

BACKGROUND

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True North: Economic Freedom and Sovereignty Must Be at the Heart of the U.S. Chairmanship of the Arctic Council

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Abstract

The United States takes over the chairmanship of the Arctic Council from Canada on April 24 during the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Iqaluit, Nunavut, Canada. The Arctic region, commonly referred to as the High North, is becoming more contested than ever before. The region is rich in minerals, wildlife, fish, and other natural resources. According to some estimates, up to 13 percent of the world's undiscovered oil reserves and almost one-third of the world's undiscovered natural gas reserves are located in the Arctic. Holding the chairmanship offers the U.S. an opportunity to shape the policy agenda in the region. The U.S. should focus its chairmanship on establishing achievable goals.

The United States takes over the chairmanship of the Arctic Council from Canada on April 24 during the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Iqaluit, Nunavut, Canada.¹ Holding the chairmanship offers the U.S. an opportunity to shape the policy agenda in the region.

The U.S. should focus its chairmanship on establishing achievable goals. To this end, the U.S. should promote economic freedom in the Arctic, raise awareness in the U.S. about the region and the Arctic Council, work to find peaceful resolutions of all Arctic maritime borders, block the European Union (EU) Commission's application for observer status, and improve capabilities for search and rescue (SAR) and oil spill cleanup.

The Arctic Council

The Arctic Council is the world's primary intergovernmental multilateral forum on the Arctic region and focuses on all Arctic

KEY POINTS

- The United States takes over the chairmanship of the Arctic Council from Canada on April 24. Holding the chairmanship offers the U.S. an opportunity to shape the policy agenda in the region.
- If the U.S. wants to spur prosperity, innovation, and respect for the rule of law, jobs, and sustainability in the Arctic region, then promoting economic freedom should be the focal point of the American chairmanship.
- Grandiose policy announcements that will never be fully resourced or will be impossible to coordinate in light of deteriorating relations with Russia should be avoided. Instead, the U.S. should focus on implementing achievable goals.
- The Arctic region is becoming more contested than ever before. The region is rich in minerals, wildlife, fish, and other natural resources. According to some estimates, up to 13 percent of the world's undiscovered oil reserves and almost one-third of the world's undiscovered natural gas reserves are located in the Arctic.

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policy issues other than defense and security.² It was established in 1996 with the Declaration of Establishment of the Arctic Council, also known as the Ottawa Declaration, as a way for the eight Arctic countries³ to work together on mutually important issues in the region. The chairmanship rotates every two years. Canada, the current chair, will hand over leadership to the United States on April 24.

The Arctic Council operates on an informal basis, and keeping it this way is in America's interests. The council has no headquarters, no treaty, no budget, and no permanent leader.⁴ Meetings are convened every six months somewhere in the chairmanship's country for senior Arctic officials. Every two years, there is a Ministerial Meeting where foreign ministers usually represent their home countries.

Reflecting the fact that many countries, organizations, and indigenous groups have legitimate interests in the Arctic region, the Arctic Council has three membership categories:

- 1. Member states.** This category consists of the eight countries that have territory in the Arctic: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States. Only member states have decision-making power in the Arctic Council.
- 2. Permanent participants.** This category is reserved for the six organizations representing indigenous groups that live above the Arctic Circle, often across national boundaries. These groups include the Aleut International Association, the Arctic Athabaskan Council, the Gwich'in Council International, the Inuit Circumpolar Council, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, and the Saami Council.

3. Observers. This category is open to non-Arctic states, intergovernmental and interparliamentary organizations, and global and regional non-governmental organizations. There are currently 32 observers, including China, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and organizations such as the Nordic Council of Ministers and the U.N. Development Programme.⁵

The U.S. participation in the Arctic Council falls under the leadership of the Department of State. Hillary Clinton was the first Secretary of State to represent the U.S. at the biannual Arctic Council summit. John Kerry, her successor, has continued this tradition.

Many different levels of government in the U.S. have competency over various Arctic issues. The U.S. Departments of the Interior, Energy, Commerce, Transportation, and Homeland Security; the Environmental Protection Agency; the National Science Foundation; the Arctic Research Commission; and the State of Alaska directly or indirectly support the U.S. in its Arctic Council work.⁶

U.S. Arctic Interests

The Arctic region, commonly referred to as the High North, is becoming more contested than ever before. The Arctic encompasses the lands and territorial waters of eight countries on three continents. Unlike the Antarctic, the Arctic has no land mass covering its pole (the North Pole), just ocean. The region is home to some of the roughest terrain and harshest weather on the planet.

