



THE GEORGE C. MARSHALL EUROPEAN CENTER FOR SECURITY STUDIES
SECURITY INSIGHTS



EUROPEAN SECURITY SEMINAR NORTH *A Cooperative Future: Opportunities for the Arctic - 7*



By Rachael Gosnell and Joseph “Grant” Thomas, Jr.

Introduction

The Arctic is at an inflection point and policymakers must take action to ensure the future of the Arctic region is one of stability and prosperity – while also contending with major changes to global dynamics in the political, economic, and environmental arenas that extend far south of the Arctic Circle. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine continues to have significant impacts for the Arctic region, ending the ‘Arctic Exceptionalism’ that had dominated the region for decades.

Cooperative mechanisms and dialogue largely remain at a standstill, as the Western world remains unified in support of international laws and norms. Climate change is acting as an accelerant for the resource-rich region that is brimming with potential for economic development and, with that, strategic competition. As nations reorient to the new geopolitical realities, like-minded stakeholders have an emerging opportunity to cooperatively address regional challenges and chart an innovative course for the Arctic.

In September 2023, nearly fifty security practitioners, policymakers, diplomats, academics, and executives representing fourteen Arctic nations and like-minded stakeholders gathered for the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies (GCMC) and Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies’ (TSC) co-hosted European Security Seminar – North to continue discussions regarding the future of security and stability in the Arctic region. Building upon the foundational dialogue and findings of previous iterations, this year’s cohort sought to exchange regional perspectives, enhance understanding of Arctic security challenges, and chart a course for the Arctic-7 and like-minded stakeholders to address common challenges spanning the security spectrum. The findings in this paper do not necessarily reflect the individual views of participants or the hosting institutions, but rather the consensus of the invited experts reflecting a diverse array of expertise.



Top 10 Key Takeaways from ESS-N 2023

1. **Geopolitical Significance:** The Arctic is gaining increasing geopolitical importance, and its future will be shaped by global powers like Russia, China, the EU, and NATO.
2. **Climate Change Impact:** Climate change is the primary driver of Arctic transformations, impacting the environment, access, and security of the region.
3. **International Cooperation:** Despite tensions, international scientific cooperation in the Arctic is strong, highlighting the importance of continuing collaboration.
4. **Balancing Interests:** Balancing economic interests, ecological concerns, and sustainable development is a key challenge in the Arctic, especially in the energy sector.
5. **Indigenous Rights:** Indigenous communities are deeply impacted by economic development and militarization. Respect must be given to their cultural heritage and sage understanding of the Arctic. They should be brought into discussions concerning the region.
6. **Security Challenges:** Evolving security dynamics in the Arctic require cooperation among Arctic states and like-minded nations to maintain stability.
7. **Russia's Role:** Russia's military presence and interests in the Arctic are significant, and there is a need to find a balance between cooperation and deterrence.
8. **Communication and Trust:** Effective communication and trust-building are essential for addressing security challenges and maintaining stability in the Arctic.
9. **Global and Local Dynamics:** Arctic challenges have both global and local dimensions, requiring solutions that consider the specific context of each Arctic community, as well as broader global trends.
10. **Involvement of Local Communities:** Empowering and involving local and indigenous communities in order to address their unique needs is crucial for regional prosperity and stability in the Arctic.

This paper seeks to capture the key discussions and findings of this year's ESS-N, focusing on an assessment of the current state of the region and offering recommendations for actions to mitigate challenges and to chart a new course for the future in order to improve regional security and stability.

Workshop Methodology and Structure

The European Security Seminar-North series was designed to address the breadth and depth of Arctic security related challenges and opportunities. The Seminar's success is derived from the diversity of perspectives incorporated – including academia, security practitioners, and senior government officials – with the intent of fostering engaging, well informed discussions in breakout groups to enable both a more comprehensive understanding of the region, and develop cooperative solutions to common challenges.

The seminar began with keynote addresses from senior U.S. and German officials, and an introduction to the seminar from TSC and GCMC leadership. The keynote remarks set the scene for the remainder of the course and provided participants with important policy considerations to guide discussions. Participants were arranged into smaller breakout groups to continue dialogue on key challenges beyond the plenary session panels and keynote addresses. With seminar groups balanced to reflect diverse perspectives and expertise to promote robust dialogue, participants contributed their own insights as

they further debated critical regional challenges and the implications for regional security.

Each seminar group was further assigned a strategic level theme to address. Across each of the breakout sessions, seminar leads framed group discussions around addressing this theme in the



context of the content presented during the plenary sessions. These themes were as follows:

- North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the High North
- Understanding the Changing Security Landscape
- Strategic Competition in the High North
- Cooperation in the High North

Each of the seminars was asked to develop actionable recommendations over the course of the week and present these findings for further evaluation amongst the broader group.

Day two of the seminar provided a basis for understanding the complex challenges of the region and opportunities for cooperation. Panels identified key climate and human security challenges in “The Changing Arctic Environment,” and offered proposals for like-minded Arctic nations and stakeholders in tackling these issues through a cooperative approach in “Security Cooperation in the Arctic.” In breakout groups, participants discussed key social, climate and environmental considerations, and what cooperative measures could be established to address human security challenges in the Arctic. In the evening, the seminar hosted a ‘Night Owl’ session where participants heard from panelists on the current state of the NATO.

