ Restructuring its identity and associating it with the Arctic may benefit China in the long run.

The US realized the importance of the Arctic during Biden’s presidency and is now advancing in the region at the speed of light. Its advancement can be gauged by the new installation of the F-35A fighter wing established at Eielson Air Force Base⁷ and the activation of the 11th Airborne Division at Fort Wainwright.⁸ Moreover, the US National Strategy for the Arctic Region underscores completing the deep-water port in Nome, Alaska, which would facilitate future US naval explorations by icebreaker vessels. In addition, the US-Norway Supplementary Defense Cooperation Agreement has enabled Washington to build its military presence in the Arctic region. The US has constructed its military facilities in Norway, military installments in three Norwegian airfields, and one naval base, namely Rygge Military Air Station south of Oslo, Sola Military Air Station, Evenes Military Air Station, and Ramsund Naval Station.⁹ These developments define American aspirations for strategic benefits in the Arctic region.

The interest of these states in natural resources, geographic influence, and critical sea routes could make the region a new battleground for great power competition. The trio is expanding their footprints in the region to ascertain their influence and limit the powers of their adversaries. There is also a possibility that tensions will emerge in the region because the US is increasing its military presence in Alaska, Russia is utilizing the Northern Sea Route, and China is developing icebreaker vessels to expand its footprints in the region.

6. “Eielson AFB Celebrates F-35 Beddown Completion,” US Air Force, May 19, 2022, <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3036523/eielson-afb-celebrates-f-35-bed-down-completion/#:~:text=We%20did%20this%2054%20F,%2C%20and%20we%20are%20ready.%E2%80%9D>.

7. “Eielson AFB celebrates F-35 bed down completion.” *US Air Force*, (2022), <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3036523/eielson-afb-celebrates-f-35-bed-down-completion/#:~:text=We%20did%20this%2054%20F,%2C%20and%20we%20are%20ready.%E2%80%9D>.

8. Bill Roth, “11th Airborne Division Activation Ceremony Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson,” *Anchorage Daily News*, June 7, 2022, <https://www.adn.com/alaska-news/military/2022/06/06/photos-11th-airborne-division-activation-ceremony-at-joint-base-elmendorf-richardson/>.

9. Jeremy Greenwood, “Great Power Competition and Overseas Basing in the Arctic,” Brookings Institute, February 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/great-power-competition-and-overseas-basing-in-the-arctic/>.

China in the North

Chinese footprints in the north mark the use of infrastructural, scientific, and vessel developments as crucial tools to increase presence in the Arctic region. The Chinese model of global economic development differs from that of the US, but whether these economic developments will become a win-win for all state players in the Arctic is a meaningful discussion. The Brookings report titled “Northern Expedition: China’s Arctic Activities and Ambitions” claims that China aspires to becoming the great power in the polar region. However, it does not describe Chinese intentions publicly. The report further explains that Beijing considers the Arctic region ripe for rivalry.¹⁰ Regarding win-win cooperation, China has envisioned its Polar Silk Road, based on a non-zero-sum game. Whether this project will be a loss for the US remains to be seen. This paper explores whether China’s growing role in the northern region is an extension of shared development initiatives by China or a political initiative for gaining power.

China’s white paper on the Arctic outlines that the state is pursuing a sustainable utilization of resources which alludes that China is modestly using those resources.¹¹ Modesty is sometimes conditioned with necessity. China is taking the Arctic seriously, which can be gauged by its growing regional diplomatic and economic engagement. It has sent its high-level diplomats to the region more than thirty-three times in the past few years. China has also proclaimed that the Arctic is a new strategic frontier that will possibly face rivalry and extractions of major powers.¹²

Western countries, led by the US, are concerned that China may be downplaying its real motives in the Arctic and other regions.¹³ The West criticizes China for expanding in the South China Sea, Djibouti, and Hambantota in Sri Lanka. Taiwan is another issue. The West alleges that China is establishing a stronghold on important trading

10. Rush Doshi, Alexis Dale-Huang, and Gaoqi Zhang, “Northern Expedition: China’s Arctic Activities and Ambitions,” Brookings Institute, April 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/northern-expedition-chinas-arctic-activities-and-ambitions/>.