The region is also one of the least populated areas in the world, with sparse nomadic communities and few large cities and towns. Although official population figures are non-existent, the Nordic Council

1. News release, "2015 Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting Announced," Arctic Council, September 18, 2014, <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/resources/news-and-press/news-archive/935-2015-arctic-council-ministerial-meeting-announced> (accessed March 3, 2015).

2. For this reason, this *Backgrounder* will not focus on military and defense issues.

3. Canada, Denmark (because of Greenland and Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States.

4. However, the Arctic Council has a standing Arctic Council Secretariat located in Tromsø, Norway, to help with the administrative function of each chairmanship. Arctic Council, "The Arctic Council Secretariat," <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us/arctic-council/the-arctic-council-secretariat> (accessed March 4, 2015).

5. For a full list, see Arctic Council, "Observers," April 27, 2011, <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us/arctic-council/observers> (accessed March 4, 2015).

6. U.S. Department of State, "Arctic Council," <http://www.state.gov/e/oes/ocns/opa/arc/ac/> (accessed March 4, 2015).

of Ministers estimates the figure is four million,⁷ making the Arctic's population slightly larger than Oregon and slightly smaller than Kentucky. Approximately half of the Arctic population lives in Russia.

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The melting of some Arctic ice during the summer months creates security challenges, but also new opportunities for economic development. Reduced ice will mean new shipping lanes opening, increased tourism, and further natural resource exploration. However, it will also mean a larger military presence by more actors than ever before.

The U.S. became an Arctic power on October 18, 1867, at the ceremony transferring Alaska from Russia to the U.S. There has been consistent, bipartisan agreement over the past 20 years regarding U.S. interests in the Arctic region. In June 1994, President Bill Clinton issued an executive order on U.S. policy in the Arctic that identified U.S. interests:

The United States has six principal objectives in the Arctic region: (1) meeting post-Cold War national security and defense needs, (2) protecting the Arctic environment and conserving its biological resources, (3) assuring that natural resource management and economic

development in the region are environmentally sustainable, (4) strengthening institutions for cooperation among the eight Arctic nations, (5) involving the Arctic's indigenous peoples in decisions that affect them, and (6) enhancing scientific monitoring and research into local, regional and global environmental issues.⁹

Clinton's directive ordered the executive branch to work with other Arctic nations to protect the Arctic marine environment from oil pollution, to conserve the region's biological resources, and to "ensure that resource management and economic development in the region are economically and environmentally sustainable."¹⁰

Fifteen years later, in the waning days of the George W. Bush Administration, the White House released an updated Arctic policy. President Bush's January 2009 executive order described in greater detail how U.S. interests in the Arctic should be advanced, but the six objectives listed in President Clinton's 1994 executive order remained the same and were repeated almost verbatim:

It is the policy of the United States to:

1. Meet national security and homeland security needs relevant to the Arctic region;
2. Protect the Arctic environment and conserve its biological resources;
3. Ensure that natural resource management and economic development in the region are environmentally sustainable;
4. Strengthen institutions for cooperation among the eight Arctic nations (the United States, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, and Sweden);

7. Nordic Council of Ministers, *Arctic Social Indicators*, January 27, 2011, p. 13, http://library.arcticportal.org/712/1/Arctic_Social_Indicators_NCoM.pdf (accessed February 27, 2015).

8. U.S. Geological Survey, "Circum-Arctic Resource Appraisal: Estimates of Undiscovered Oil and Gas North of the Arctic Circle," 2008, <http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2008/3049/> (accessed February 27, 2015).

9. William J. Clinton, "United States Policy on the Arctic and Antarctic Regions," Presidential Decision Directive/NSC-26, June 9, 1994, p. 2, <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd/pdd-26.pdf> (accessed February 27, 2015).

10. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

5. Involve the Arctic's indigenous communities in decisions that affect them; and
6. Enhance scientific monitoring and research into local, regional, and global environmental issues.¹¹

The Obama Administration has released several Arctic policy documents: the White House's National Strategy for the Arctic in May 2013, the U.S. Coast Guard's Arctic Strategy in May 2013, and the Department of Defense's Arctic Strategy in November 2013.¹² These documents describe the current Administration's strategy to advance the Arctic interests that were outlined in Bush's 2009 executive order. The National Strategy for the Arctic summarizes the U.S. vision for the region:

