PERRY CENTER OCCASIONAL PAPER

MARCH 2021

Real and Imaginary Issues: Governance of the Arctic and the Antarctic

Andrés Borjas and Dr. Fabiana Sofía Perera

WILLIAM J. PERRY CENTER
FOR HEMISPHERIC DEFENSE STUDIES
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Cover Caption: China has recently built two powerful icebreaker the Xue Long and the Xue Long 2, as part of an effort to expand the country's presence in Arctic and Antarctic waters.
Credit: CGTN News.

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Editor-in-Chief: Pat Paterson
Layout Design: Viviana Edwards

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The Arctic might be the one place in the world where the real and imaginary boundaries of the West and its challengers meet. Unlike at the southern pole, the Arctic is a region that has been inhabited for thousands of years and one in which the West and its challengers border each other. The countries that lay claim to the Arctic face each other in a contentious situation that creates challenges to broad multilateral governance. By contrast, in the Antarctic, a region that has no permanent population, multilateralism has flourished as a way of governance. This lack of a permanent Antarctic identity coupled with expansive multilateralism has enabled challengers to the West with no direct connection to the region - China in particular - to gain a foothold there despite geographical distance and lack of historical ties.

This paper first focuses on the development of the Arctic Council, the region's most important multilateral forum and covers how claimant states in the High North - despite successes in some areas - struggled to address the questions of regional identity and more substantive issues such as security cooperation. A revanchist Russia in the 21st century threatens states attempting to address issues of Arctic security through smaller multilateral fora. In these cases, the problem of Arctic identity often serves as the keystone that would make or break cooperation. The paper then engages with the issue of non-Arctic states aspiring for a foothold in the region by explaining the development of the membership hierarchy and most importantly the weaponization of Arctic identity in this process to exclude powerful aspirants, particularly China, from becoming a legitimate regional actor. China's actions in the Arctic are then explored further, illustrating Beijing's deep engagement with the region and its frustrations with the problems that Arctic identity poses for its goals. Lastly, the system of Antarctic governance is explained and compared to the politics of the Arctic that also has implications for China's rise in the polar regions.

Credit: U.S. Department of State.

Defining the Arctic and Antarctic

The Arctic comprises territory from eight states surrounded by a mostly frozen ocean. In this northernmost part of the world defining boundaries is complicated by the shifting nature of the landscape and the intersecting and overlapping multilateral regimes that govern the space. Most commonly the Arctic is defined as the region that lies north of the Arctic circle (66° 33' N) though there are other definitions. In the United States (U.S.), the Arctic is "all United States and foreign territory north of the Arctic Circle." Similar definitions are also proposed by other Arctic states.[1]

Due in part to their remoteness, the polar regions - the Arctic and the Antarctic - have seldom weighed heavily on global consciousness compared to traditional security issues that dominate the discourse in the U.N. General Assembly, the one institution supposed to be a bulwark against anarchy in the international system. Nevertheless, their place outside the center of attention is a testament to the success of the regional and international frameworks that have governed these regions. In the challeng-

[1] National Science Foundation, "Arctic Policy and Research Act of 1984 (amended 1990)," 1984, https://www.nsf.gov/geo/opp/arctic/iarpc/arc_res_pol_act.jsp#112.

ing political and natural environment of the Arctic, fora for collaboration such as the Arctic Council have featured prominently and successfully created frameworks for environmental regulation, energy exploitation, and maritime crisis management.

Similarly, collective action has dominated Antarctic governance. The 1959 Treaty of the Antarctic and the subsequent Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) have successfully worked as tools for preserving the Antarctic's security and environmental stability and insured the continent and its waters remain primarily a "scientific preserve" used "exclusively for peaceful purposes."[2]

Caption: The Antarctic Treaty was signed on December 1, 1959 by twelve countries and the first meeting was held on July 1, 1961 in New Zealand (shown here).
Credit: Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC).

The ATS defines the Antarctic as the territory south of 60°. Below this line no country has territorial claims. North of it, Australia, Norway, and the United Kingdom have territorial claims through the Heard and McDonald Islands, Bouvet Island, and South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands respectively. Climate change, coupled with an increasingly contentious global environment, presents novel challenges for the governance of the Arctic and the Antarctic. Both regions currently experience ex-

[2] Heather Conley, Terry Toland, Jamie Krout, *A New Security Architecture for the Arctic: An American Perspective* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2012), 13.

treme environmental costs of climate change and are warming two to three times faster than the rest of the world.[3]

Moreover, the return of great power competition as a driving force in international relations has implications for the Arctic and Antarctic security. The rapidly evolving Russia-China-U.S. dynamic threatens to awaken frozen conflicts and will impose added stressors on the capable yet fragile multilateral frameworks of each region.[4] In the current moment of heightened and growing risk, it is imperative to understand how the Arctic and Antarctic systems have historically preserved security and protected the poles from broader global conflict. Furthermore, upon closer look, it becomes apparent that, despite the similar challenges faced by both the polar regions, there are key differences in each of their governance structures. As such, what are the factors that have shaped their diverging paths? What lessons can the multilateral systems in the Arctic and Antarctic learn from each other in order to become more robust structures better suited to preserving polar security in the face of developing threats?

From the development of governance models in the polar regions, it is clear that the Arctic and Antarctic are heading down diverging paths. In the High North, it is apparent that an "Arctic identity" enabled by a natural set of territorial claims and exacerbated by the current context of contentious great power relations has been a significant obstacle to broad multilateral governance in the region. By contrast, the lack of "Antarctic identity" has allowed multilateralism to enjoy primacy in the management of the Antarctic, a situation that enabled non-Antarctic countries - China in particular - to gain a foothold in the region despite geographical distance and lack of any territorial claim.

The Arctic as an idea has been integrated into the national identity of the states that border the region. In the U.S., Alaska's annexation was tied to the expansionistic romanticism of Manifest Destiny and the northernmost state is still considered to be the country's "last frontier."[5]

For Canada, its Arctic identity is part of the nation's "core myth" that serves to distinguish its sovereignty from the United States.[6] In Russia, historical and geographical claims have been used to present the country as an "Arctic Great Power," an identity that emphasizes its "uniqueness" with re-

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[3] Kendra Pierre-Louis, "Antarctica Is Melting Three Times as Fast as a Decade Ago," *New York Times*, June 13, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/13/climate/antarctica-ice-melting-faster.html; Eric Niiler, "The Arctic Is Warming Much Faster Than the Rest of Earth," Wired, December 4, 2019, https://www.wired.com/story/the-arctic-is-warming-much-faster-than-the-rest-of-earth/.

