



Polar Initiative Policy Brief Series
**ARCTIC 2014: WHO GETS A
VOICE AND WHY IT MATTERS**

September 2014

AMERICA'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY FRONTIER

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Policy Recommendations

The U.S. chairmanship of the Arctic Council provides an incredibly important opportunity for the United States to strengthen its internal and external leadership on three specific topics:

- Strengthen measures for safe Arctic shipping;
- Seek a far-reaching Arctic Council agreement to reduce black carbon and short-lived climate forcers (SLCF), including methane. This initiative should engage Arctic Council members and observers, such as China and India;
- Increase the focus on the health and well-being, subsistence culture, food security, and sustainable development of indigenous communities.

This policy brief series seeks to share with a wider audience the proceedings of the May 2014 conference at the Woodrow Wilson Center that explored emerging challenges facing Arctic governance, analyzed the goals and policies of stakeholder nations, and evaluated means for promoting international cooperation. The conference was co-hosted under the Wilson Center's Polar Initiative by the Center's Kissinger Institute on China and the United States, Asia Program, Canada Institute, China Environment Forum, Kennan Institute, and Global Europe Program.

U.S. National Interests in the Arctic

The United States is an Arctic nation with important strategic interests in this rapidly transforming region. U.S. interests in the Arctic have been strikingly consistent for the past four decades despite the fact that the Arctic Ocean is becoming a new “blue water” ocean. In 1971, President Richard Nixon’s National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM-144) on the Arctic promoted:

the sound and rational development of the Arctic, guided by the principle of minimizing any adverse effects to the environment; promoting mutually beneficial international cooperation in the Arctic; and at the same time providing for the protection of essential security interests in the Arctic, including preservation of the principles of freedom of the seas and superjacent airspace.

The same strategic goals of “advance[ing] U.S. security interests; pursue[ing] responsible Arctic region stewardship and strengthen[ing] international cooperation” were repeated 42 years later in the 2013 National Strategy for the Arctic Region. Yet, despite this policy consistency, the United States (with the exception of the State of Alaska) frequently must remind itself that it is an Arctic nation as noted in the very final paragraph of the 2010 U.S. National Security Strategy, “The United States is an Arctic Nation with broad and fundamental interests in the Arctic Region.”

One of its most important instruments of national protection, the U.S. missile defense system, is in part located in the Arctic (Fort Greely in Alaska, and Thule Air Force Base in Greenland). The United States is also a science power in the Polar regions, spending approximately \$1.5 billion last fiscal year alone.¹

What Does American Arctic Policy Look Like Today?

Historically, U.S. strategic documents related to the Arctic were produced approximately every 10 to 15 years. But in the last two years alone, the United States has been a strategy-drafting machine with the release of numerous strategic documents, such as the May 2013 National Strategy for the Arctic Region. Other strategy documents that followed included the May 2013 U.S. Coast Guard Arctic Strategy, the Defense Department’s Arctic Strategy released in November 2013, the January 2014 Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for the Arctic Region, and the U.S. Navy’s Updated Arctic Roadmap released in February 2014.

In addition to producing strategies, the United States has also issued numerous thick studies and assessments in recent years. In July 2010, the U.S. Coast Guard released its High Latitude Study that examined the Coast Guard’s present and future ability to conduct its missions in the Polar Regions, including the need for additional icebreakers. The following year, the Department of Defense released its report to Congress on Arctic Operations and the Northwest Passage, which addressed strategic national security objectives, necessary improvements to mission capabilities and basing infrastructure, and the need for icebreakers. In March 2013, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issued the Alaska Deep Draft Arctic Port System Study, which identified Arctic navigation improvements in support of maritime missions. The United States has also conducted several icebreaker assessments, including the 2007 National Research Council Report, *Polar Icebreakers in a Changing World: An Assessment of U.S. Needs*; the 2010 U.S. Arctic Research Commission Report; and the 2011 DHS Office of the Inspector General Report.

¹ This is a rough estimate of the National Science Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and National Aeronautics and Space Administration polar budgets.

This increased U.S. report and strategy writing activity is an acknowledgement that: (1) the United States is attempting to strategically come to grips with a new ocean; but, (2) it has not yet come to terms with the budget implications of the infrastructure, development, and security costs of the Arctic's transformation.

U.S. Arctic Policy: Lost and Found?

There are two critical elements missing from U.S. Arctic policy: long-term vision and adequate funding to support the vision. To be successful, the United States must develop a long-term, national economic and stewardship strategy for the Arctic, which would be wisely resourced through public-private partnerships for deep-water ports, aviation assets, infrastructure, communication, and navigational assets for ice-strengthened vessels. Unfortunately, the United States has already fallen behind in developing its long-term vision (other than to assess and monitor Arctic developments) and national budget allocations for infrastructure and stewardship related purposes have not yet happened. In full cooperation with the State of Alaska, Washington must make the Arctic a policy priority now before it becomes a policy problem due to a mass causality or environmental incident.

The United States has a great opportunity to prioritize the Arctic since, from 2015 to 2017, it will have the chairmanship of the Arctic Council, which will be a prime opportunity to develop America's Arctic policy. This chairmanship will offer Washington an opportunity to highlight that the United States is an Arctic nation and to

educate the American people about U.S. Arctic engagement—generally a good news story—while underscoring the importance of U.S. leadership and engagement in the Arctic region. As the Arctic Council celebrates its twentieth anniversary during the American chairmanship in 2016, the United States should help prepare the way for the Arctic Council's next 20 years.