During the third day, panelists examined the challenges to sustainable development and economic security in the High North in, “Economics and Security: Perspectives from the North.” The panel highlighted the unique characteristics of the Arctic, such as the abundance of natural resources and the opening of sea routes, that make the economics of the region particularly important. Developing cooperative measures between like-minded Arctic states and stakeholders is imperative to ensure regional prosperity and peace. In the afternoon session, “Looking North: Global Trends,” panelists discussed how global security trends impact the High North and the broader Arctic region.

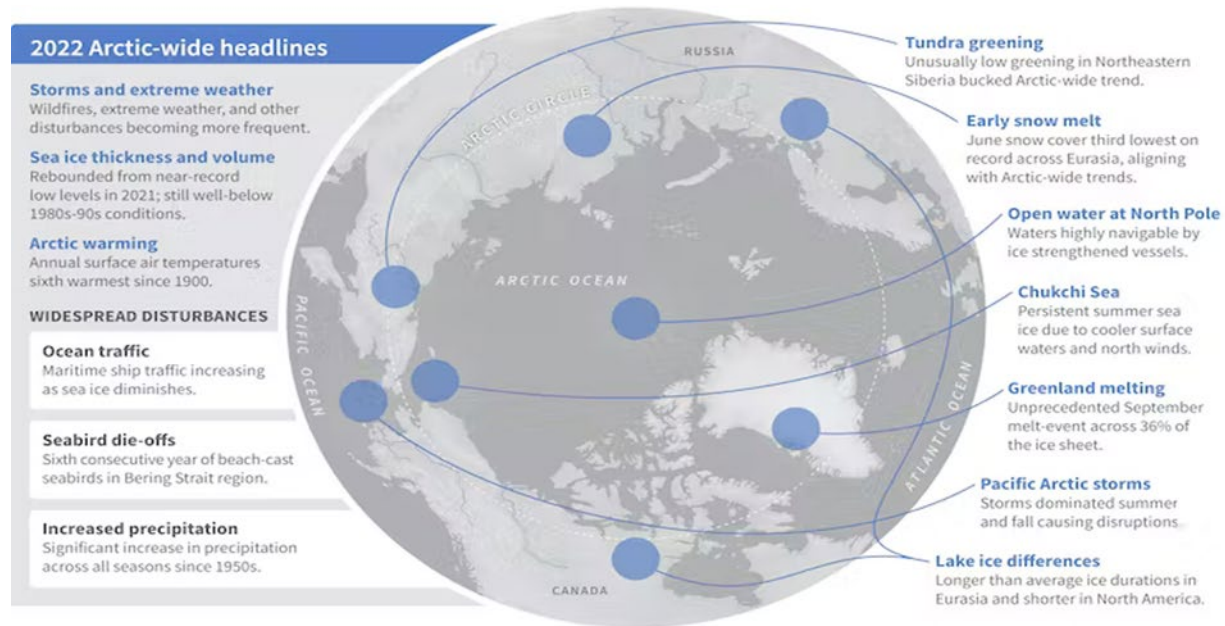
Day four of the seminar focused on identifying security challenges, assessing future collective security measures, and examining how to best counter malign actors in the region. The first panel of the day, “Practitioners’ Perspectives: Cooperation and Coordination,” provided multi-national insights on operating in the Arctic region. The second, “The Future of Security Cooperation,” analyzed future trends, drivers, and risk factors of strategic competition in the High North.

The workshop concluded on day five with seminar group presentations. In this session, breakout groups presented their findings in response to their assigned theme, based on the proceedings of the workshop. Each of the groups highlighted the importance of security cooperation among the like-minded Arctic and non-Arctic states. Following the presentations, GCMC and TSC leadership provided closing reflections on the importance of the seminar, and the future of the European High North and Arctic region. The remainder of this paper is a collated report of the reflections from the breakout groups and final presentations.

The Changing Arctic Environment

The Arctic is a region deeply affected by climate change, geo-economic trends, technological advances, geopolitical dynamics, and strategic competition. In order to chart a productive course

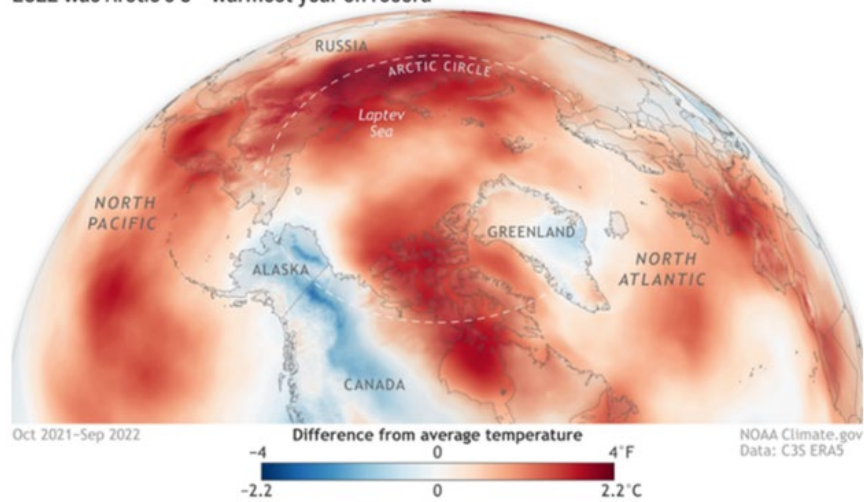
for the future, it is imperative to gain a more comprehensive understanding of these particular aspects of the region. Understanding circum-polar security dilemma dynamics requires analysis of sub-regional climate and security trends. Climate change is a central driver of Arctic transformations, and will lead to further environmental shifts, infrastructure challenges, and security concerns. Given the fragile ecosystem and the dramatic impact that warming trends are having on the security environment in the Arctic, the climate-security nexus is particularly poignant in the High North. The opening of new maritime approaches has already caused northern nations to rethink domain awareness and military infrastructure in the region, as climate change amplifies geostrategic drivers.