We seek an Arctic region that is stable and free of conflict, where nations act responsibly in a spirit of trust and cooperation, and where economic and energy resources are developed in a sustainable manner that also respects the fragile environment and the interests and cultures of indigenous peoples.¹³

In January 2014, the Obama Administration released a detailed implementation plan for the White House strategy.¹⁴ A year later the President issued an executive order reiterating U.S. interests in the Arctic:

The Arctic has critical long-term strategic, ecological, cultural, and economic value, and it is imperative that we continue to protect our national interests in the region, which include: national defense; sovereign rights and responsibilities; maritime safety; energy and economic benefits; environmental stewardship; promotion of science and research; and preservation of the rights, freedoms, and uses of the sea as reflected in international law.¹⁵

Collectively, the Clinton, Bush, and Obama executive orders identify the various U.S. interests in the Arctic region and direct how to pursue them.

Goals for the Chairmanship

The chairmanship of the Arctic Council is not necessarily a powerful position. As an intergovernmental organization, council decisions in the council are made unanimously. However, the country holding the chair has some latitude in setting the council's agenda.

In preparation for the Arctic Council chairmanship, retired Coast Guard Admiral Robert J. Papp, Jr., was appointed in July 2014 to serve as the U.S. Special Representative for the Arctic.¹⁶ Given the Coast Guard's leading role in the Arctic on security matters and Admiral Papp's distinguished career, this was a sensible choice.

The State Department has announced that the theme for the U.S. chairmanship will be "One Arctic—Shared Opportunities, Challenges and Responsibilities."¹⁷ Admiral Papp has offered a glimpse into

11. George W. Bush, "Arctic Region Policy," National Security Presidential Directive NSPD-66/Homeland Security Presidential Directive HSPD-25, January 12, 2009, p. 2, http://www.nsf.gov/geo/plr/opp_advisory/briefings/may2009/nspd66_hspd25.pdf (accessed February 27, 2015).

12. Barack Obama, "National Strategy for the Arctic Region," The White House, May 2013, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_arctic_strategy.pdf (accessed February 27, 2015); U.S. Coast Guard, "Arctic Strategy," May 2013, http://www.uscg.mil/seniorleadership/DOCS/CG_Arctic_Strategy.pdf (accessed February 27, 2015); U.S. Department of Defense, "Arctic Strategy," November 2013, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2013_Arctic_Strategy.pdf (accessed March 10, 2014); and U.S. Navy, "Arctic Roadmap, 2014-2030," http://www.navy.mil/docs/USN_arctic_roadmap.pdf (accessed February 27, 2015).

13. Obama, "National Strategy for the Arctic Region," p. 4.

14. The White House, "Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for the Arctic Region," January 2014, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/implementation_plan_for_the_national_strategy_for_the_arctic_region_-_fi....pdf (accessed February 27, 2015).

15. Barack Obama, "Enhancing Coordination of National Efforts in the Arctic," Executive Order 13689, January 21, 2015, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/21/executive-order-enhancing-coordination-national-efforts-arctic> (accessed March 4, 2015).

16. John Kerry, "Retired Admiral Robert Papp to Serve as U.S. Special Representative for the Arctic," U.S. Department of State, July 16, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/07/229317.htm> (accessed March 4, 2015).

17. Yereth Rosen, "Big Changes in Far North Since US Last Chaired Arctic Council," *Barents Observer*, February 17, 2015, <http://barentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2015/02/big-changes-far-north-us-last-chaired-arctic-council-17-02> (accessed March 4, 2015).

the priorities and goals of the U.S. chairmanship. The three “overarching” goals are to:

1. Continue strengthening the council as an intergovernmental forum,
2. Introduce new long-term priorities into the council, and
3. Raise Arctic and climate change awareness within the United States and across the world.¹⁸

In addition, there are three “organizational thematic areas”:

Addressing the Impacts of Climate Change in the Arctic,

Stewardship of the Arctic Ocean, and

Improving Economic and Living Conditions.¹⁹

Each chairmanship churns out new task forces, working groups, and priorities. When everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. The U.S. should avoid introducing new long-term priorities into the Arctic Council and instead focus on improving and implementing existing programs. Instead of grandiose policy announcements that will never be fully resourced or that will be impossible to coordinate in light of deteriorating relations with Russia over Ukraine, the U.S. should focus on implementing achievable goals.

