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Resource Extraction, National Security

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The Geopolitical Implications of Arctic Melting



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Introduction: The Arctic's Rapid Transformation

With the Arctic sea ice melting much faster than ever before, the changes to the world's geopolitics are enormous and complex. Due to the process of climate change the Arctic region which for centuries was virtually untouched becomes an area of interest and activity international. The melting of ice creates new navigable sea ways for commercial imports, reveal unseen resources and new sporting line in territorial conflicts among members and non-members of the Arctic Council. In so doing, the changes not only disrupt states affairs within and between them but also require reconsideration of the concepts of national security and multilateral cooperation.

Emerging Shipping Routes and Trade Implications:

Probably the most significant general result of Arctic melting in terms of geopolitical implication is the creation of new shipping routes. While the NW Passage and the Northern Sea Route where frozen for most part of the year they are becoming more accessible. This shift poses considerable influence to the global trade because these routes can greatly reduce the distances that have to be covered between key market

economies in Europe, North America and Asia. These new routes are eagerly anticipated by shipping companies, which hope to use them to cut their transport costs and alter the fundamentals of international maritime transport. However, being added somewhat the maritime traffic the question appears concerning the impact on the ecology and the probability of accidents in the sensitive area. The UN and the states have to wonder about how the newly appearing shipping lines should be controlled and managed in terms of their proper sustainable usage that is possible only after the questions of sovereignty are put on the table.

Resource Extraction and Geopolitical Tensions:

The third major concern connected with melting of the Arctic has to do with the problem of resource extraction as a geopolitical question. The Arctic is estimated to contain large resources of oil, natural gas, and minerals which have been previously inaccessible due to ice. The nations such as Russia, Canada and United States are well aware of the opportunities regarding economic gain in the region and are already engaged in the exploitation of natural resources particularly oil and gas. It could also result in more agitation with the resources race specially the relations between Russia and any member of the west. Russia specifically Moscow has been quite forceful in its stance throughout the

Arctic region setting up military facilities and staging massive drills. This approach makes the U.S. and its allies uncomfortable and they may be forced to up their military force in the region in reaction. New conflict potential may rise in connection with territories containing valuable resources, thereby pump up the possibilities for a diplomatic intervention.

Territorial Claims and Conflict

Potential:

One is the question of territorial claims in the Arctic region which is rather connected to the issue. According to international law in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) there is a regulation on how countries can stake and control continental shelf. As more countries try to claim a broader area, there is always a high possibility of making conflicting claims. For example, when Russia started drilling the Lomonosov Ridge claiming that force was the sovereignty over it due to the fact that it runs all the way up to the North Pole, other nations of the Arctic reacted. The legal methods of addressing such conflicts are time-consuming and therefore may lead to heightened animosity during several years. Hence relationships and coordinated approaches like that of the Arctic council is important to minimize chances of the cooperation transitioning to armed conflict. None the less, nationalism in some countries poses challenges – governments balance domestic political concerns with the requirement of international cooperation.

Non-Arctic Nations' Involvement and Governance Challenges:

The melting of the Arctic also allows the non-Arctic nations in consequential actions in this formerly inaccessible continent. The Arctic states include countries like China, which is expanding drastically its research,

infrastructure and shipping footprints in the region. China also formally identified itself as a near Arctic state and has claimed it wishes to engage itself proactively in Arctic matters. This gets a lot of the Arctic states worried on sovereignty and control since non Arctic nations may have their own programs that would not necessarily benefit the parties with an interest in the region. The problem then is how to design a system of governance for Arctic and the non-Arctic states that would protect the environmental and cultural values of the Arctic region.

Environmental and Cultural Consequences:

Global climate change makes the Arctic environment deteriorate and poses additional challenges to the geopolitical situation. When the ice melts and ecosystems change indigenous peoples and sensitive environments are threatened. This effects is not only isolated to the Arctic; world climate is affected by changes occurring in the Arctic environment. Probably, there is a high need for countries of the world to work together on the fight against climate change through reduction of greenhouse gases as the two poles gradually melt leading to an increase in sea level and changes in weather conditions. If world leaders do not work together to solve climate change in the Arctic area, they may face other international political crisis due to the effects of region's environment that are beyond their national borders.

Reopening Multinational Cooperation in the Arctic:

However, these are the multiplicity of geopolitical significances are in the foreground of reopening of multinational cooperation in the Arctic circle. The previous experience has shown that countries can unite to resolve specific issues; for instance, the Arctic Council was

created in 1996. This cooperation is necessary not only for solutions to conflicts and dealing with development but also for the climate change discussion and its international consequences. The Arctic can provide a learning ground for new and experimental form of governance that stresses sustainability and seeks to reconcile nation-state interests.

Conclusion: A New Foreign Policy

Era:

Finally, the politico-security consequences of the Arctic Ice Cap melting are consistent with the trend that characterizes our historical epoch – environmental changes driving changes in the distribution of power and the strategies of nations. While competition for resources will inevitably

influence the Arctic future these two models indicate that cooperation is also possible. The creation of an environmental oval for Arctic nations and the commitment to discussing it among nations: the more the world faces new problems of a melting Arctic, the more states need to switch to sustainable development practices. Although such resources and opportunity of new trading routes may encourage countries to behave selfishly, the sustainability and prosperity of the Arctic region, let alone, its importance to the whole world, can only be achieved through multinational cooperation which overcomes the egoistic tendencies of particular states. We cannot think of melting Arctic as a sign of climate change alone but as a platform for a new foreign policy era – one that will need vision, negotiation, and ownership.