[4] Abhishek Saxena, "The Return of Great Power Competition to the Arctic," The Arctic Institute, October 22, 2019, https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/return-great-power-competition-arctic/.

[5] William L. Iggiagruk Hensley, "Before Trump eyed Greenland: Here's what happened last time the US bought a large chunk of the Arctic," The Conversation, August 17, 2019, https://theconversation.com/before-trump-eyed-greenland-heres-what-happened-last-time-the-us-bought-a-large-chunk-of-the-arctic-122010; Carey Goldberg, "Alaska Revels in Frontier Image Though Frontier Slips Away," The New York Times, August 14, 1997, https://www.nytimes.com/1997/08/14/us/alaska-revels-in-frontier-image-though-frontier-slips-away.html; Haycox, Stephen. "Truth and Expectation: Myth in Alaska History," Northern Review 1, no. 6 (2012): 65-68.
https://thenorthernreview.ca/index.php/nr/article/view/397/390 .

[6] Williams, Lisa. "Canada, the Arctic, and Post-National Identity in the Circumpolar World." *Northern Review*; No 33 (2011): 116. https://thenorthernreview.ca/index.php/nr/article/view/186.

spect to the Arctic.[7] Notwithstanding these national claims, the Arctic remains the traditional homeland for a diverse array of indigenous communities whose social, political, and economic well-being is tied more directly to the well-being of the High North.[8] Arctic identity, like other notions of political identity throughout history, has the capacity to develop a feeling of common cause, or be weaponized to breed division. Throughout the various regional groupings aimed at addressing Arctic issues, these dueling natures of Arctic identity have played prominent roles.

Caption: Russia has recently increased its footprint in the Arctic to include this massive oil rig, the Prirazlomnaya.
Credit: Russia Trek blog.

Membership and Multilateral Governance Norms in Arctic Region

The Arctic Council is the primary forum for governance and cooperation in the Arctic.[9] Founded in 1996, the Council is currently composed of eight member states as well as thirteen observer states and

[7] Khrushcheva, Olga, and Marianna Poberezhskaya. "The Arctic in the Political Discourse of Russian Leaders: The National Pride and Economic Ambitions." *East European Politics* 32, no. 4 (October 1, 2016): 548-549. https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2016.1231669.

[8] Duane Smith, "Climate Change in The Arctic: An Inuit Reality," *UN Chronicle*, May 25, 2007, https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/climate-change-arctic-inuit-reality.

[9] Koivurova, Timo. "Limits and Possibilities of the Arctic Council in a Rapidly Changing Scene of Arctic Governance." Polar Record 46, no. 2 (2010): 146. doi:10.1017/S0032247409008365.

six Indigenous communities.[10] Despite the necessity for multinational cooperation that the region's harsh environment has always incentivized, the decision to opt for multilateralism has enjoyed notoriously low levels of political will historically. During the Cold War, the Arctic was dominated by great power strategic priorities since the region represented the shortest route between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and as such was the preferred route for ICBM delivery in the case of a nuclear exchange.[11] By 1991, the easing of Cold War tensions led to the creation of the Council's predecessor, the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS).[12] The AEPS was a product of the Murmansk Initiative, a Soviet Union diplomatic project aimed at creating a "zone of peace" removed from strategic military planning and instead the focus of environmental matters.[13] The AEPS fit the latter goal of the Initiative with its core mission strictly limited to providing policy recommendations and technical assistance on environmental matters and sustainable development. Despite the success in making multilateralism a key issue, there were important shortcomings in the organizations. Most notably, the AEPS failed to clearly define the boundaries of the Arctic Region. When it was succeeded in 1996 by the Arctic Council, the organization remained a relatively powerless consultative instrument that explicitly excluded military matters and security concerns from its prerogative.[14] It also continued to operate on a vague definition of the Arctic, as three of the six Council Working Groups continue to maintain their own differing definitions of the Arctic.[15] Modifications to membership, however, were significant. Indigenous groups which could represent "either one people living in many Arctic states or many indigenous peoples living in one state" now held the status of "Permanent Participants" creating a newfound "need to fully consult before consensus decision making."[16]

Arctic Defense Forums

Outside the environmental and development focus of the Arctic Council, however, Arctic countries have pursued military measures towards the High North through multilateral forums that *do* have a security mandate. Table 1 summarizes participation in these fora and shows the extent to which membership overlaps with membership in the Arctic Council.

For these groups, interest in Arctic security is mainly derived from the onset of Russian revanchism. In recent years, Moscow has engaged militarily in the region at levels not seen since the Cold

[10] Buixadé Farré, Albert, Scott R. Stephenson, Linling Chen, Michael Czub, Ying Dai, Denis Demchev, Yaroslav Efimov, et al. 2014. "Commercial Arctic Shipping through the Northeast Passage: Routes, Resources, Governance, Technology, and Infrastructure." *Polar Geography* 37 (4): 306 https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937X.2014.965769.

[11] Jon Bowermaster, "The Last Front of the Cold War," *The Atlantic,* November 1993 https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/politics/foreign/front.htm; Koivurova, "Limits and Possibilities," *Polar Record* (2010): 3.

[12] Koivurova, "Limits and Possibilities," *Polar Record* (2010): 2-4.

[13] Åtland, Kristian. "Mikhail Gorbachev, the Murmansk Initiative, and the Desecuritization of Interstate Relations in the Arctic." Cooperation and Conflict 43, no. 3 (2008): 290 https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836708092838.

[14] Arctic Council, "Ottawa Declaration (1996)", available at: https://oaarchive.arctic- council.org/handle/11374/85.

[15] "Definitions of the Arctic Region," Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, January 23, 2020, https://www.arcticcentre.org/EN/arcticregion/Maps/definitions.

[16] Koivurova, Timo. "Limits and Possibilities of the Arctic Council in a Rapidly Changing Scene of Arctic Governance." Polar Record 46, no. 2 (2010): 148. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247409008365.

Caption: Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) pose for a photo in front of the headquarters in Mons, Belgium during a light snowstorm.
Credit: NATO.