A realistic agenda for the U.S. chairmanship would focus on:

- **Promoting economic freedom in the Arctic Region.** The best way to improve living conditions for local inhabitants and indigenous people is by pursuing policies that promote economic freedom. Economic freedom leads to prosperity and security.
- **Raising awareness in the U.S. about the Arctic.** Beyond images of polar bears and cruise ships few Americans understand the importance of the Arctic or the challenges facing the region. The U.S. chairmanship offers an opportunity to change this.
- **Facilitating the peaceful resolution of Arctic maritime borders.** The council could be a useful forum for resolving several maritime border disputes between the members of the Arctic Council.
- **Maintaining capabilities to act in the Arctic.** The United States should promote the implementation of the Arctic Council’s 2011 Search and Rescue and 2013 Oil Spill Preparedness and Response agreements by allocating adequate resources to the two initiatives.
- **Keeping the EU Commission out of the Arctic Council.** Nowhere in the criteria for observer status issued by the Arctic Council does it state that supranational organizations can be observers. Allowing the EU Commission’s application would be a blow to national sovereignty in the Arctic.

Promoting Economic Freedom in the Arctic Region

In addition to the bounty of minerals, wildlife, fish, and natural resources in the Arctic, tourism is likely to continue growing. According to one study, the number of cruise ship itineraries in the Canadian Arctic region alone doubled from 2005 to 2013.²⁰ The number of cruise ship calls at Greenland ports doubled between 2003 and 2008.²¹ The

18. U.S. Department of State, “Arctic Council United States Chairmanship 2015–2017,” presentation at Yellowknife, Canada, p. 4, <http://www.knom.org/wp-audio/2014/11/2014-11-03-US-Chair-Arctic-Council.pdf> (accessed March 4, 2015). See also Matthew Smith, “As US Outlines Arctic Council Goals, Native Groups and State Lawmakers Left Wanting,” Alaska Public Media, November 3, 2014, <http://www.alaskapublic.org/2014/11/03/as-us-outlines-arctic-council-goals-native-groups-and-state-lawmakers-left-wanting/> (accessed March 13, 2015).

19. U.S. Department of State, “Arctic Council United States Chairmanship 2015–2017,” p. 5.

20. J. Dawson, M. E. Johnston, and E. J. Stewart, “Governance of Arctic Expedition Cruise Ships in a Time of Rapid Environmental and Economic Change,” *Ocean & Coastal Management*, Vol. 89 (March 2014), pp. 88–99, <http://www.aeco.no/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Governance-of-Arctic-expedition-cruise-ships-pdf.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2015).

21. Lloyd’s Register, “Written Evidence (ARCO048),” testimony before Select Committee on the Arctic, U.K. House of Lords, January 19, 2015, <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/arctic/Lloyd%27s-Register-%28ARCO048%29.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2015).

region also holds potential for commercial shipping. For instance, using the Northeast Passage reduces a trip from Hamburg to Shanghai by almost 4,000 miles, cutting a week off delivery times, saving time and money.

The increasing navigability of Arctic waters during recent summer seasons, coupled with the vast resources of the region, means that economic activity will continue to increase. It is in the interest of the United States to ensure that the increased economic activity corresponds with principles of economic freedom. The way in which the Arctic economy develops will have a major impact on the welfare of people living in the region, the environment, and security. The U.S. should use its chairmanship to promote economic freedom in the Arctic.

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Economic freedom is defined as “the condition in which individuals can act with autonomy while in the pursuit of their economic livelihood and greater prosperity.”²² Free trade is an essential component of a free economy, involving the exchange of goods or services by two or more parties who view the exchange as to their benefit. Economic freedom spurs innovation, prosperity, and respect for the rule of law. A key driver of the U.S. promoting economic freedom in its Arctic Council chairmanship should be to benefit the people who live in the Arctic region.

Regrettably, the attitudes of many U.S. citizens toward the Arctic differ from those of the people

who live there. A 2010 survey found that 51 percent of Americans believe climate change and global warming are the biggest threats facing the Arctic region.²³ In the same poll, an astonishing 43 percent said that they did not know what the biggest threat is to the Arctic region. No one cited jobs, the economy, economic growth, or the various social problems plaguing the Arctic region as the greatest threat even though the polling question included them as options. According to a 2013 survey, only 16 percent of Alaskans view climate change as a top issue relating to security in the American Arctic. Alaskans viewed protecting the environment from accidents and disasters (30 percent) and economic growth (28 percent) as more pressing issues.²⁴

Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) summarized the attitude of many Americans toward the Arctic: “For many non-Arctic residents, the Arctic is a pristine, untouched environment that, like a snow globe on a shelf, must not be disturbed. It may come as news to some, but the Arctic is home to approximately 4 million people.”²⁵