11. The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, “China’s Arctic Policy,” January 2018, http://english.scio.gov.cn/node_8002680.html.

12. Doshi, Dale-Huang, and Zhang, “Northern Expedition.”

13. Doug Irving, “What Does China’s Arctic Presence Mean to the United States?” RAND, December 29, 2022, <https://www.rand.org/blog/rand-review/2022/12/what-does-chinas-arctic-presence-mean-to-the-us.html>.

routes and calls it Chinese imperialism, spreading in other regions through economic incentives and infrastructural developments.¹⁴ The Brookings report implies that China is using its Xuelong ice-breaker vessels for navigation to help it evaluate ways to construct a maritime route through the Arctic.¹⁵

A comparative analysis of China's footprints in various states suggests that China utilizes economic incentives to promote its well-defined foreign policy goals in other regions. China entered Djibouti through the Belt and Road (BRI) initiative and made large-scale investments when the African state needed foreign assistance for infrastructural development. The developments in Djibouti included a railway network, roads, ports, and an undersea fiber optic cable. Washington is concerned about China occupying critical chokepoints of Djibouti and Maldives and getting a strong presence on the world's major trade points.¹⁶ However, China has maintained the terms of equality and mutual benefits in its policy framework for Africa.¹⁷ In this case, Gilpin's idea that China's trade activities are malign mercantilism is debatable.¹⁸ It can be deduced by looking at the profiles of countries where China has invested in road and rail networks, energy sector projects, and ports development, that those states are in Chinese debt. The inability of states to service debts is linked more to domestic reasons rather than Chinese actions.

Chinese infrastructure investments in the Arctic region have several significant aspects. It is buying 250 square kilometers of land in Iceland to build a golf course and 200 square kilometers of Norway's Svalbard archipelago.¹⁹ Beijing is building the largest port in Sweden and acquiring its marine base. An essential part of its investment is

14. Amitai Etzioni, "Is China a New Colonial Power," *The Diplomat*, (2020), <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/is-china-a-new-colonial-power/>.

15. Doshi, Dale-Huang, and Zhang, "Northern Expedition."

16. Christopher Woody, "Top US Military Commanders Are Worried about What China is Up to around the World's Most Important Waterways," *Insider*, July 27, 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-military-worried-about-chinese-activity-near-maritime-chokepoints-2022-7>.

17. "China, Djibouti to Continue Win-Win Cooperation," *CGTN*, January 10, 2020, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-01-09/China-Djibouti-to-continue-win-win-cooperation-N7xED-dIQ9O/index.html>.

18. Knud Erik Jorgensen, *International Relations Theory: A New Introduction* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 143.

19. Nengye Liu, "China and One Hundred Years of the Svalbard Treaty: Past, Present and Future," *Marine Policy* 124, (2021), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0308597X20310046>.

linking Finland to China through a rail network.²⁰ China's presence in the Arctic region is related to its major economic and political goals.²¹ Beijing is comprehensively advancing globally by marking its influence on every crucial area and port. The process will eventually connect China with the Arctic too.²²

There are two possible ways in which China may approach the region. The first is that the linkages will empower China in the region through new infrastructure, ports, rail network, and extraction of minerals to improve its market economy. The second possibility is that Chinese involvement in the Arctic will be a win-win situation for the trade of essential commodities without unwarranted influence and financial hassles for the region.²³

Russian Expedition of the Arctic

Russian progress in the Arctic is important as new territories are emerging due to climate change, paving the way for Moscow – the biggest coastal state of the Arctic – to navigate and explore the resource-rich area.²⁴ Several analysts are convinced that Russia is an ambitious player in the region and its activities may usher a return of Cold War.²⁵ Russia has leverage in the Arctic because of the Northern Sea Route (NSR), which can connect Asia with Europe. However, this project's financial aspect concerns Russian authorities as considerable technological investments are required to ensure smooth trade through the NSR. Russia is currently trading in rubles, not dollars, and the US sanctions have damaged the Russian economy.²⁶

20. Martin Breum, "Finland Plans 'Arctic Corridor' Linking China to Europe," *EU Observer*, 2018, <https://euobserver.com/nordics/141142>.