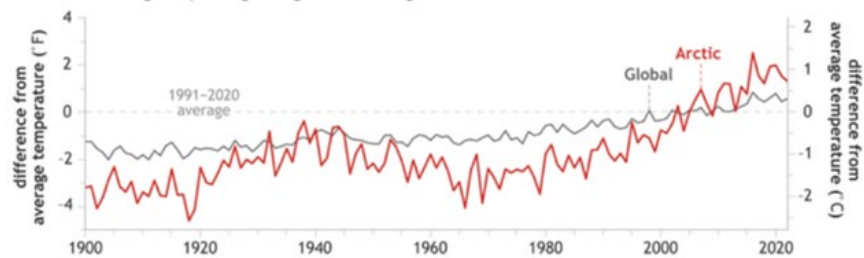
Source: NOAA Arctic Report Card 2022

The Arctic has become a focal point for geopolitical competition and climate related headlines. Recent Arctic tsunamis, boreal forest fires, seabird die-offs, permafrost thawing, tundra greening, and disruptive storms are affecting local communities at an unprecedented rate. The interconnectedness of global climate phenomena marks these as not just regional, but global challenges. To better advise policymakers and defense leadership on regional security, it is imperative that all facets of the Arctic – and the impact on regional climate, economic, and security dynamics – are understood.

2022 was Arctic's 6th-warmest year on record

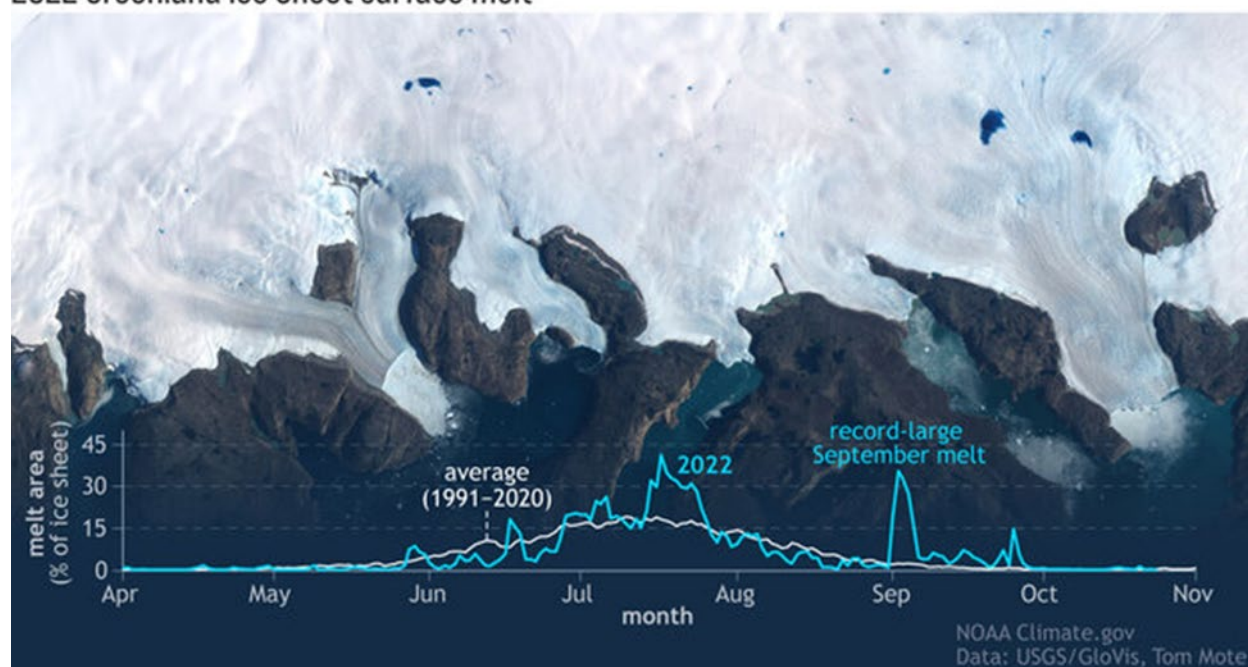


Arctic warming outpacing the global average



Warming at a rate of at least double, and perhaps as much as four times faster than the average global rate, the Arctic region is experiencing dramatic changes. Some predictions warn that the Arctic could warm as much as ten degrees Celsius by the end of the century, bringing dramatic changes to the fragile ecosystem and people residing in the region. Climate change will continue to have a disproportional impact on the Arctic, and those changes – such as the melting of ice, thawing of permafrost, interruption of Atlantic thermohaline circulation, and warming of the Arctic Ocean – will have global economic and security ramifications. For instance, the melting of the Greenland Ice Sheet could cause global sea level to rise by 6-7 centimeters – bringing devastating consequences for low-lying communities. The Greenland Ice Sheet has sustained twenty-five consecutive years of ice loss, with an unprecedented late-season warming and surface melt in September 2022.

