

ARCTIC COUNCIL INITIATIVES TO SUSTAIN ARCTIC COOPERATION

Recommendations from the February 2015 Meeting at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

JAMES F. COLLINS, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace • MICHAEL SFRAGA, University of Alaska Fairbanks
ROSS A. VIRGINIA, Dartmouth College • KENNETH S. YALOWITZ, Wilson Center

A group of 45 international experts, government officials and representatives of leading NGO's met in Washington, DC, on February 23, 2015, and unanimously concluded that the Arctic must and can, with adequate political will, remain an area for peaceful cooperation, scientific research and sustainable development. And to the extent possible, it should be kept apart from the current complex geo-political environment. This vision is already challenged by events in the region and outside. Russia's increased military presence raises the specter of a more militarized Arctic, and US energy sanctions on Russian oil and gas projects in response to Russian involvement in the war in Ukraine have raised questions about the Arctic's economic development. But, climate change, environmental dangers, the prospect of increased Arctic Ocean shipping, the development of the rich energy and natural resource base of the Arctic, and the need for improved maritime infrastructure and shipping safety all necessitate continued cooperation.

All participants agreed that the Arctic Council and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) continue to be the primary mechanisms to ensure this outcome. Therefore, a principal task of the US Arctic Council chairmanship, beginning in April 2015, is to guide consensus toward cooperation, engagement and transparency in the Arctic and channel the dynamism of rapid change in the Arctic into timely and effective work by the Arctic

Council on its own agenda and Arctic issues that need to be taken up with other international bodies.

The US Chairmanship program for the Arctic Council sets priorities in these areas: Arctic Ocean safety, security and stewardship; improving economic and living conditions; and addressing the impacts of climate change. A consensus of meeting participants supported the US Chairmanship goals and objectives and the need to address climate change challenges resulting from loss of sea ice, sea level rise, and thawing permafrost. Equally important was a consideration of actions to limit black carbon pollution and improve air quality in the Arctic, continue research and programs to ensure the health of the Arctic Ocean ecosystem as energy development increases, and implement the Polar Code and other measures to improve the safety of Arctic navigation.

The February 23, 2015, meeting followed a preparatory session held on October 16, 2014, which was also convened by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Dartmouth, the University of Alaska Fairbanks and the University of the Arctic, at which policy recommendations for the US Chairmanship were initially discussed. The purpose of the February meeting was to choose and prioritize recommendations. Several of the October proposals have already been incorporated by US planners into the US agenda for the chairmanship and are not repeated below. The following additional recommendations were made by the group in the four categories of issues discussed.

AUTHORS

James F. Collins, Ambassador (ret.), Diplomat in Residence and Senior Associate, Russia and Eurasia Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC

Michael Sfraga, Vice Chancellor, University of Alaska Fairbanks

Ross A. Virginia, Director of the Institute of Arctic Studies at the Dickey Center for International Understanding and Myers Family Professor of Environmental Science, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH

Kenneth S. Yalowitz, Ambassador (ret.), Global Fellow, Kennan Institute, Wilson Center, Washington, DC

GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT FOR THE US CHAIRMANSHIP

- The United States failure to ratify UNCLOS continues to weaken the American voice in Arctic councils. Ratification would enhance US authority on Arctic issues and underscore its commitment to peaceful development of the Arctic and avoidance of border conflicts.
- The Arctic Council should ensure procedures for regular consultation at the sub-political level, given the uncertain geopolitical environment.
- A multilateral training center sanctioned by the Arctic Council should be established for search and rescue training and exercises, and for dealing with oil spills. Developing multilateral cooperative practices and communication capabilities in the Arctic is essential.
- Meetings of Defense Chiefs and the Arctic Security Council are currently in abeyance. They should be resumed as soon as conditions permit. Meetings of Coast Guard chiefs through the Arctic Coast Guard Forum should continue in any event. These address overriding safety concerns from maritime activities.
- Security-related communications can be improved by developing a standardized procedure for communicating the movement of military assets in the Arctic to deal with natural disasters. Standardized procedures prevent misunderstandings that can develop from rapid deployment of assets during emergencies.
- Navigational charts of the Arctic Ocean remain inadequate. International cooperation in mapping and sharing information in this sphere is essential and should increase.