Economic freedom in the Arctic would promote economic growth, alleviating unemployment as well as many of the social issues of the region. Furthermore, economic freedom would promote the types of development that mitigate the likelihood and impact of environmental disasters. Yet at a U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources hearing, Lesil McGuire, co-chair of the Alaska Arctic Policy Commission, testified that the U.S. is falling behind in Arctic development. “We’re the one of the eight that’s the furthest behind. We’re lacking in any deep water ports. We’re lacking when it comes to support for spill response.”²⁶

Changes in the Arctic region also have the potential to cut costs and transit times for global shipping. Use of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) along the coast of Russia and Norway declined in 2014. The amount

22. Terry Miller and Anthony B. Kim, “Defining Economic Freedom,” chap. 5, in Terry Miller, Anthony B. Kim, and Kim R. Holmes, *2014 Index of Economic Freedom* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation and Dow Jones & Company, Inc., 2014), p. 79, <http://www.heritage.org/index>.

23. EKOS Research Associates, “Arctic Sovereignty Survey,” January 2011, p. 1, <http://gordonfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/images/US%20Data%20Tables.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2015).

24. Institute of the North, “Survey of Alaskans’ Opinions on the Arctic,” May 2013, p. 16, https://www.institutenorth.org/assets/images/uploads/attachments/Alaskan_Opinions_on_the_Arctic_-FINAL.pdf (accessed March 3, 2015).

25. Lisa Murkowski, “Alaska Must Lead as US Takes Up Arctic Council Chair,” *Alaska Dispatch News*, November 19, 2014, <http://www.adn.com/article/20141119/lisa-murkowski-alaska-must-lead-us-takes-arctic-council-chair> (accessed March 3, 2015).

26. Lesil McGuire, testimony before Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, U.S. Senate, video, March 5, 2015, <http://www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings-and-business-meetings?ID=1ecba404-f39d-487f-b6e9-17ba0f4e8f23> (accessed March 10, 2015).

of cargo transported in 2014 across the route was 77 percent less than in 2013.²⁷ However, this drop was largely the result of sanctions against Russia, combined with declining fuel prices. Despite the drop in commercial shipping in the Arctic, the time and fuel savings associated with Arctic shipping indicate that the decline will likely be short-lived. Fuel accounts for approximately 70 percent of shipping costs. Unsurprisingly, in 2014, Russia approved a record number of permits for transit across the NSR,²⁸ when oil prices sent companies in search of cost savings. The steep decline in oil prices from a high of \$114 per barrel in June 2014 to \$55 per barrel in December 2014,²⁹ partially accounts for the small number of ships transiting the NSR in 2014.

Despite the challenges associated with shipping across the NSR, the shorter distances and relative safety compared with the volatile maritime choke points and lanes of the Middle East and Africa mean that Arctic shipping routes will continue to attract interest. The U.S. should continue to work to ensure freedom of passage through Arctic waters for commercial shipping. Russia currently assesses administrative and icebreaker fees through its Northern Sea Route Administration. Russia has at times suggested that it could levy additional fees on commercial ships using the NSR. Canada for its part claims the waters of the Northwest Passage are internal Canadian waters and thus not available for innocent passage. Any onerous or excessive fees or regulatory burden on commercial ships transiting Arctic waters is a threat to economic freedom that would negatively impact the U.S. and economic growth in the Arctic region. The U.S. should use its chairmanship to help

to ensure shipping lanes in the Arctic remain available to commercial traffic without onerous bureaucratic or administrative requirements.

The White House's National Strategy for the Arctic Region does not mention economic freedom, jobs, or growth.³⁰ Yet a real lack of economic freedom and therefore economic opportunity in the Arctic region can have deleterious consequences for the 4 million people living in the Arctic region.³¹ "The populations of the Arctic regions in the United States and Canada both grew faster than those countries as a whole."³² Sustaining a competitive and functioning economy in the Arctic would help to combat social ills of the region, including mental health issues and drug and alcohol abuse. The Arctic also faces challenges, including the high cost of goods,³³ the lack of infrastructure, and spotty telecommunications investment.