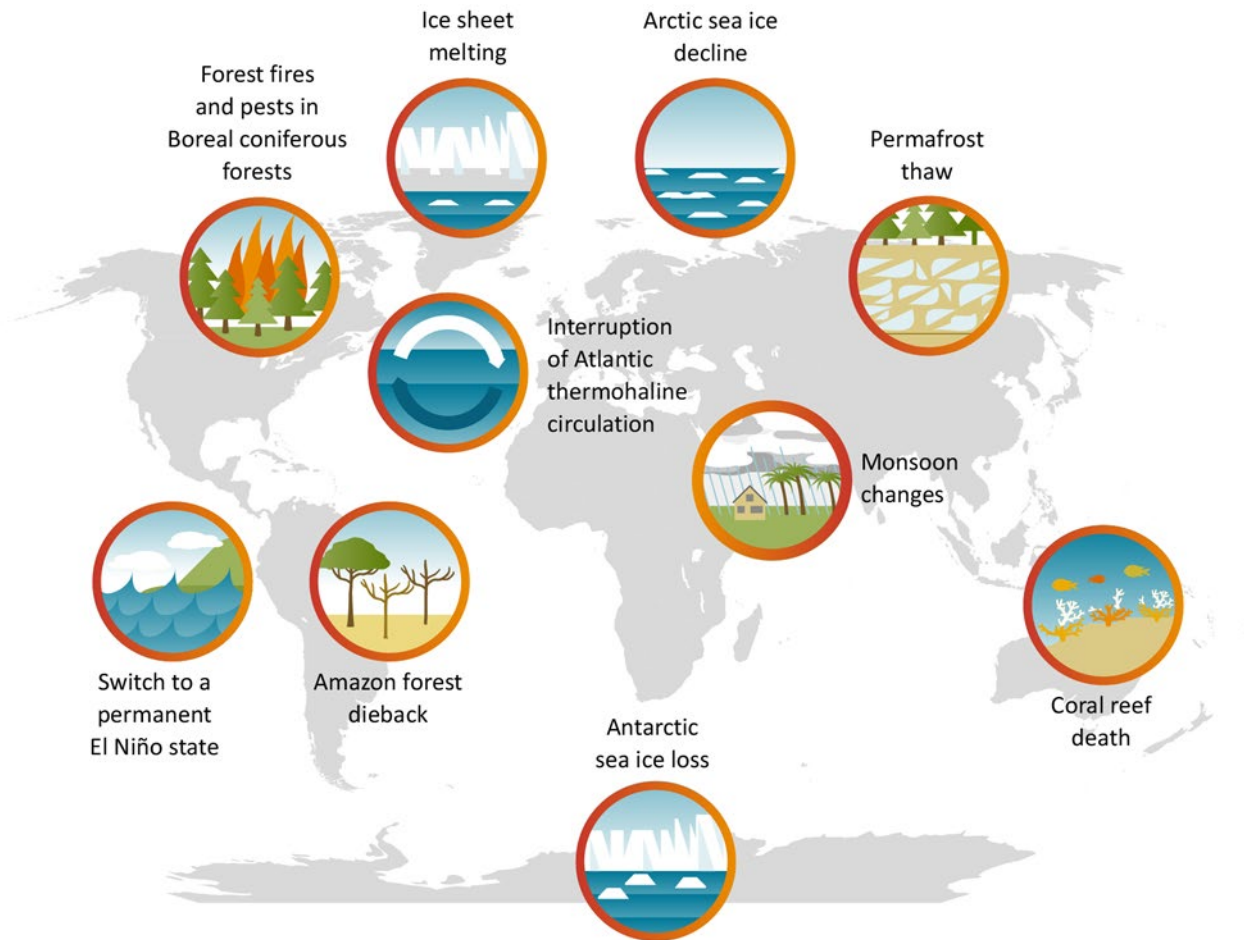
2022 Greenland Ice Sheet surface melt



Permafrost thaw will also bring challenges, as nearly 30% of the northern hemisphere is permafrost – much of that being Russian territory. Thawing will bring local consequences, with challenges for infrastructure, ports, and local communities, but also global concerns given the mass release of stored carbon into the atmosphere and the potential release of other toxins, ranging from long-frozen viruses and bacteria to mercury and methane. According to NOAA’s Arctic Report Card 2022, the past year was the sixth-warmest on record for the Arctic based on records dating back to 1900. Arctic sea ice coverage was well below long-term averages in 2022, enabling the opening of the Northern Sea Route and Northwest Passage during the warmer months. Further, the warming enabled the accumulation of moisture in the atmosphere, causing an increase in precipitation, with the potential to impact the fragile local ecosystems as well as broader global climate trends.

Indeed, there are concerns about soon reaching tipping points for many of the weather and climate phenomena ongoing in the Arctic region. While the Arctic is home to a tiny fraction of the global population and economic activity, it is a region that has an outsized effect on global weather and climate patterns both on land and at sea. However, the nature of many of these climate phenomena are not yet fully understood. In order to better comprehend the changing geophysical environment, more research is critical. A freeze of scientific cooperation on an institutional level with Russia – which comprises approximately fifty percent of the Arctic landmass – remains problematic to enhancing understanding and awareness of the evolving circum-polar region. The lack of data from Russian scientists disrupts holistic understanding of the implications of climate change. It is critical that like-minded stakeholders engage in scientific research and share data to develop a more comprehensive understanding of local, sub-regional, and regional climate and weather phenomena in order to better understand global implications.