War, leading mistrustful governments in the U.S., Canada, and Western Europe to organize in a reactionary manner to Russian movements.

NATO: Canada, Demark, Iceland, Norway, and the U.S. are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).[17] These states have used this forum to raise concern over Russia's military build-up in the Arctic since 2008 - particularly in light of large-scale readiness exercises since 2015, as well as acts of Russian "aggression" in Eastern Europe and around the world.[18] The alliance has responded to threats in the High North most recently with the 2018 Trident Juncture joint exercises in Norway, which were "NATO's largest exercise in nearly twenty years."[19]

Still, the drawbacks to a NATO-centered Arctic defense posture are significant and very entangled to the question of what is an Arctic state and what is not. Finland and Sweden's abstention from NATO due to long-held policies of non-alignment removes key sources of legitimacy for the alliance's

[17] "Member Countries," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, September 24, 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_52044.htm.
[18] Gerald Connolly, *NATO and Security in the Arctic* (Brussels: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2017) https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2017-nato-and-security-arctic-connolly-report-172-pctr-17-e-rev1-fin.
[19] Jonathan Masters, "NATO's Trident Juncture Exercises: What to Know," *Council on Foreign Relations,* October 23, 2018, https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/natos-trident-juncture-exercises-what-know.

involvement.[20] Furthermore, voices from the Finnish defense establishment have stated that "international affairs in the High North should primarily be the responsibility of the Arctic countries."[21] Lack of consensus from NATO has also been a problem. Canada has actively opposed the multilateralization of Arctic defense issues, strongly emphasizing "Canada's enduring sovereignty over its Arctic" in its 2016 Arctic Policy and Defense Framework, but only including some references to bilateral security cooperation and no mention of NATO.[22] In light of these drawbacks, smaller, more regional, security forums with more solid legitimacy footings have also developed a security policy in response to rising Arctic challenges.

NORDEFCO: The Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFCO) was created in 2009 as a merger of various separate collaboration projects between Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden - all five of the Nordic countries with Arctic claims.[23] NORDEFCO became the most successful iteration of the concept of a Scandinavian Defense Union, an institution long-believed to be necessary to protect the region from the insecurities it endured during World War II and the Cold War.[24] Moreover, the key role that military integration has played in regional identity, particularly in the history of Pan-Scandinavia, allowed simpler path towards security cooperation in the Arctic.[25] This pooling of resources has been characterized as a "smart defense" approach in reaction to the redeployment of Russian military assets into bases in the High North.[26] NORDEFCO has facilitated the integration of military education, armaments cooperation, and multilateral training exercises between the Nordic militaries, and the number of joint projects and responsibilities continues to expand.[27] The bloc fundamentally enhanced Nordic willingness for "cross border training" and has become the "core" for the development of high-level international exercises.[28] NORDEFCO's marquee contribution to Arctic security has been the biennial organizing of the Arctic Challenge Exercise (ACE).[29] ACE has become "one of the major air

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[20] Matti Pesu, *What Non-Alignment: Finland's Security and Defense Policy Stems from Partnerships* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2017), https://www.fiia.fi/wpcontent/uploads/2017/11/bp227_what_nonalignment.pdf; Felix Chang, "Sweden's Foreign Policy: Nonaligned, But Not Entirely Neutral," *Foreign Policy Research Institute,* November 2, 2017 https://www.fpri.org/2017/11/swedens-foreign-policy-nonaligned-not-entirely-neutral/ .

[21] Joshua Tallis, "NATO is the right forum for security dialogue in the High North," *DefenseNews,* July 28, 2020 https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/07/28/nato-is-the-right-forum-for-security-dialogue-in-the-high-north/ .

[22] "Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework," *Government of Canada,* November 18, 2019, https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1560523306861/1560523330587#s1; David Auerswald, "NATO in the Arctic: Keep the Role Limited, For Now," *War on the Rocks,* https://warontherocks.com/2020/10/nato-in-the-arctic-keep-its-role-limited-for-now/ .

[23] Pauli Järvenpää, *NORDEFCO: Love in a Cold Climate?* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defense and Security, 2017) https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2017/ICDS_Analysis-NORDEFCO-Pauli_Jarvenpaa-April_2017.pdf

[24] Olesen, Mikkel Runge. "To Balance or Not to Balance: How Denmark Almost Stayed out of NATO, 1948–1949." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 20, no. 2 (June 1, 2018): 64. https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_a_00818.

[25] Olesen, "To Balance," *Journal of Cold War Studies* (2018): 67.

[26] Dahl, Ann-Sofie. "NORDEFCO and NATO:" *NATO Defense College* (2014), http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10416.

[27] Pauli Järvenpää, *NORDEFCO: Love in a Cold Climate?* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defense and Security, 2017) https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2017/ICDS_Analysis-NORDEFCO-Pauli_Jarvenpaa-April_2017.pdf.

[28] "Arctic Challenge Exercise 2019," *Swedish Armed Forces,* 2019, https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/activities/exercises/arctic-challenge-exercise-2019/ .

[29] Ibid.

Caption: The bilateral command headquarters of The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colorado.
Credit: U.S. Department of Defense (DOD).

exercises in Europe" bringing together over 100 warplanes from the U.S., U.K., France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the Nordic states.[30]

NORAD: The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) has been an important bilateral option for the U.S. and Canada to cooperate on Arctic military matters. Since its founding in 1957, NORAD's primary mission has been the joint development of radar lines and air patrols aimed at providing effective early warning of imminent conventional and nuclear threats emerging from the Soviet Arctic.[31] With the end of the Cold War, NORAD's mission adjusted to meet the changing needs of North American security and since 2001 the Command has adapted to the terrorist threat by focusing on anti-hijacking operations in air and maritime domains.[32] Nevertheless, in North America as in Europe, renewed threats from Russia and China in the Arctic has spurred growing interest in the traditional missions of frontier control and early warning. NORAD's more limited mission and geographical reach has made it a more useful instrument for Ottawa to advance its "internally oriented" Arctic goal

[30] Ibid, Lt. Col. Jim St. Clair, "169th FW wrap up Arctic Challenge exercise in Sweden," *US Air Force*, Link: https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1870898/169th-fw-wrap-up-arctic-challenge-exercise-in-sweden/.
[31] Charron, Andrea. "Canada, the Arctic, and NORAD: Status Quo or New Ball Game?" *International Journal* 70, no. 2 (2015): 217. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24709458.
[32] Charron, "Canada, the Arctic," *International Journal* (2015): 218-220.