21. Maud Descamps, "The Ice Silk Road: Is China a 'Near-Arctic-State'?" Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2019, <https://isdp.eu/publication/the-ice-silk-road-is-china-a-near-arctic-state/>.

22. Olga Alexeeva, "China And The Arctic In The Frame Of The BRI," CQEG, 2022, <https://cqegheiulaval.com/2022/09/14/china-and-the-arctic-in-the-frame-of-the-bri/>.

23. Marco Volpe, "The Tortuous Path of China's Win-Win Strategy in Greenland," The Arctic Institute, 2020, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/tortuous-path-china-win-win-strategy-greenland/>.

24. Nick Paton Walsh, "Russia's Militarization of the Arctic Shows No Sign of Slowing Down," *CNN*, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/21/europe/russia-arctic-military-intl/index.html>.

25. Eugene Rumer, Richard Sokolsky, and Paul Stronski, "Russia in the Arctic: A Critical Examination," Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, March 29, 2021, <https://carnegie-ieendowment.org/2021/03/29/russia-in-arctic-critical-examination-pub-84181>.

26. Alexandra Prokopenko, "How Sanctions Have Changed Russian Economic Policy," The Moscow Times, 2023, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/05/14/how-sanc->

Development in the Arctic is also challenging for Russia because of limited infrastructure, increased global focus on green energy, and competition with the US, NATO, and their allies.²⁷ Russia and China may work together for easy adjustments, given their warm relations. China's economic heft and Russia's strategic location and advanced navy may open avenues for cooperation in the Arctic, besides managing competition with the US.²⁸ Although it is too early to predict Sino-Russian behavior in the Arctic, preliminary documents, including the Chinese white paper, suggest that both countries share an unwavering support mechanism in strategic and military domains.²⁹

The Kremlin's primary interest in the region is untapped energy resources. Russian projects, including the Yamal liquefied natural gas project and NSR, envision becoming an artery of regional commercial trade.³⁰ Moscow is also restructuring Soviet-era bases in the Arctic Circle to reinvigorate its maritime power. Numerous ice-breaking Russian vessels in the Arctic signify Russia's logistical edge over other Arctic nations. Russia's energy resources are depleting, and those in the Arctic will help boost the local economy.³¹

The impact of climate change in the polar region has been inviting massive media coverage and is now getting critical attention in academic debates – Arctic peace and stability need to be researched extensively, given the frosty state of US-Russia relations. One significant discussion among scholars is the Russian advancement plan in new territories and the American response. The director of the US Global Engagement Program, David Speedie, suggests that the region will experience a balancing of cooperation and competition be-

tions-have-changed-russian-economic-policy-a81093.

27. Rumer, Sokolsky, and Stronski, "Russia in the Arctic."

28. Chuan Chen, "China-Russia Arctic Cooperation in the Context of a Divided Arctic," The Arctic Institute, 2023, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/china-russia-arctic-cooperation-context-divided-arctic/>.

29. Maria Rehman, "Changing Contours of Arctic Politics and the Prospects for Cooperation between Russia and China," The Arctic Institute, 2022, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/changing-contours-arctic-politics-prospects-cooperation-russia-china/>.

30. Atle Staalesen, "First Yamal LNG Shipment Means a New Era of Shipping on Russia's Northern Sea Route," Arctic Today, 2017, <https://www.arctictoday.com/first-yamal-lng-shipment-means-a-new-era-of-shipping-on-russias-northern-sea-route/>.

31. Malte Humpert, "From Ukraine to the Arctic: Russia's Capabilities in the Region and the War's Impact on the North," High North News, 2022, <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/ukraine-arctic-russias-capabilities-region-and-wars-impact-north>.

tween Washington and Moscow.³² However, Russian and American defense chiefs have expressed displeasure on the nature of MQ-9 Reaper drone incident.³³ This shows that the danger of competition between them looms large in the region.

The onset of Ukraine conflict in February 2022 has made it evident that Russia can go to any extent to resist NATO's expansion. Moscow has also expressed reservation about Finland's permanent NATO membership.³⁴ The fact that imperialist powers will seek territorial expansion to acquire resources³⁵ may manifest in Ukraine. Through territorial expansion in the Arctic region, these powers aim to secure a strategic position to elevate influence and economy.