In October 2014, the Alaskan legislative co-chairs of the Alaskan Arctic Policy Commission sent a letter to Admiral Robert Papp, the U.S. Special Representative to the Arctic, in which they strongly called for the U.S. chairmanship to focus on jobs and economic growth as the top priority: "We believe that jobs and economic development for the people that actually live in the Arctic is a high priority and not an afterthought for Alaskans."³⁴ During Canada's chairmanship, a task force was created to facilitate the creation of a circumpolar forum for business interaction, cooperation, and development. The result was the Arctic Economic Council. Some Canadian officials have expressed alarm that the Arctic Economic Council's mandate has moved beyond the original vision to include considering "responsible resource development."³⁵ The U.S. should work to

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27. Trude Pettersen, "Northern Sea Route Traffic Plummeted," *Barents Observer*, December 16, 2014, <http://barentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2014/12/northern-sea-route-traffic-plummeted-16-12> (accessed March 3, 2015).
 28. Terri McMillan, "Breaking Through the Ice: An Assessment of Northern Sea Route Opportunities," *The Maritime Executive*, February 10, 2015, <http://www.maritime-executive.com/features/breaking-through-the-ice> (accessed March 3, 2015).
 29. Y Charts, "Brent Crude Oil Spot Price," http://ycharts.com/indicators/brent_crude_oil_spot_price (accessed March 3, 2015).
 30. Obama, "National Strategy for the Arctic Region."
 31. Council on Foreign Relations, "The Emerging Arctic," <http://www.cfr.org/arctic/emerging-arctic/p32620#/> (accessed March 3, 2015).
 32. Joan Nymand Larsen and Gail Fondahl, eds., *Arctic Human Development Report: Regional Processes and Global Linkages*, Nordic Council of Ministers, 2014, p. 55, <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:788965/FULLTEXT01.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2015).
 33. Larsen and Fondahl, *Arctic Human Development Report*.
 34. Lesil McGuire and Bob Herron, letter to Admiral Bob Papp and Ambassador David Balton, October 6, 2014, <http://www.knom.org/wp-audio/2014/11/2014-11-03-Letter-to-Papp-from-AAPC.pdf> (accessed March 3, 2015).
 35. Lloyd Axworthy and Mary Simon, "Is Canada Undermining the Arctic Council?" *The Globe and Mail*, March 4, 2015, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/is-canada-undermining-the-arctic-council/article23273276/> (accessed March 4, 2015).

ensure the Arctic Economic Council remains true to its founding vision and does not become a duplicate of or an alternative to the Arctic Council.

Raising Awareness of the Region

The fact that the State Department has identified raising awareness of the Arctic as one of its goals should be viewed very positively. When asked what he considered to be his greatest achievement, former Secretary of State William Seward³⁶ reportedly replied: “The purchase of Alaska, but it will take the country a generation to appreciate it.”³⁷

Sadly, more than a generation has passed, and few Americans appreciate the value of Alaska and the Arctic region. To many people living in the continental United States, Alaska is only a cold and remote place where cruise liners stop. Outside Alaska, the opportunities and challenges found in the Arctic rarely factor into the national discourse. Therefore, it is no surprise that many Americans have probably never heard of the Arctic Council.

Polling data surveying the attitudes of Americans about the Arctic region are limited, but those that exist illustrate the lack of basic knowledge about the Arctic in the U.S. According to a 2013 poll surveying Alaskans’ views on the Arctic—the most recent available—conducted by the Institute of the North, more than half (51 percent) of Alaskan respondents had not heard of the Arctic Council.³⁸ A 2010 poll by the Gordon Foundation in Canada found that 68 percent of U.S. respondents said that they had never heard of the Arctic Council, and 16 percent said they were not sure.³⁹

The State Department has done a commendable job engaging with stakeholders, the think tank community, and Capitol Hill on the U.S. chairmanship. Admiral Papp has been a prolific speaker at various conferences and think tanks in the U.S. and overseas.

Even so, the U.S. government has done little to promote the chairmanship to the broader general public. There seems to be no meaningful public

relations campaign, no government-managed social media accounts highlighting the chairmanship or the U.S. role in the Arctic, and no dedicated website for the U.S. chairmanship. Information on the U.S. chairmanship on the State Department’s website is buried. In fact, as of March 10, 2015, the only mention of the U.S. chairmanship on the Arctic section of the State Department’s website is in one sentence at the very bottom of the webpage.⁴⁰

Fortunately, it is not too late. Each chairmanship lasts for two years, which still allows sufficient time to raise public awareness about the Arctic and the U.S. chairmanship of the Arctic Council. The State Department should not waste this opportunity.