of "exercising sovereignty over Canada's North."[33] And in the face of increasing regional contentiousness both of North America's Arctic states have worked to ensure "that NORAD is modernized to meet existing and future challenges."[34] The upgrading of the North Warning System (NWS) - a chain of forty seven long and short radar installations stretching nearly 3,000 miles from Newfoundland and Labrador to Alaska - has become a joint priority, and NORAD plans to award new contracts for this project in the mid-2020s.[35] With upgrades, the NWS will be able to detect new threats in the Arctic - from the deployment of next generation cruise missiles, to new rounds of ballistic projectile testing by Russia - that the system is currently not equipped to handle.[36] Still, the omission of the NWS project on Canada's 20-year Defense Investment Plan has signaled concerns from Ottawa regarding Canadian loss of Arctic sovereignty.[37] A so-called "policy of silence" now threatens to slow down progress on the NWS front.[38]

[33] Government of Canada, *Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy Government of Canada.* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2009) *https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/arctic-arctique/arctic_policy-canada-politique_arctique.aspx?lang=eng*

[34] Wegge, Njord. "Arctic Security Strategies and the North Atlantic States". Arctic Review 11 (2020): 369. https://doi.org/10.23865/arctic.v11.2401.

[35] Vivienne Machi, "United States, Canada Studying Options to Replace Arctic Early Warning Radars," *National Defense*, July 27, 2018, https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2018/7/27/united-states-canada-studying-options-to-replace-arctic-early-warning-radars.

[36] Ernie Regehr, *Replacing the North Warning System: Strategic competition or Arctic confidence building?* (Vancouver: The Simons Foundation, 2018), Link: https://www.thesimonsfoundation.ca/highlights/replacing-north-warning-system-strategic-competition-or-arctic-confidence-building.

[37] Department of National Defense, *Defense Investment Plan 2018,* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2018) https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/reports/2018/defence-investment-plan-eng.pdf; Jim Bell, "Defense expert slams Ottawa for ignoring North Warning System upgrade," *Arctic Today,* January 21, 2020 https://www.arctictoday.com/defense-expert-slams-ottawa-for-ignoring-north-warning-system-upgrade/.

[38] Jim Bell, "Defense expert slams Ottawa for ignoring North Warning System upgrade," *Arctic Today,* January 21, 2020 https://www.arctictoday.com/defense-expert-slams-ottawa-for-ignoring-north-warning-system-upgrade/.

Table 1: Overlapping forums for Arctic security

Country	Arctic State?	Arctic Council Status	NATO Status	NORDEFCO Status	NORAD Status
Canada	Yes	Member	Member		Member
China	No	Observer			
Denmark	Yes	Member	Member	Member	
Finland	Yes	Member		Member	
France	No	Observer	Member		
Germany	No	Observer	Member		
Iceland	Yes	Member	Member	Member	
India	No	Observer			
Italy	No	Observer			
Japan	No	Observer			
Korea (ROK)	No	Observer			
Netherlands	No	Observer	Member		
Norway	Yes	Member	Member	Member	
Poland	No	Observer	Member		
Russian Federation	Yes	Member			
Singapore	No	Observer			
Spain	No	Observer	Member		
Sweden	Yes	Member		Member	
Switzerland	No	Observer			
United Kingdom	No	Observer	Member		
United States	Yes	Member	Member		Member

The Power of Definition in Managing Arctic Contentiousness

The examples above demonstrate that even as security cooperation in the Arctic becomes increasingly important, variations in visions for the region matter and can serve as powerful roadblock or catalysts for multinational development. So far, the Arctic Council is the only forum around which all Arctic states have successfully coalesced. Despite its limited scope, the Arctic Council is still designed to be a "high level forum" requiring the attention of top officials from member countries.[39] As such, it works as a socializing mechanism by which "to strengthen trust and mutual understanding between Arctic neighbors on the political platform."[40] The *de facto* norm-making power of the Arctic Council cannot be ignored and has played a prominent role in defining who is Arctic and who is not as the issue has become more contentious. The Council has been careful to never exclude any of the eight member

[39] Arctic Council, "Ottawa Declaration," 1996, https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/85.

[40] Buixadé Farré, Albert, Scott R. Stephenson, Linling Chen, Michael Czub, Ying Dai, Denis Demchev, Yaroslav Efimov, et al. "Commercial Arctic Shipping through the Northeast Passage: Routes, Resources, Governance, Technology, and Infrastructure." *Polar Geography* 37, no. 4 (October 2, 2014): 306 https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937X.2014.965769.

states and has taken discreet steps to block the political inclusion of any outside powers. At the 7th Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in 2011, the member states acted in unison to exclude outsider would-be Arctic powers by clarifying the requirements for observer status to include that candidate states "recognize Arctic States' sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction in the Arctic."[41] This move came as a response to applications submitted by "powerful players" - namely China - for observer status.[42]

Arctic states with territorial claims have a clear incentive to hold a tight grip on the region. Cli-

Caption: The Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in 2019 was held in Rovaniemi, Finland.
Credit: High North News and photographer Siri G. Tømmerbakke.

mate change and a warming Arctic are unlocking potentially game-changing economic benefits. The receding permanent ice sheets are creating a northern passage between Asia and Europe that has the possibility of becoming a major maritime lane. Moreover, due to the shrinking permafrost, the prospects of exploiting the estimated 90 billion barrels of undiscovered oil and 44 billion barrels of natural gas - considered "a fifth of the world's yet to-be-discovered oil and natural gas reserves" - are becoming all the more probable.[43] Russia, with a vast Arctic coastline and a history of industrialization in the region,

[41] Farre et al, "Commercial Arctic Shipping," *Polar Geography* (2014): 305.

[42] Graczyk, Piotr, and, and Timo Koivurova. "A New Era in the Arctic Council's External Relations? Broader Consequences of the Nuuk Observer Rules for Arctic Governance." Polar Record 50 (October 13, 2012): 4 https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247412000824.