Russia's declared motive for Arctic exploration is using resources for its socio-economic development. In doing so, Russia can emerge as a powerful Arctic state, but Western sanctions may hamper this process. Like all other actors in the Arctic, Russia's activities are driven by its national interests and for utilizing resources to increase its power in international politics.³⁶

The confrontation between Russia and the West in the Arctic region must be resolved to ensure peace and stability in the region. One way can be using diplomacy and deterrence to mitigate tensions. However, diplomacy requires the intention and will of stakeholders, whereas the prerequisite for deterrence is establishing an implicit understanding of not waging war. The current crisis between Russia and the West can endanger peace in the Arctic region.³⁷

32. Yuri Morozov and David Speedie, "The Arctic: The Next 'Hot Spot' of International Relations or a Region of Cooperation?" Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, 2009, <https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/media/article/the-arctic-the-next-hot-spot-of-international-relations-or-a-region-of-cooperation>.

33. Phil Stewart and Idrees Ali, "US Military Drone Crashes into Black Sea after Russian Intercept," *Reuters*, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-says-reaper-drone-crashes-into-black-sea-after-russian-intercept-2023-03-14/>.

34. Ellen Knickmeyer, "Finland, Sweden Offer NATO an Edge as Rivalry Warms up North," *Associated Press News*, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-nato-sweden-finland-climate-and-environment-726570f7c9dd3f564255f395fee7e577>.

35. Jorgensen, *International Relations Theory*, 143.

36. Shaheer Ahmad and Muhammad Ali Zafar, "Russia's Reimagined Arctic in the Age of Geopolitical Competition," Air University, 2022, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2959221/russias-reimagined-arctic-in-the-age-of-geopolitical-competition/>.

37. Rumer, Sokolsky, and Stronski, "Russia in the Arctic."

United States in the Arctic Circle

US President Joe Biden has announced the beginning of the Willow Project in Alaska, shoring up the massive American drilling for oil and gas.³⁸ Although the Biden administration is facing backlash from environmentalists and the public, the federal government is determined to explore the Alaskan shore.³⁹ The Willow Project ushers in the era of American active involvement in the Arctic and is envisioned to provide extra offshore leverage to the US. ConocoPhillips, an oil and gas exploration production company, has assured guaranteed jobs and local investment through the USD 8 billion project. This region can produce up to 180,000 barrels of oil per day.⁴⁰ The Willow Project may become one of the most significant projects in the Arctic Circle.

The Arctic was not prominent on the US radar before the Biden administration's plan to boost progress in strategic and economic domains. The Council on Foreign Relations published a paper in 2017 highlighting the importance of and requirement for a renewed US strategic commitment in the Arctic as it might have to bear the brunt of ignoring the region. The task force, chaired by Thad Allen, a retired admiral and former commandant of the US coast guards, found that America was lagging in the strategic domain, and China was building its third icebreaker while Russia had numerous.

At the same time, the US had only two – one heavy-weight and one medium-weight icebreaker – for the Antarctic and Arctic regions. The report concluded that there was also no maritime infrastructure at the time.⁴¹ Washington decided to invest USD 858 billion on Arctic security in its proposed national defense bill, besides granting 4.6 percent raise to military service members in the Arctic.⁴² Funding for Port Nome in Alaska has also been a part of Washington's upcoming

38. Elizabeth Kolbert, "Why did the Biden Administration Approve the Willow Project?" *The New Yorker*, 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/why-did-the-biden-administration-approve-the-willow-project>.

39. Sam Cabral, "Willow Project: US Government Approves Alaska Oil and Gas Development," *BBC*, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-64943603>.

40. "Alaska's Willow Project: Balancing Economy and Environment," Carlile, May 8, 2023, <https://www.carlile.biz/willow-project/>.

41. "US Should Increase Its Strategic Commitment to the Arctic, Says CFR Task Force," Council on Foreign Relations, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/news-releases/us-should-increase-its-strategic-commitment-arctic-says-cfr-task-force>.

42. Riley Rogerson, "Proposed National Defense Bill Would Boost Arctic Military Capabilities," *Anchorage Daily News*, 2022, <https://www.adn.com/politics/2022/12/11/proposed-national-defense-bill-would-boost-arctic-military-capabilities/>.

defense bill, reflecting Biden administration's focus on the Arctic region.