Tipping points in the climate system



Graphic: Leopoldina Factsheet Climate Change (2021), CC BY-ND 4.0
After Lenton et al. (Nature 2019)

The Arctic region holds tremendous natural resources – not only oil and gas, but also rare earth minerals that are enablers of green energy and the digital transformation. Earlier this year, the Swedish state-owned mining company LKAB announced the discovery of significant deposits of rare earth elements in the Kiruna area. These metals are essential for the manufacture of wind turbines, electric vehicles, and other digital applications. Yet with this bountiful discovery of critically important resources comes concern for environmental damage and the use of fossil fuels to aid extraction. The Arctic may be facing a twist on the resource paradox, in that the rush for the region’s fossil fuels, renewables, and materials to support green and digital transitions is fueling further economic exploration and exploitation, causing profound impacts for the local and indigenous communities. New economic activity brings major challenges, to include concerns for sustainable development, human rights, and environmental damage. Yet renewable energy – of which the Arctic has an abundance of potential – is essential to achieving energy

security for the High North and broader European region. Like-minded nations must work together to reduce the risk of devastating a fragile ecosystem and unique culture while pursuing energy security.

Climate change has long been a hot topic for the Arctic, as has the potential for economic development enabled by warming trends, and as a result, we face new realities in the region as climate change acts as an accelerant for great power competition. To promote regional peace, stability, and security, it is essential to first explore scientific assessments and gain a greater understanding of the challenges faced by indigenous and local communities – as well as the impact on military infrastructure and operations.

Understanding the Evolving Security Landscape

The most distinct immediate challenges for the Arctic region stem from climate change and the geopolitical consequences resulting from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. As the Arctic region shifts from an area of dialogue and cooperation to a region focused on deterrence and domain awareness, it is clear that there is simply no more ‘business as usual.’ The Russian invasion has altered the security landscape, driving a renewed focus on High North security for the first time in more than 25 years. The accession of Finland and likely Sweden into NATO reflects the seriousness in which nations are responding to Russian aggression. The regional security architecture is responding as nations commit resources, training, and assets to develop a more persistent and capable presence as a deterrent against further Russian aggression.

Russia has long cast a wary eye to its vulnerable northern border. The opening of the Arctic maritime domain is amplifying insecurities in the North and Russia perceives the open access as an existential threat. In response, the nation has transformed their Arctic seacoast by reinvigorating former Soviet era bases to install anti-access/area denial (A2AD) coverage. While every nation has the inherent right to defend sovereign territory, Russia’s misplaced usage of international law to impose additional restrictions on maritime traffic along the northern waters violates the freedom of the seas that has enabled global economic prosperity. With the potential to connect the trading and manufacturing centers along the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the high seas of the Arctic Ocean must remain steadfastly open and free for vessels meeting the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) Polar Code requirements. Allied nations must work together to uphold all aspects of the rules-based international order in the Arctic.

Yet Russia faces a paradox in the North, in that it desperately needs to develop and export the fossil fuel resources in its Arctic Zone to sustain its economy. Rising tensions have negatively impacted foreign investment in the Russian Arctic. As such, Russia’s economic dependence on the region – and the need for foreign investment and cooperation to gain the technology required to develop its abundant Arctic oil and gas fields – may serve to temper Arctic saber-rattling.

Human Security Considerations

While economic security has received significant attention, human security challenges also have the potential to deeply affect regional security. Indigenous and local peoples have often been excluded from national discussions. There is an urgent need to bring these sage communities into discussions in order to preserve cultural heritages, fragile ecosystems, and incorporate immense

local knowledge into security discussions. Local communities bring tremendous expertise on their region, which offers distinct advantages to identifying and tackling environmental, economic, and hard security challenges; yet they are often underutilized or marginalized. Arctic states must build trust and relationships with those who will be most deeply affected by the evolving climate and security landscape, or risk malign actors seeking to gain influence within these communities.

Strategic Competition in the High North

Ongoing globalization is causing nations to increasingly look northward for strategic resources, enabled by expanding accessibility in the region. The race to both research and economically develop the region is becoming more competitive amongst national, commercial and military entities alike. Strategic competition should be approached as a competition continuum rather than a false binary of either regional cooperation (Arctic exceptionalism) or armed conflict. The trend of strategic competition will only intensify in the High North and broader Arctic region as resources elsewhere are depleted and societal trends such as urbanization, migration, and climate related challenges further pressure the north. These trends will afford both new opportunities and new vulnerabilities from global economic development, prosperity, and the green transition.

In particular, there will be a centralization of resources and a clash between traditional and modern ideas, which will deeply impact indigenous and local communities. Native communities are confronting challenges to their traditional lifestyles, as highlighted by the case brought to the Norwegian Supreme Court where indigenous Sami argued that a wind turbine park violated their cultural rights as reindeer herders. Though the court's decision was unanimous in reaffirming the Sami rights in the October 2021 ruling, the wind turbines remain, highlighting the challenges between modernizing and enabling the green transformation – while also being mindful of protecting cultural heritage of the indigenous peoples.