[43] Jessica Robertson, "90 Billion Barrels of Oil and 1,670 Trillion Cubic Feet of Natural Gas Assessed in the Arctic," *US Geological Survey,* July 22, 2008. https://www.usgs.gov/media/audio/90-billion-barrels-oil-and-1670-trillion-cubic-feet-natural-gas-assessed-arctic ; Jad Mouawad, "Oil Survey Says Arctic Has Riches," *New York Times,* July 24, 2008, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/24/business/24arctic.html .

is hoping these developments will serve as a lifeline for the country's faltering economy.[44] For its part, China - a resource-hungry emerging power with prospects for economic growth largely tied to its commercial relations with wealthy western nations - also has a unique interest in gaining access to the Arctic and exploiting the region's resources.

China and the Arctic

At the 2013 ministerial, China was granted observer status in the Arctic Council after Beijing publicly "accept[ed] Arctic states' sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction in the Arctic region and their leading role in the council."[45] Despite the council's limited governance role and the fractious relationship between its members, the notable sidelining of China and other major states as non-voting observers demonstrated a consensus that Arctic issues should be "sorted out by as few interested players as possible, while keeping the rest of the world at a distance."[46] This arrangement, however, has not gone uncontested.

Despite almost 2,000 miles of separation between Beijing and the Arctic circle, since 2006 the High North has been frequently mentioned in Chinese strategy papers and conversely in 2018 China has released an Arctic strategy.[47] That same year, China unveiled its plans for a "Polar Silk Road" which emphasized the country's need to exploit the region as a major sea lane and as a source of hydrocarbons. Northern trade routes have the potential to cut shipping times from Chinese ports to European shores by 10 days all the while bypassing the geopolitically tense and pirate infested waters of the South China Sea, the Straits of Malacca, and the Red Sea.[48] Meanwhile, the promise of abundant and exploitable oil has led some Chinese observers to emphatically regard the region as the "new Middle East."[49]

Chinese ambitions have materialized through demonstrations of operational capacity and attempts at buying its way into the Arctic. Chinese companies have invested heavily in Iceland and Greenland attempting to acquire critical infrastructure such as airports, mines, and ports - including a defunct U.S.

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[44] Kathrin Hille, "Russia's Arctic Obsession," *Financial Times,* October 21, 2016, https://ig.ft.com/russian-arctic/; Pincus, Rebecca. "Three-Way Power Dynamics in the Arctic." Strategic Studies Quarterly 14, no. 1 (2020): 47. doi:10.2307/26891883.

[45] Stephen Chen, "Landmark decision sees China join Arctic Council as an observer," *South China Morning Post,* May 19, 2013 https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1240869/landmark-decision-sees-china-join-arctic-council-observer .

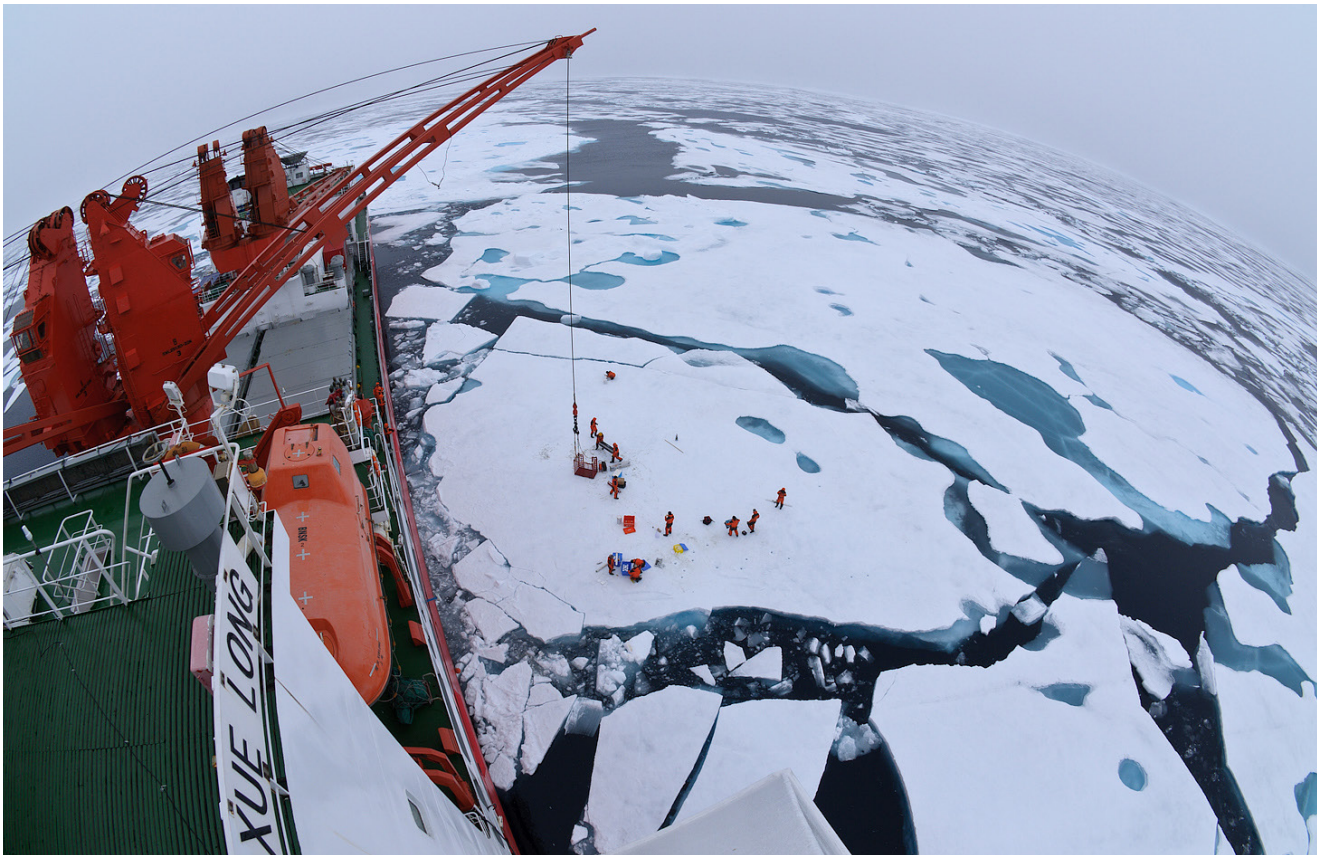
[46] Lackenbauer, P. Whitney, Adam Lajeunesse, James Manicom, and Frédéric Lasserre. *China's Arctic Ambitions and What They Mean for Canada. 1st* ed. University of Calgary Press, 2018. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvf3w20h.