Another opportunity lies in the appointment of the U.S. Special Representative for the Arctic Region. In July 2014, Secretary of State John Kerry announced that Admiral Robert Papp, former U.S. Coast Guard commandant, will serve as the U.S. Special Representative for the Arctic; and former Alaskan Lieutenant Governor Fran Ulmer, chair of the U.S. Arctic Research Commission, will advise on Arctic science and policy. These officials will play a critical role in advancing U.S. interests in the Arctic region both domestically and internationally, as well as strengthen cohesion and efficiency among U.S. government agencies that address Arctic issues.

While the moment seems particularly ripe for active U.S. engagement throughout the Arctic region, challenging geopolitical times lie ahead. As the crisis over Ukraine continues, relations among Arctic nations, particularly bilateral relations between Canada and Russia and the United States and Russia, have grown very tense, having an immediate impact on the work of the Arctic Council.² Ambitious Arctic cooperative projects have been temporarily set aside, including a joint U.S.-Russian hazards-reduction workshop, which was intended to share information about lessons learned and risks avoided regarding natural disasters in Alaska. Russia's heightened military presence

² For additional information on the effects of the Ukrainian crisis on the Arctic Council, see Yereth Rosen, "U.S.-Russian tensions create worries for Arctic scientists," *Anchorage Daily News*, May 9, 2014, <http://www.adn.com/2014/05/09/3463580/us-russia-tensions-create-worries.html>; and John Crump, "Diplomatic Chill: A new cold war in the warming Arctic?," Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, May 1, 2014, <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/monitor/diplomatic-chill>.

in the Arctic could also increase tensions between Russia and Arctic littoral NATO members, particularly as both Russia and the United States house significant national missile defense architecture in the Arctic. It will be of vital importance to diplomatically navigate this tense geopolitical period to protect existing Arctic cooperation as well as to prevent future strategic spill-over in the region.

Finally, the United States must also factor in the physical presence and role of new, non-Arctic actors such as China in the Arctic region and specifically in the Arctic Council. Shifting global and regional shipping, as well as natural and mineral resource patterns may change Arctic economic resource development, further spurring the interest and involvement of non-Arctic actors in the region. For the United States, this means that heightened attention and focus is needed to ensure the safety of the narrow Bering Strait as increased vessel traffic will affect U.S. economic and security interests.

Conclusion

There is simply no substitute for the articulation of a long-term vision for the American Arctic. Although U.S. strategic interests in the Arctic have been consistent for the past 40 years, the United States must respond to both the potential economic opportunity and the large infrastructure and security challenges that an emerging “blue water” ocean presents. This vision must be able to clearly answer the following two questions:

Will the United States develop its portion of the Arctic?

Today, the answer to this question (from Washington) is: “We aren’t sure. This problem is a long way off; it will cost a great deal of money that we don’t have; and we are uncertain about the environmental impact of greater

development. We need to think about it for a long time (and 22 federal agencies need to be part of that thinking) before we make a decision.” The answer from the State of Alaska is quite different: “We have and must continue to develop the Arctic in an environmentally sound way.” Today, the United States has two competing visions for the Arctic which have neutralized each other.

Will the United States protect the American Arctic?

Today, the answer is, “In theory and rhetorically, of course we will protect the American Arctic.” In reality, the United States cannot seem to identify the resources to enhance maritime safety and stewardship. We are attempting to make do with what we have but we know that what we have will not meet future demands. Tragically, the United States spends enormous resources on deepening our scientific understanding of the Arctic, but science rarely influences policy decisions. Simply put, the United States will struggle to adequately protect this increasingly fragile ecosystem.

At the end of the day and based on the number of U.S. studies and assessments released in the past few years about Arctic development plans, a state-federal and international vision for the Arctic is simply too difficult to formulate. However, the United States will continue to point to implementation plans and future assessments as a vision that realistically has little impact.

Implementing U.S. Arctic policy will require sustained and senior-level U.S. leadership. It will also require making tough decisions on funding priorities, as well as stronger coordination between scientific research and understanding (both public and private), and U.S. economic and stewardship priorities. This strong leadership is absent at the moment, leaving the impression

that the United States is not truly interested or invested in a safe and sustainably developed Arctic.

To conclude on a more positive note, the U.S. chairmanship of the Arctic Council provides an incredibly important opportunity for the United States to strengthen its internal and external leadership on three specific topics:

- Strengthen measures for safe Arctic shipping including:
 - » make IMO polar code standards for Arctic shipping mandatory;
 - » improve maritime domain awareness;
 - » improve vessel tracking mechanisms;
 - » and enhance the capacity and effective implementation of the international search and rescue (SAR) and oil spill

response agreements with a specific focus on the Bering Strait.

- » These efforts will require public-private investment, potential new institutions and structures, and collaborative development to enhance safety and protection of the marine environment.

- Seek a far-reaching Arctic Council agreement to reduce black carbon and short-lived climate forcers (SLCF), including methane. This initiative should engage Arctic Council members and observers, such as China and India.
- Finally, increase focus on the health and well-being, subsistence culture, food security, and sustainable development of indigenous communities.

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