According to a study, the US Arctic policy has three driving factors, that is: first, Russia's existence as a major coastal state and China's gradual progress in the Arctic; second, environmental issues leading to changes in its maritime approach; and third, the economic factor.⁴³ These drivers reflect the interplay of politics and economy concerning US role in the Arctic region. There are chances that the US policy in the Arctic would bring China and Russia on one page to deter the former's hegemony in the region in this Arctic iteration of the age-old dictum of power politics that "the enemy of your enemy is your friend."

The US national strategy for the Arctic region suggests that it is rebounding in the region.⁴⁴ In his speech at the State of the Union address in Washington, President Biden stated that the US oil demand would increase, signaling an era of investment in the oil and gas sectors.⁴⁵ He emphasized the US plan of cutting corporate hegemony over mineral extractions. The debate surrounding the announcement of the Willow Project signifies that the US will simultaneously remain focused on economic and geo-strategic advancements in the Arctic.

Several assumptions can be drawn here over US policies of balancing cooperation and competition to understand possible American behavior in the Arctic. Although the US and China engage in indirect confrontations, developments in the Middle East, where the US has welcomed China's mediating role in improving Iran-Saudi Arabia ties, show that Chinese interest in Middle Eastern markets and their resources has prompted the US to set aside its reservations on China's role in global affairs.⁴⁶

The new US Arctic policy claims that the US "seeks an Arctic region

43. Heather A. Conley, Matthew Melino, "The Implication of U.S. Policy Stagnation toward the Arctic Region," *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, (2019), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/implications-us-policy-stagnation-toward-arctic-region>.

44. "National Strategy For the Arctic Region," The White House, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/National-Strategy-for-the-Arctic-Region.pdf>.

45. "Biden Goes Off-Script to Concede Oil Demand Will Last for Years," *Bloomberg*, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-02-08/biden-s-acknowledges-in-state-of-the-union-speech-that-oil-demand-to-endure>.

46. Ali Harb, "Iran-Saudi Arabia Deal Not a Setback for US, Analysts Say," *Al Jazeera*, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/16/iran-saudi-arabia-deal-not-a-setback-for-us-analysts-say>.

that is peaceful, stable, prosperous, and cooperative.”⁴⁷ The scholarly debate, however, brings forth the other side of the argument too, showing that the Arctic region might not stay peaceful and stable⁴⁸ due to the emerging China-Russia entente cordiale and its challenge for the US-led international order.⁴⁹ Another important element is the interests and political ideals of the Arctic states – including Canada, Norway, Finland, and Sweden – which are more aligned with the US than China and Russia.⁵⁰

The political environment of the Arctic is thus rife with strategic confusion as prominent actors advance gradually in the Circle. The region’s future is tied in with the actions of Russia, the US, and China, which could threaten regional peace at some point in time. Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Denmark share no history of full-fledged war. The region remained a relatively placid periphery even during the Cold War. Though these Arctic nations need to refrain from getting embroiled in any tension, it will be hard to resist the pull of great powers. The precedent set by power politics worldwide – such as in the Middle East and Africa – is a pragmatic lesson to all actors to walk ahead carefully, prioritizing the betterment of their people over zero-sum games of beggar-thy-neighbor.

Regional Peace Amid Great Power Interplay

The Arctic political economy faces numerous challenges owing to emerging great power politics. If the US tries to impose its order there as in other regions, Russia and China will reciprocate in a similar manner, if not in exact measure. Russia’s resistance to the West in Ukraine and other political and economic areas showcases a Russia vs West conundrum. While Finland has been added to NATO and Sweden is on its way to becoming a member of the alliance, the West is moving towards worrying moments and resistances. The beginning of oil and gas drilling can signal Washington’s intent to encircle

47. “National Strategy for the Arctic Region,” The White House.

48. Jean-Louis Lozier, “Arctic: Toward the End of the Exception? Strategic, Nuclear and Maritime Issues in the Region,” French Institute of International Relations, April 26, 2022, <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/etudes-de-lifri/proliferation-papers/arctic-toward-end-exception-strategic-nuclear-0>.