The unique nature of the Arctic brings limited infrastructure, a limited workforce, dominance of fossil fuels, and a potential to play a significant role in the green energy transition through the mining of rare earth minerals. Understanding local issues is vital to preparing a fragile region to be a key arena for strategic competition. Nations must seek opportunities for stable economic development that benefits local communities and national interests. Indeed, two dilemmas have emerged, with economic interests and opportunities vying for dominance over security and strategic interests. China and Russia may seek to further exploit these societal and national divisions, to the detriment of Western nations.

While it is clear that strategic competition will continue to be a dominating factor in the High North, it is still uncertain as to whether or not Russia and China will strengthen their partnership into an alliance or, more likely, their inherent distrust and wariness will continue to enable only a partnership of convenience. China's view of Russia as a potential resource colony could spark further insecurities from their northern partner. The West should be mindful of this dynamic and seek opportunities to maximize mutually beneficial arrangements with Russia when conditions permit.

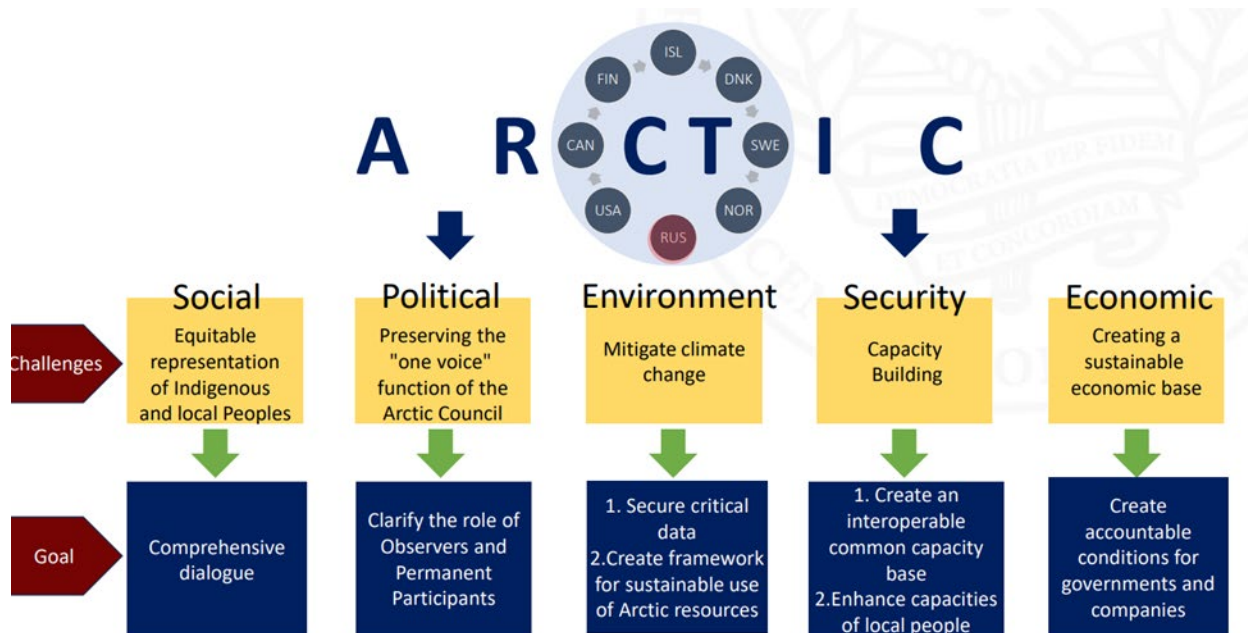
Extensive Chinese investment throughout the Arctic region has given China footholds. Both Russian and Chinese disinformation, propaganda campaigns, and hybrid warfare serve to further complicate the Arctic region. Like-minded nations must work together to strengthen capabilities to cooperatively tackle foreseen, and unforeseen, challenges.

Charting a Productive Course in the Arctic

All Arctic nations and stakeholders benefit from a peaceful and stable Arctic. The Arctic holds the tantalizing potential for a conflict-free region that is a model of transnational cooperation. While ‘Arctic exceptionalism’ may be over for now, the unique characteristics of the region tend toward cooperation in the face of common challenges: extreme weather conditions, climate change, environmental fragility, emergent crises, natural or man-made disasters, and transnational issues.

These new realities demand a thoughtful examination of how to best achieve a region that respects the sovereignty of Arctic nations, encourages responsible and sustainable economic development, protects a fragile ecosystem, and ensures indigenous and local communities are both consulted and respected for their unique expertise and cultural heritage. Challenges will be present across the spectrum and goals should be established to address each in a comprehensive and inclusive manner.

Challenges may be evaluated by their distinct, but often intertwined, categories, including social, political, environmental, economic, and hard security. Each of these obstacles should then be assigned a goal to focus local, regional, and national efforts. While all eight Arctic nations have previously worked together in the Arctic Council to address these challenges – with the exception of military security, which is expressly prohibited by the Arctic Council mandate – the current situation will likely preclude Russian involvement for the foreseeable future. However, the remaining “A7” nations should come together under the Norwegian-chaired Arctic Council to continue forward progress on key challenges. The absence of Russian participation should not be viewed as a barrier to consensus, but rather an opportunity to uphold international norms and values.



NATO in the High North

The Arctic will soon become a stronghold of trans-Atlantic cooperation. The accession of Finland – and soon Sweden – to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization will shift the center of gravity for this alliance. The potential to uphold collective security in the Arctic region is greater under the broadened NATO membership. The northern Allies bring high levels of interoperability, capabilities, and capacity for Arctic military operations.