ARCTIC COUNCIL GOVERNANCE

- The United States should proactively promote a study of the number, role and participation of Arctic Council observer states and groups. One goal should be to enhance contributions by observer states in the Council's Working Groups in areas such as scientific research and shipping assessments. The study should also address whether term limits or groupings of observers into interest categories would improve Arctic Council governance.
- A study should be undertaken to determine the effectiveness of Arctic Council Working Groups. Are their recommendations sufficiently specific: are they relevant and are they being followed? Are working groups effectively working with international organizations studying related issues and using the results of their work?
- The Arctic Council should lead in identifying priorities for scientific study and in acting as a convener and recommender to other scientific organizations undertaking studies of broader issues such as global climate change and sea level rise.
- The relationship of the Arctic Economic Council to the Arctic Council requires more definition and could be enhanced by making the former an observer. The Arctic Economic Council should be encouraged to expand its writ beyond its present focus on large industry, energy and mineral extraction to include job creation and community sustainable development in the Arctic.
- Establish an Arctic Council task force on communications to improve sharing of information among member states and observers on maritime awareness, oil spill management, responses to accidents, and infrastructure.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

- More small-scale energy pilot projects and evaluation research are needed to stabilize and expand the economic future of small communities. These projects should highlight US and other technologies that might also be applied to isolated communities and remote activities in other regions. The continued development and employment of renewable energy options designed for users in their local environments should be a top priority for US energy policy in the Arctic.
- The Arctic Council and the Arctic Economic Council should prioritize research and support strategies to diversify local economies and provide resilience that can address the effects of the cyclical nature of energy and natural resource industries.
- The Arctic Council and Arctic Economic Council should serve as a forum to develop and put into practice frameworks for corporate social responsibility to include those promoting sustainable business practices drawing on international guidelines such as The UN Global Compact.
- The Arctic Council should address individual and community health and food security as linked problems. Research and management plans should incorporate local perspectives, and gender issues should be highlighted.
- The lack of infrastructure continues to be the main challenge for safe Arctic shipping and oil and gas development. Promoting efforts and methods to address this issue remains a critical task for Arctic Council Working Groups and the International Maritime Organization.

EDUCATION, SCIENCE POLICY AND DIPLOMACY

- Science Ministers from Arctic Council members and observers should meet with funders and other agencies to evaluate the capacity, sustainability, and adequacy of present observing networks and programs for early warning systems for environmental change.
- Until there is an appropriate management plan in place, an international agreement to ban commercial fishing in the offshore Arctic Ocean is essential. Arctic Council Working Groups should promote and contribute to the scientific assessments needed for management of all Arctic Ocean natural resources.
- The Arctic Council and its participants should promote the mobility of students, scholars, and practitioners engaged in Arctic research and policy. Programs such as the University of the Arctic, the Fulbright Arctic Initiative, and regional efforts are essential to promoting Arctic awareness and science literacy.
- The application and acquisition of traditional local knowledge and its use in Arctic Council research and developing policies is a priority. Education and mobility programs must research pathways for greater indigenous participation and ensure that communities see direct benefits from these efforts.
- The Arctic Council should continue to lead in supporting new applied research models that have special advantage in addressing problems specific to the Arctic. Special emphasis should be given to bridging disciplines by including social sciences, arts and humanities, and traditional local knowledge into programs of scientific research and assessment.

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Collins, J.F., M. Sfraga, R.A. Virginia, and K.S. Yalowitz, 2013. *A Euro-Atlantic Action Plan for Cooperation and Enhanced Arctic Security*. Conference Report and Recommendations to the Arctic Council and Interested Parties for February 11-12, 2013, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., and the University of the Arctic Institute for Applied Circumpolar Policy.

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For comments or information please contact arctic@dartmouth.edu.

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