49. Clay Dillow, “Russia and China Vie to Beat the US in the Trillion-Dollar Race to Control the Arctic,” *CNBC*, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/02/06/russia-and-china-battle-us-in-race-to-control-arctic.html>.

50. Kristin Archick, “The Nordic Countries and U.S. Relations,” Congressional Research Services, 2023, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF10740.pdf>.

Moscow and limit Russian capabilities in the Arctic. NATO's expansion, is therefore, naturally expected to heighten Russian anxieties.

The clash of interests, as mentioned above, would impede peaceful development in the Arctic. During the last hundred years, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia have already experienced protracted and tiresome quarrels between powerful states. The Cold War is just one significant example: it damaged Afghanistan, Vietnam, and the Korean Peninsula in its entirety. Similarly, a ticking clock is on in the Arctic region, requiring cooperation among major stakeholders.

The clashes over Arctic resources have deep historical roots. While there have not been any direct military confrontations in the contemporary era, tensions and disputes related to territorial claims in the region may encourage imperialist tendencies in states. The neo-realist theory of balancing suggests that states are interest-driven and act to maximize their security.⁵¹ The war over minerals is not a new phenomenon in international politics but might take a new shape in a world where the US is still the dominant power, and China and Russia are emerging and resurging as global influencers. The US National Strategy for the Arctic includes security, environmental protection, sustainable economic development, international cooperation, and governance as foundational principles.⁵² The strategy seeks to strengthen the Arctic Council which is an inter-governmental forum that work for the resolution among Arctic nations and people of the region.⁵³ Notwithstanding, Washington can reduce tensions in the region by opening avenues of cooperation that can translate into stability in the Arctic region.⁵⁴ As for China, its economic and diplomatic incentives coupled with the ideals of shared development will earn it greater influence, making coercive policies of others less effective. The US plays a key role as an advocate for institution and liberal norms, which is in contrast with its actions in Iraq in 2003 and United Nations' silence on the invasion, showcasing immunity enjoyed by great powers. The challenge for key players in the new world order will be to invert the ominous takeaway of the Peloponnesian War, as expressed by Thucydides,

51. W. Julian Korab-Karpowicz, "Political Realism in International Relations," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/realism-intl-relations/>.

52. "Unpacking the 2022 US National Strategy for the Arctic Region," *Wilson Center*, 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/unpacking-2022-us-national-strategy-arctic-region>.

53. "National Strategy for the Arctic Region," *The White House*.

54. Harb, "Iran-Saudi Arabia Deal."

that the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.

Harbinger of Change in the Arctic

The Arctic region requires mechanisms for ensuring the sustainable and peaceful use of new territories, resource extraction, scientific research, and military advancements. All Arctic states are responsible for formulating an agreement or a treaty to reduce the chances of war, set the principles for exploration, accumulate shared scientific centers, and coordinate trade, development, military cooperation, and intelligence sharing.

The exclusive focus of great powers on their own interests alone will eventually undermine the peaceful existence of the Arctic states. Despite warning signs of the evolving new Cold War in the Arctic, no means of negotiation are being considered. The Arctic Council has no jurisdiction to address the emerging issues of new territories. Although the possibility of a power struggle cannot be ruled out even in the presence of a treaty, a legal setup will at least provide space to keep a check.⁵⁵ It is also necessary to upgrade the mandate of the Arctic Council to enhance its scope of work. A formal treaty will bind all actors.⁵⁶ It is imperative to prevent confrontation in the Arctic and promote peace and stability to preserve its rich resources and the sea lines of communication (SLOC) for regional harmony.

Conclusion

Instability in the Arctic region will be dangerous for the entire world. The contemporary great power competition will be counterproductive for the region and beyond. The US, Russia, and China must eschew differences and join hands to achieve peace and stability and benefit humanity. Being the north star of the developed world, the US has the onus to prefer cooperation rather than confrontation or competition. In the wake of rising multipolarity, key regional players must restructure their foreign policies and ensure balancing acts. This approach will enable them to mutually resolve significant challenges humanity faces, such as climate change and economic crises.

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56. Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen, "When Do Ideas of an Arctic Treaty Become Prominent in Arctic Governance Debates?" *Arctic* 72, no. 2 (2019).