However, it is also important to clearly evaluate Moscow’s threat perceptions on NATO expansion. While there is debate as to whether Moscow truly views NATO enlargement as an existential threat – given the muted reaction by military units when Finland joined NATO – there is no doubt that Russia perceives the Alliance as threatening. Climate change and an increasingly isolated Russia, together with NATO enlargement may very well create an existential threat to Russia, which increases competition, polarization and militarization. The previous buffer zone that existed with the non-aligned nations of Sweden and Finland have forced Russian military planners to adjust their foundational strategies. Russian doctrinal philosophy under Putin equates the existence of the state only with expansion. Putin has given particular attention to the Arctic region and the Russian Arctic strategy has been steady since 2014, gaining national level prioritization. NATO Allies must not underestimate the national importance or military capabilities of the Russian Federation. Although much of Russia’s ground forces have been decimated in Ukraine, their naval and air forces remain intact to defend their northern flank. Russia has effectively doubled-down on its aggressive Arctic strategy with the release of its most recent strategic documents, pursuit of nuclear weapons testing, and preservation of the Northern Fleet Military District’s capabilities.

In response to the escalated threat environment, NATO has sought to increase focus on deterrence and defense in the High North. Yet more can, and should, be done. Strategically, the Nordic nations must be carefully integrated into the SACEUR Area of Responsibility (AOR), as a Northern Flank – and appropriately enabled. This entails:

- Increased NATO presence through NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP) and Common Funding
- Demonstrate the ability to control the space through multi-domain capabilities, exercises, and operations
- Enable mobility in the High North
- NATO reinforcement of nations’ total defense approach, while adapting national capabilities to project comprehensive resilience

It must also be understood that the Ukraine conflict may have dramatically altered Moscow’s approach to the region, with less desire to appear cooperative and a greater tendency to remove itself from cooperative organizations it perceives to hold little value for its strategic interests. Russia’s March 2023 foreign policy strategy clearly identified the United States, and like-minded nations, as a threat and seeks to curb Western dominance. The importance given to its circumstantial relationship with China should be a clear signal that Moscow is not looking to rejoin Western cooperative mechanisms under the current leadership. NATO strategy must evolve accordingly, prioritizing credibility of capabilities to effectively deter Russia. Yet NATO must also continue to adhere to international mechanisms. Transparency and clear

communication will mitigate the potential for security dilemma dynamics to gain strength, creating an escalation spiral that will be to the detriment of all involved.

Integrated Deterrence – and Reassurance?

Ensuring security and stability in the Arctic is a nuanced challenge that requires foresight and deepening cooperation. First and foremost, like-minded states have a responsibility to enact an appropriate blend of deterrence and reassurance. While Russia’s invasion of Ukraine rightly chilled previous “A8” cooperative mechanisms in the Arctic, there remains a steadfast need for clear signaling and setting the conditions for future dialogue. Dialogue, however, must be conditional and come from a position of unity and strength. Like-minded nations must work together to address common challenges. With seven of the eight Arctic nations soon to be NATO Allies, we are in a unique position to truly adjust the course of the Arctic. Yet the window to reset the course of the Arctic will be a brief one. Policymakers should take action to strengthen the capabilities and policies necessary to ensure the Arctic remains a stable, secure, and peaceful region amidst great power competition.

The following recommendations emerged from expert discussions during the European Security Seminar – North as essential for ensuring future preparedness to promote for regional stability and security.

Build resilience in the North. While the concept of Total Defense is a familiar one for many Arctic nations, policymakers should focus on strengthening resilience of Arctic populations to better prepare for a range of potential crises ranging from weather-related phenomena such as tsunamis and coastal erosion to permafrost thaw, pandemics, and security threats. Those nations without a Total Defense concept should seek to develop one, learning from the best practices of other Arctic Allies.

Improve military capacity and capabilities. The backbone of deterrence is credible capability and this requires a concerted effort to improve key areas, such as improving all-domain awareness, establishing meaningful and routine presence, enhancing capabilities through multilateral and bilateral exercises, ensuring equipment and weapons systems are optimized for cold weather, and enhancing tactical and operational level knowledge of the challenging region.

Train for the future. The current schedule of training exercises and operations in the High North is robust. Yet, it can further be optimized by integrating more units and raising the complexity of scenarios. More NATO Allies should be integrated to ensure nations have the ability to conduct operations in the harsh landscape of the High North.

Strengthen underwater capabilities. Given the vulnerability of subsea transatlantic cables and pipelines – and the sophistication and weaponry of Russia’s submarines, it is imperative that Allies focus on a coordinated approach to securing the underwater domain. The proficiency of Russian submarines is combining with the changing sound profile caused by the incursion of fresh water from ice melt to complicate undersea warfare scenarios. Additional sensors, unmanned capabilities, and deploying additional Allied maritime, surface, and undersea assets to the region is of tremendous importance.

Improve the supply chain. The Arctic sub-regions present uniquely different weather characteristics (particularly temperature, humidity, and propensity for storms) that must be accounted for by specialized logistics teams. Supply chains must ensure awareness of cold weather capabilities across the circum-polar Arctic.