[47] Marisa Lino, "Understanding China's Arctic Activities," *International Institute for Strategic Studies,* February 25, 2020, https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2020/02/china-arctic#:~:text=China%20published%20its%20own%20Arctic,Polar%20Silk%20Road'%20economic%20plan.&text=Designing%20and%20building%20polar%2Dcapable,the%20thirteenth%20Five%2DYear%20Plan.

[48] Jane Nakano and William Li, China Launches Polar Silk Road, *Center for Strategic and International Studies,* February 18, 2018, https://www.csis.org/analysis/china-launches-polar-silk-road; Woon, Chih Yuan. "Framing the 'Polar Silk Road': Critical Geopolitics, Chinese Scholars and the (Re)Positionings of China's Arctic Interests." *Political Geography* 78 (2020): 5. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102141.; Heljar Havnes and Johan Martin Seland, "The Increasing Security Focus in China's Arctic Policy," *The Arctic Institute,* July 16, 2019, https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/increasing-security-focus-china-arctic-policy/; Blake Hounshell, "Pompeo aims to counter China's ambitions in the Arctic ," *Politico,* May 6, 2019. https://www.politico.com/story/2019/05/06/pompeo-arctic-china-russia-1302649.

[49] Woon, Chih Yuan. "Framing the 'Polar Silk Road,'" *Polar Geography* (2020): 5.

naval base - in order to carve a stake north of the Arctic Circle.[50] At home, China is in the process of developing a modern icebreaker fleet. One of its ships, the *Xue Long,* became the first Chinese ice-breaker to complete an Arctic voyage from Asia to Europe.[51] In 2019, China received the first drops of Arctic oil with the completion of the "Power of Siberia" pipeline that connected Russian Siberian oil fields with China's northeast.[52] The pipeline, part of a US$400 billion investment, was a major step at energy diversification and the guaranteeing of energy security for Beijing to say nothing of it being another major claim in the region.[53] Most strikingly, China has also become a major player in scientific research. Since 2006, its Arctic research output has increased by 260 percent, "by far the nation with the



Caption: Crew members of the Chinese icebreaker Xue Long set up a drift camp on the Arctic ice during a voyage near the North Pole.
Credit: Timo Palo.

[50] Blake Hounshell, "Pompeo aims to counter China's ambitions in the Arctic," *Politico,* May 6, 2019 https://www.politico.com/story/2019/05/06/pompeo-arctic-china-russia-1302649.

[51] Trude Pettersen, "Chinese icebreaker bound for North Pole," *Barents Observer,* August 23, 2012, https://barentsobserver.com/en/arctic/chinese-icebreaker-bound-north-pole-23-08; Jane Nakano and William Li, China Launches Polar Silk Road, *Center for Strategic and International Studies,* February 18, 2018, https://www.csis.org/analysis/china-launches-polar-silk-road .

[52] Grace Shao, "Russia opens Siberian pipeline to China as Beijing expands its influence in the Arctic," *CNBC,* December 3, 2019, https://www.cnbc.com/2019/12/04/siberian-pipeline-from-russia-to-china-polar-silk-road.html.

[53] Olga Tanas, Anna Shiryaevskaya, and Dan Murtaugh, "How Russia-China Gas Pipeline Changes Energy Calculus," *Bloomberg*, November 24, 2019, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-11-25/how-russia-china-gas-pipeline-changes-energy-calculus-quicktake

highest relative growth," and the 7th ranking research-producing nation.[54]

Altogether, these efforts have bolstered China's claim as a "near-Arctic" power. Yet, much to Beijing's frustration, Arctic identity and the politics of definition have proven to be significant challenges that cannot be invested away. The states of the Arctic Council have been skeptical of providing a non-Arctic state a bigger voice in the region. The U.S. and its allies have warned of the "dual purpose" nature of China's infrastructure and scientific investments and have used the Arctic Council as a bully pulpit aimed at limiting Beijing's diplomatic sway in the region.[55] U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo did just that at the 2019 Arctic Council Ministerial, during which the Arctic identity was weaponized against Chinese interests: "There are Arctic states, and non-Arctic states. No third category exists. China claiming otherwise entitles them to exactly nothing."[56] This limited role in Arctic norm-making is not simply inconvenient, but also hugely frustrating, particularly in the context that on the opposite side of the planet, investment and interest have granted Beijing a leading role in the governance structure of the Antarctic Treaty System.

The Antarctic Treaty System: An Alternative a World Away

While the Cold War resulted in the militarization of the Arctic, in the South Pole nations worked to prevent the region from following the same path. With this goal, 12 countries (Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States) signed the Antarctic Treaty in 1959, which declared the region "a scientific preserve in which signatories had full freedom for scientific investigation."[57] The treaty further states "that it is in the interest of all mankind that Antarctic shall continue forever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and shall not become the scene or object of international discord."[58] The Antarctic Treaty and the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) it created successfully prevented the South Pole from becoming another Cold War front most notably by barring testing and deployment of nuclear weapons in the strategically fruitful ice deserts of the Antarctic landmass.[59] Post-Cold War, the ATS has remained

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[54] Dag Aksnes, Igor Osipov, Olga Moskaleva, and Lars Kullerud, "Arctic Research Publication Trends: A Pilot Study," University of the Arctic, Rovaniemi, Finland (2016): 14. https://www.elsevier.com/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/204353/Arctic-Research-Publication-Trends-August-2016.pdf

[55] Alex Fang, "US rejects China's 'near-Arctic state' claim in new cold war," *Nikkei Asia,* April 24, 2020 https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/US-rejects-China-s-near-Arctic-state-claim-in-new-cold-war; Swee Lean Collin Koh, "China's strategic interest in the Arctic goes beyond economics," *DefenseNews,* May 12, 2020, https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/05/11/chinas-strategic-interest-in-the-arctic-goes-beyond-economics/.

[56] Eilís Quinn, "U.S. stuns audience by tongue-lashing China, Russia on eve of Arctic Council ministerial," *Barents Observer,* May 6, 2019, https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2019/05/us-stuns-audience-tongue-lashing-china-russia-eve-arctic-council-ministerial .

[57] Heather Conley, Terry Toland, Jamie Krout, *A New Security Architecture for the Arctic: An American Perspective* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2012), 13.

