



## Three scenarios for Arctic 2045

The purpose of the three scenarios is to encourage both long-term planning and foresight while recognizing the capacity of 'surprise events' to disrupt. In the case of the Arctic region, for example, we might point to the grounding of the exploratory rig the Kulluk in December 2012 and the manner in which that 'disaster' was seized upon by environmentalists to posit a series of disastrous futures for the Arctic if oil exploration and drilling was allowed to continue. Scenario planning should help plan for the future, and ideally help us anticipate such futures and act on them by introducing and implementing preparedness, pre-caution pre-emption and/or resilience.

As part of the exercise itself, it might be helpful to distinguish what these terms mean:

- Preparedness – a state of readiness aided and abetted by prevention measures with capacities to respond to any uncertainty even disaster in its aftermath
- Pre-caution – measures taken to prevent something unpleasant and unwanted from happening such as an oil disaster and to do so now before greater harm or risk is exposed
- Pre-emption – is taking action against a target where there is evidence that the target is about to launch an attack
- Resilience – is preparing and accommodating changing circumstances, and the capacity of key systems and elements in societies to 'bounce back' from shocks.

We offer three scenarios for Arctic 2045 and have assumed certain background factors as relevant to all three scenarios – ongoing climate change with corresponding implications for sea ice distribution and thickness and oceanic acidification/warming; increased access for marine and air transport; ongoing resource development; indigenous and northern communities as empowered actors especially outside Russia; a thickening web of global governance; and the capacity for 'flashpoints' and 'shocks' to challenge all three scenarios (eg a major environmental disaster, a disputed fishing incident, environmental action against oil infrastructure).

### Scenario 1 – Routed Arctic

In this scenario, Arctic 2045 is effectively a 'global Arctic' - an Arctic which is no longer considered exceptional by the wider global community who demand an ever greater say and access to the management of the region, and in particular anything pertaining to the Central Arctic Ocean (CAO) waters, international shipping straits, and pockets of the seabed which are part of 'The Area'.

There is high demand for resources such as new fishing grounds in the CAO and existing governance structures such as the Central Arctic Ocean regional fisheries organization struggle to manage the demands of extra-territorial parties such as China, Japan, Korea and the European Union. The Arctic Council has had to make further concessions to the 'observers' in order to maintain its position as the primary intergovernmental forum in the Arctic.

The Arctic becomes increasingly connected to the world-economy, new boom towns and regions emerge as investors locate data storage centres, tourism and shipping to thrive in what some are calling the 'New North'. Good communication and transport links are good predictors, however, of long-term sustainability let alone success.

### **Scenario 2 – Rooted Arctic**

Supported by their indigenous and northern communities, the Arctic Five and Arctic 8 are increasingly militant about their sovereign and security rights in the Arctic region. Having used a stewardship agenda in the past, they believe that extra-regional parties, including the UN, have not taken seriously enough their distinct interests despite the Arctic Council 'rules' demanding that they do so. They invest ever more in their armed forces and their coastguards, as well as investing in coastal infrastructures.

The most militant of all the players is Russia which for the last twenty years has demonstrated a willingness to launch 'surprise' patrols and harassment missions against those seeking to operate in and or close by to the 'Russian Arctic' which the Kremlin claim extends to the North Pole. Security measures are tight along the Northern Sea Route, which paradoxically encourages shipping companies to favour the Suez and Panama Canals. Canada meanwhile tries to capitalize on Russian intransigence and promotes the Northwest Passage as the new 'Silk Road' of the North, while at the same time eyeing China's intentions nervously.

The Arctic becomes more akin to the experiences of the Cold War, when militaries and militarization was the norm for much of the North American and Russian Arctic. In particular, the Arctic becomes a site of intense surveillance, particularly from space, while the use of UAVs and USVs also expands dramatically in and around major shipping lanes and fishing grounds. Disputes abound over whether these surveillance systems are for civilian or military purposes and how their use should be regulated. Meanwhile, the US restores its military presence on Iceland again and NATO and Russia no longer collaborate with one another in military let alone search and rescue operations (SAR). Links are good predictors, however, of long-term sustainability let alone success.

### **Scenario 3 – Wilderness Arctic**

Pressurized and incentivized by the global community, the Arctic Eight are at the forefront of demands that resource development is halted or severely restrained in the Arctic Ocean region. Oil and gas drilling and exploration is largely irrelevant because of low carbon transition and consumer hostility to companies that exploit the Arctic further. Plans by Greenland to become independent from Denmark are shelved as the country opts for sustainable forms of tourism and fishing. The Arctic Five agree to implement MPAs around the Central Arctic Ocean. With resource development off the table, Canada, Russia and Denmark settle their continental shelf claims amicably through following the recommendations of the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

The Arctic Council retains its traditional mandate of promoting science and environmental protection and the management of the CAO becomes a model of good maritime governance, and further measures are put in place to deter exploitation. If anything the parties agree that the drift towards promoting further economic exploitation of the Arctic (through old forums such as the Arctic Economic Council) was a mistake.

## Tensions and potential flashpoints

1. The role of Russia – does it become more assertive in the Arctic and by accident or design undermine the Arctic Council? And more generally the role of the Arctic 5 – do they decide to create their own Arctic Club, which then effectively undercuts the Arctic Council?
2. Does the existing legal climate, including UNCLOS, prove resilient as arguments rage over how to manage the CAO?
3. Discord in Eastern Europe, especially the Baltics – what consequences for relations in the Arctic? What would happen if Sweden and Finland join NATO?
4. What role does species invasion play in accelerating/encouraging EITHER conservation measures OR exploitation as new fishing potential is revealed by the migration of fish stocks?
5. The future state of the CAO – what happens if others decide to test military equipment, dump waste materials, exploit seabed resources in this region?
6. What might occur if China attempts to send a warship as ‘escort vessel’ through the North East or North West Passage in order to protect commercial shipping interests? Or uses militarized drones in order to enhance shipping fleet protection?
7. What might be the future status of Svalbard if it becomes populated with more and more surveillance infrastructure for monitoring civilian/military activity in the Arctic? And other parties decide that they want to join Norway and Russia in mining for coal (however economically unproductively) because they are determined to literally ‘ground’ their presence on an increasingly disputed archipelago?
8. What happens in the case of a major shipping/oil accident? Who is responsible, who is to blame? Would an accident ever be deliberately ‘staged’ in order for example for some parties to try and exclude others from the Arctic region or to justify further militarization and securitization?

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