Incorporate Indigenous and local communities. Rather than excluding or marginalizing indigenous and local communities, national and defense leaders should seek to actively engage them to better understand local challenges and generate local solutions. This is true across the spectrum, from local planning to national defense plans. Following the highly successful model of the Canadian Rangers, Arctic nations should seek to empower those who know the region best.

Incentivize the private sector. While the capabilities to operate in the High North have long been considered niche, governments should prioritize the ability to resolve key hinderances to effective military operations, turning to the private sector for solutions to polar communications challenges, domain awareness, and systems and gear optimized for cold weather operations.

Arctic Youth Development Programs. The future of Arctic safety, security, and stewardship rests with the younger generation of emerging leaders. Developing, or expanding, programs that educate younger emerging leaders about the topics and issues impacting the future of the Arctic is critically important. Exchange programs, educational outreach, collaborative youth events, mentoring programs, and college internship programs are important ways to ensure we are preparing the future generations to address the wide array of Arctic issues addressed at ESS-N and that will continue to evolve in the years to come.

Cooperate and Coordinate. Nordic cooperation should not be viewed as a given, but rather an ongoing goal. Hybrid threats, climate change, protectionism, and upcoming election cycles can serve to drive a wedge between Allies. These concerns must be anticipated and overcome by strengthening cooperative mechanisms now, so that the transatlantic link is safeguarded. Focus on common areas of interest serves to unify key stakeholders. These areas include: environmental and climate issues, infrastructure challenges, cross-border resource management, collective security, and upholding the rules-based international order.

Improve immediate response capabilities and regulations. The M/V OCEAN EXPLORER cruise ship grounding during ESS-N highlighted the urgent need to focus on Arctic safety, security, and stewardship. While the Polar Code is a positive step, the IMO, national governments, and leadership of Arctic nation maritime regulatory organizations must work together to promote safe Arctic maritime operations.

Lay out the rules. Like-minded nations should put forward a set of practical, enforceable, and sustainable expectations to all actors in the region. The rules should be adhered to and enforced by all nations. While this construct may seem out of reach, nations should work within the construct of the multilateral organizations, such as the Arctic Council, to develop appropriate mechanisms that build upon the previous agreements addressing mutually beneficial topics such as search and rescue, oil pollution response, and scientific cooperation. Though the Arctic Council mandates are not legally enforceable, states should seek to compel compliance to those

that pertain to their territory or territorial waters. The revitalization of the Arctic Chiefs of Defense (CHOD) forum could serve as another opportunity to develop security-related mandates.

Uphold the rules-based international order. Nations must adhere to and promote the rules-based international order. The U.S. should immediately ratify the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Further, consideration of appropriate freedom of navigation activities should be made by all like-minded nations, not only the United States. Challenging excessive maritime claims is of global importance to ensuring freedom of sea-borne commerce, and the Arctic should be included.

Understand and balance risk management. Nations should seek to avoid the trap of mirror-imaging and should instead engage in clear signaling. Further, it is imperative to maintain an understanding of Russia's insecurities, priorities, and tendencies to affect clear, unambiguous policy that accounts for risk and escalation management.

Be predictable and transparent. Establishing clear patterns of persistent presence and regional engagement will serve to improve credibility, strengthen deterrence, and establish an operating norm well known by all regional actors, to raise the threshold for escalation in the event of a crisis.

Consider a NATO-Russia INCSEA. While the Incidents at Sea agreements have traditionally been bilateral since the first US-USSR INCSEA in 1972, the geopolitical and technological conditions have significantly evolved. It is time to consider whether a multilateral agreement would better accomplish the INCSEA objective to reduce the risk of an unintended incident at sea. Indeed, the new agreement should incorporate language capturing the behavior of unmanned vehicles, in addition to more traditional vessels and aircraft.

Dialogue when conditions warrant. There is no question that the best opportunity to prevent misunderstandings and misperceptions is frequent and frank dialogue. This comes from a number of different avenues, ranging from intergovernmental fora, expert engagements, military hotlines, and formal diplomatic channels. The loss of dialogue poses a risk to all sides and should be resumed when conditions warrant.

The Arctic has long faced numerous security challenges, yet the region today is facing a greater risk of misleading indicators and misunderstandings or misperceptions resulting in an inadvertent escalation. Signaling must be clear and precise, or ambiguity risks further destabilizing the region or worse, causing unintended conflict. As conditions allow for dialogue to resume, states should utilize all present avenues to clearly communicate – with a preferred focus on multilateral institutions such as the Arctic Council, Arctic Coast Guard Forum, Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEF), and the Arctic Chiefs of Defense meetings – to ensure all voices are considered. Bilateral discussions should be held only on matters of specific interest to those two nations, to ensure a unified Western voice representing the region.

While addressing and implementing these solutions will take time, it is necessary to do so in order to chart a course of productive cooperation and to act as a credible and capable deterrent to prevent an escalation of conflict. The Arctic faces numerous challenges such as intense climate

change, sustainable economic development, fragile ecosystem, and vulnerable Indigenous and local populations. Like-minded nations must work together to tackle these common challenges. Russian militarization in the area underscores the security risk in the region. To maintain a secure, stable, and prosperous Arctic, policymakers should build resilience in the North, improve military capacity and capabilities for Arctic operations, and refine operational plans for worst-case scenarios. Enacting the above recommendations will both reduce the likelihood of conflict and ensure a unified victory of like-minded nations and democratic ideals in the High North.

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