[58] Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty, "The Antarctic Treaty," 1959, https://www.ats.aq/e/antarctictreaty.html https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/usmu013.asp .

[59] "Nuclear Weapon Free Zones and Denuclearization," Atomic Heritage Foundation, April 7, 2017 https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/nuclear-weapon-free-zones-and-denuclearization#:~:text=Other%20Denuclearization%20Treaties&text=It%20went%20into%20effect%20on,of%20radioactive%20waste%20in%20Antarctica.

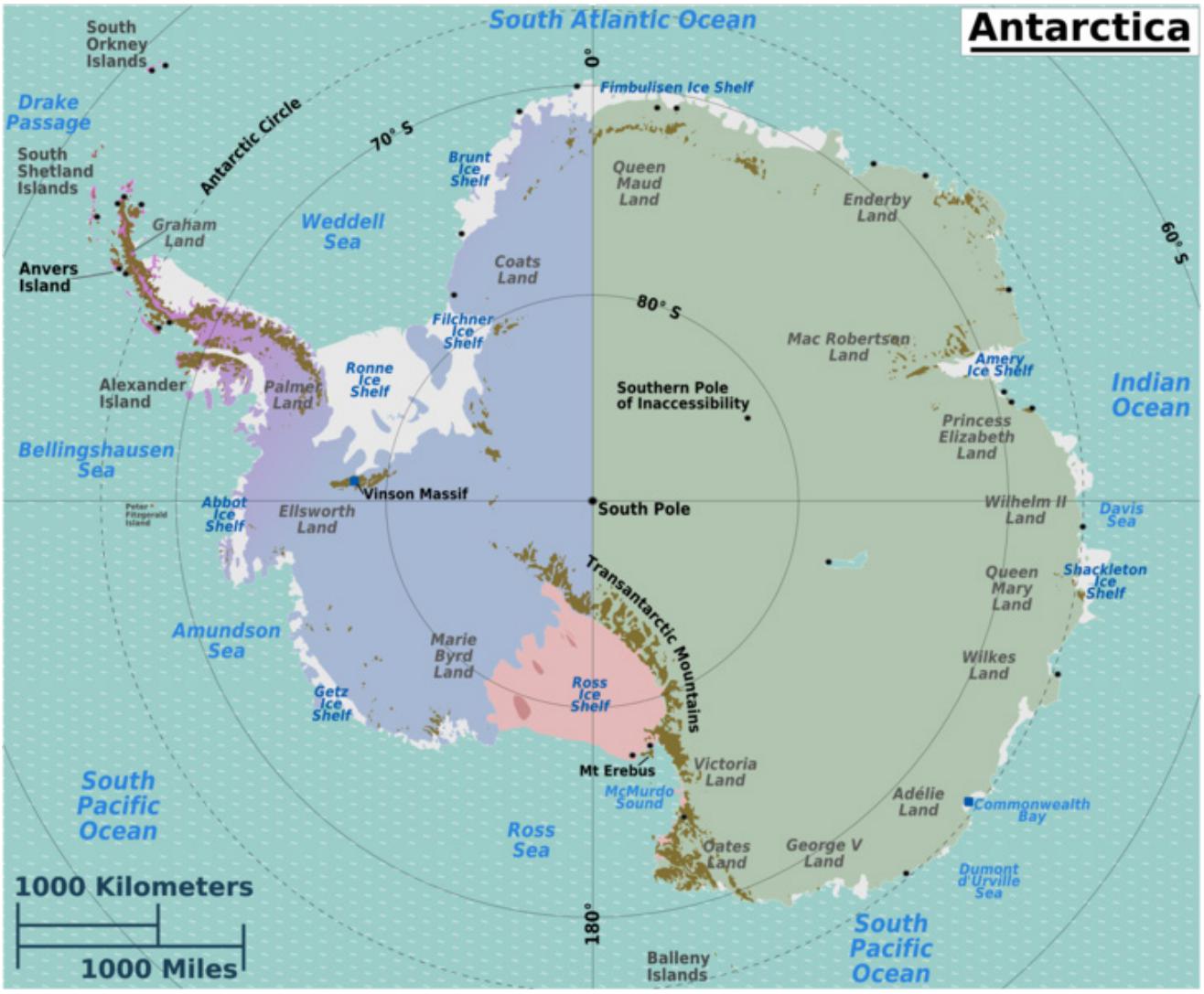
committed to Antarctic environmental, scientific, and economic concerns. And even as interest has grown in exploring and developing the region - from unearthing answers regarding climate change that lay below Antarctic ice to developing the highly productive fisheries in the littoral seas for commercial consumption - multilateral governance has remained intact.[60] Unlike the discretionary politics that has been employed in the Arctic, voting membership in the ATS is open to all countries in the world, the only caveat being a requirement that states must engage in "significant research activities" in order to fully ascend to the Antarctic Treaty.[61] China gained entry into the ATS in 1985, the same year it opened its first permanent research outpost, the Great Wall Station.[62] Since then, Beijing's engagement in the region has increased significantly. There are now four total Chinese research station in the continent with a fifth one opening in 2022. At the same time, Beijing has been pushing for greater expansion of Antarctic fishing, mining, and energy exploration activities while also opening three additional research stations.[63] China is of course not the only country with interests in both poles. Figure 1 illustrates how interests in the governance of both regions overlaps.

[60] Nengye Liu, "What Are China's Intentions in Antarctica?" *The Diplomat,* June 14, 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/what-are-chinas-intentions-in-antarctica/; Quirin Schiermeier, "Antarctic project to drill for oldest-ever ice core," *Nature,* March 27, 2019, https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07588-3.

[61] Harrington, Jonathan. "China, Global Ecopolitics and Antarctic Governance: Converging Paths?" *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 22, no. 1 (2017): 42. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-016-9430-2.

[62] Harrington, "China, Global Geopolitics," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* (2017): 44.

[63] Liu, Nengye. "The Rise of China and the Antarctic Treaty System?" Australian Journal of Maritime & Ocean Affairs 11, no. 2 (April 3, 2019): 120–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/18366503.2019.1589897; Nengye Liu, "What Does China's Fifth Research Station Mean for Antarctic Governance?" *The Diplomat,* June 28, 2018, https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/what-does-chinas-fifth-research-station-mean-for-antarctic-governance/.