Maintaining Arctic Capabilities

In the past few years, the U.S. and other Arctic Council members have entered into a number of multilateral agreements on a range of Arctic issues. However, two agreements in particular show that practical outcomes are possible and demonstrate the value of the Arctic Council: the Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic (SAR Agreement) and the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution, Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (Response Agreement). While using the Arctic Council as a forum for these agreements, the eight members of the council have entered into them independent of the council through “intergovernmental state agreements.”⁴¹

There is a concern that the eight Arctic countries might not have the capability to fulfill the requirements of these two important agreements. In particular, the U.S. has been chronically underfunding its Arctic capability for years. To lead by example, the U.S. must allocate adequate funding and resources to be an actor in the Arctic region.

The SAR Agreement. The SAR Agreement seeks to “strengthen aeronautical and maritime

36. Secretary Seward was responsible for U.S. purchase of Alaska in 1867.

37. The Seward Homestead, “Then & Now—William Henry Seward,” http://sewardhomestead.org/about_seward.html (accessed March 4, 2015).

38. Institute of the North, “Arctic Public Opinion Poll,” https://www.institutenorth.org/programs/past-programs-and-initiatives/Arctic_Policy_Forum/arctic-public-opinion-poll/ (accessed March 4, 2015).

39. EKOS Research Associates, “Arctic Sovereignty Survey,” p. 4.

40. “The United States will assume the Arctic Council Chairmanship in 2015–2017.” U.S. Department of State, “Arctic,” <http://www.state.gov/e/oes/ocns/opa/arc/index.htm> (accessed March 4, 2015).

41. Kathrin Keil, “A New Model for International Cooperation,” The Arctic Institute, February 20, 2014, <http://www.thearcticinstitute.org/2014/02/a-new-model-for-international.html> (accessed March 6, 2015).

MAP 1

Cooperation in the Arctic: Dividing Up Search and Rescue

The 2011 Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic divides the Arctic region into eight sectors and assigns a sector to each of the “Arctic Eight” nations to undertake primary responsibility over search and rescue operations, as shown in the map below. The Arctic search and rescue agreement, along with the International Maritime Organization’s Guidelines for Ships Operating in Arctic Ice-Covered Waters, and other widely accepted treaties such as SOLAS, COLREG, and MARPOL, regulate maritime traffic in the Arctic.



Note: SOLAS is the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea. COLREG is the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea. MARPOL is the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships.

Source: “Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic,” May 12, 2011, http://library.arcticportal.org/1474/1/Arctic_SAR_Agreement_EN_FINAL_for_signature_21-Apr-2011.pdf (accessed February 24, 2014).

search and rescue cooperation and coordination in the Arctic.⁴² It is the first legally binding agreement overseen by the Arctic Council and “the first legally binding agreement on any topic ever negotiated among all the eight Arctic states.”⁴³

The SAR Agreement follows the guidelines of the 1979 International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue and the 1944 Convention on International Civil Aviation.⁴⁴ The 1944 Convention established guidelines for the use of aerospace and search and response efforts for downed aeronautical vehicles. The 1979 Convention set forth guidelines in the maritime domain, and established 13 SAR zones. These zones acted as a framework for the territorial zones established in Article 3 of the SAR Agreement, which designates a primary nation to coordinate SAR in each zone. Other nations may request help in a particular zone or request to enter a zone to support SAR efforts.

Whether the U.S. can fulfil its responsibilities under the SAR Agreement is debatable. The Coast Guard’s Regional Coordination Center Juneau⁴⁵ is far south of the Arctic Circle and nearly 1,100 miles from the Coast Guard’s northernmost station in Barrow, Alaska, with few landing strips or ports in between.⁴⁶ While the infrastructure and facilities in Juneau make it an appropriate U.S. command and control location for the Arctic, its distance from Arctic points of interest illustrate how vast and remote the Arctic region is.

The United States issued its Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for the Arctic Region in January 2014, which sets goals for U.S. participation and leadership in the SAR Agreement. It specifically lists two “next steps” for American leadership of the Arctic Council regarding SAR:

Institutionalize international Arctic SAR exercises sponsored by the rotating chair of the Arctic Council by the end of 2015.

Develop comprehensive understanding of national, state, regional, and, through Arctic Council coordination, international SAR resources potentially available in the region by the end of 2017.⁴⁷

Notably, the plan’s first step directs the U.S. to create these SAR exercises, as America will be chair of the Arctic Council by then. The second step similarly sets a timeline that coincides with the end of U.S. chairmanship. The SAR guidelines in the implementation plan also seek to measure progress “through comprehensive training, exercises, and drills designed to rigorously test and continually improve notification and response times.”⁴⁸ While none of these sections of the implementation plan direct specific resources toward SAR activities, as chair the United States can lead by example by investing in capabilities and capacity to that end.