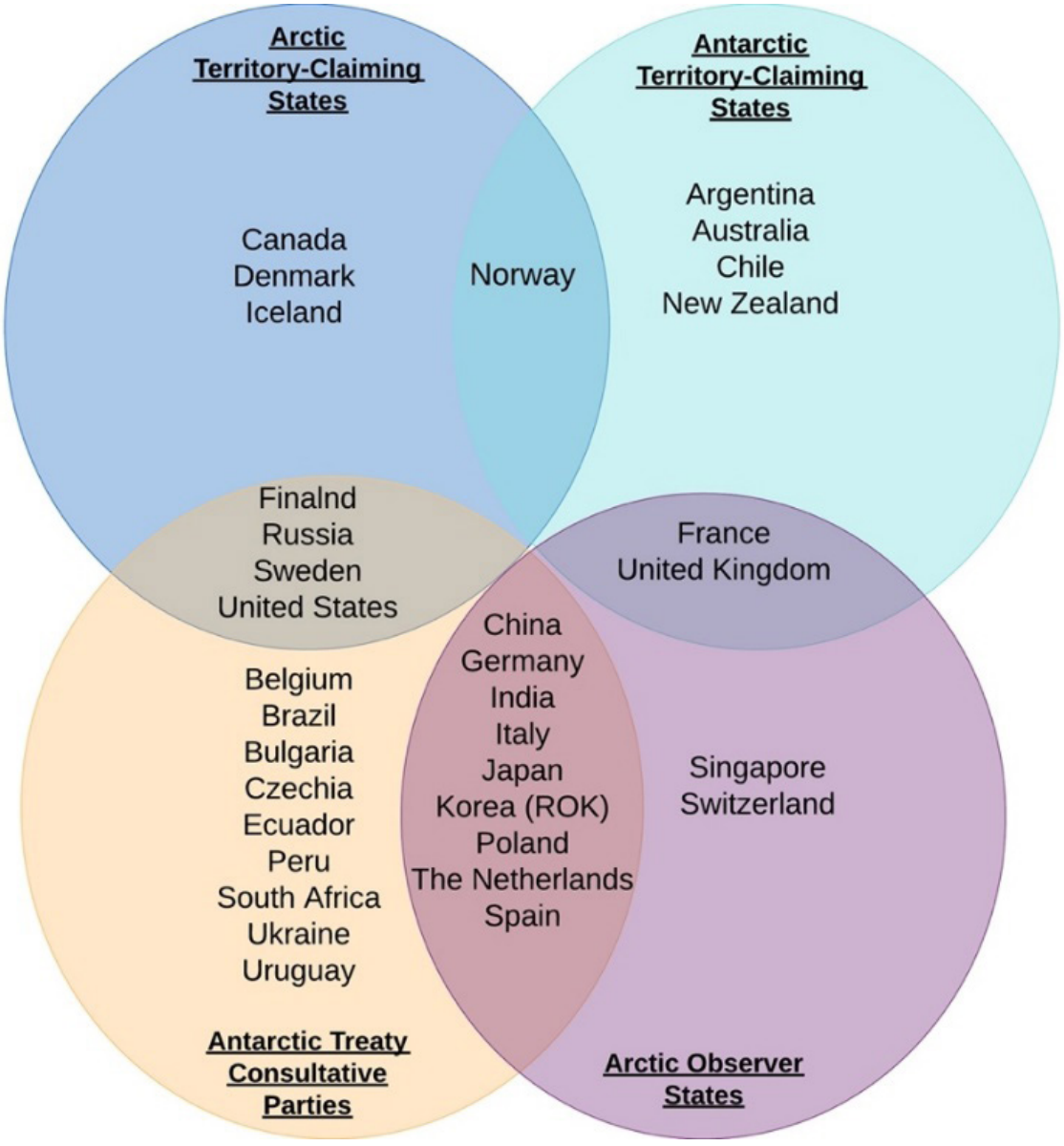
Caption: Science stations of a number of countries (marked by a black dot) are situated across the Antarctic.
Credit: Peter Fitzgerald.

In the Antarctic, Beijing has been able to invest its way into full membership, directly contrasting its Arctic experience. While rising contentiousness and opportunity have overridden multilateralism in the Arctic, the limited economic and geopolitical potential in the South Pole aided in the preservation of norms-based governance in Antarctica. The ATS has thus been able to continually procure a peaceful development of the region. China, in this less contested environment, has not been hampered by an "Antarctic identity" - a dynamic aided in no small part by the continent's lack of an indigenous or permanent population. Only about 4,000 people, mostly scientific, marine, or military personnel, inhabit the Antarctic, and very few of them remain there on a permanent basis.[64] Regardless of the limited mate-

[64] Jonathan Thompson, "The Antarctic has a population of 4,000 - but what does it take to work in a wilderness of 70-knot winds and marauding penguins?" *The Independent,* January 11, 2015. https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/antarctic-has-population-4-000-what-does-it-take-work-wilderness-70-knot-winds-and-marauding-penguins-9963162.html.

rial gains that Beijing can achieve through its Antarctic policy, its full membership in the ATS provides the rising power an invaluable good: legitimacy on the world stage.

Figure 1. Intersections of Arctic and Antarctic Systems



Conclusion

Altogether, while the polar regions are currently facing similar challenges of climate change, the predominant politics in the Arctic and Antarctic are quickly diverging. Arctic identity has become a centerpiece of the polar policies of states above the Arctic circle and has also become a factor in developing unity and disunity in the face of their varied interests. As such, creating broad-based multilateral solutions to manage the economic opportunities and security challenges in the Arctic has proven to be substantially difficult. Still, despite contentiousness among these states, they have united to monopolize the region and limit the involvement of interested non-Arctic states - China being the most powerful among them. In the Antarctic, the question of identity has never played a significant role which has allowed the continent to be a global scientific, environmental, and economic good. Such an arrangement has played well for China as it rises among the rank of nations in global world order, but the contrast between its Arctic and Antarctic experiences has undoubtedly frustrated Beijing. Despite its lack of voice in Arctic governance, China will continue to deeply embed itself in the region. In the end, it can be expected that as Beijing's sway in global governance increases it will apply diplomatic, economic, and military pressure on the Arctic states with the aim of breaking their normative hold on the region, perhaps instead pushing for a merit-based, rather than geography-based, system of leadership that the resembles the current governance structure in the Antarctic.

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