The State Department presented its roadmap for U.S. Arctic Council chairmanship at the end of 2014 with further details on SAR operations. It sets a goal to “[e]nhance SAR capability by conducting a full scale live exercise, if feasible.” To achieve this goal, two subsequent points were issued:

A tabletop exercise beforehand would identify available SAR resources and specific actions to include in the live exercise.

42. Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic, May 12, 2011, <http://www.ifrc.org/docs/idrl/N813EN.pdf> (accessed February 26, 2015).

43. Arctic Council, “Search and Rescue in the Arctic,” June 22, 2011, <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/environment-and-people/oceans/search-and-rescue/157-sar-agreement> (accessed March 6, 2015).

44. Arctic Portal, “Arctic Search and Rescue Agreement,” <http://www.arcticportal.org/features/751-arctic-search-and-rescue-agreement> (accessed March 6, 2015).

45. Regional Coordination Center Juneau, commanded by Commander of the 17th Coast Guard District, acts as the primary coordination center in its territorial zone of the SAR Agreement.

46. Distance Between Cities Calculator, “Distance Between Barrow, AK, USA, and Juneau - AK, United States,” <http://www.distancebetweencitiescalculator.com/distance-from-barrow-ak-usa-to-juneau-alaska-ak> (accessed March 6, 2015).

47. The White House, “Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for the Arctic Region,” p. 25 (bullet point formatting omitted).

48. *Ibid.*

Target dates are May 2015 for the tabletop and summer 2016 for the live exercise. An after-action report with recommendations improving SAR coordination in the region would be submitted to the [Senior Arctic Officials].⁴⁹

As with the implementation plan, these are low on specifics, but they clearly state U.S. objectives that will require various resources to execute.

The Response Agreement. The Arctic Council members also entered into the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution, Preparedness and Response in the Arctic in May 2013. Like the SAR Agreement, its stated purpose is “to strengthen cooperation, coordination and mutual assistance among the [Council Members] on oil pollution preparedness and response in the Arctic.”⁵⁰

The Response Agreement sets forth requirements for response activities and presence, such as “each party...shall establish...a minimum level of prepositioned oil-spill combating equipment, commensurate with the risk involved, and programs for its use” and “plans and communications capabilities for responding to an oil pollution incident.”⁵¹

It also details command points and territorial zones similar to those in the SAR Agreement. This is important for U.S. purposes because the Coast Guard acts as the command and control entity for disaster response in U.S. waters. Yet the vast regions of water each nation must maintain make it difficult to move appropriate resources and vessels to the location of a spill quickly.

The Coast Guard has stated that its National Security Cutter (NSC) has been designed and built to withstand Arctic conditions, and one NSC will be deployed to the Coast Guard’s 17th District. However, if this cutter must enter Arctic waters, it will need

time to do so from Juneau or another southern Alaskan port, and it may need icebreaking assistance.

Although the U.S. and other Arctic nations have shown a willingness to focus on SAR and collaborative response efforts in the region, questions remain as to whether they could provide capability to cover all territorial zones sufficiently. As Ronald O’Rourke of the Congressional Research Service explains about the U.S. zone, “Given the location of current U.S. Coast Guard operating bases, it could take Coast Guard aircraft several hours, and Coast Guard cutters days or even weeks, to reach a ship or a downed aircraft in distress in Arctic waters.”⁵²

In July 2013, Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Papp reinforced this concern:

[A]lthough we have lived and served in southern Alaska for most of the Coast Guard’s existence, our access to and operations in northern Alaska on the North Slope have been only temporary and occasional, with no permanent infrastructure or operating forces along the Beaufort or Chukchi seas. There are no deepwater ports in the U.S. Arctic.⁵³

The disparity between the Coast Guard’s icebreaker requirements and its fleet is proof of such concerns. In 2010 the United States High Latitude Region Mission Analysis Capstone Summary determined that the Coast Guard needed a minimum of “three heavy and three medium polar icebreakers in order to fulfill its statutory missions.”⁵⁴

The Coast Guard has continued to use this as its icebreaker requirement level, but it has only one heavy and one medium polar icebreaker. The USCGC *Polar Star*, the heavy icebreaker, was built in 1974 and recently underwent a \$90 million restoration

49. U.S. Department of State, “Arctic Council United States Chairmanship 2015–2017,” p. 13.

50. Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil, Pollution, Preparedness and Response in the Arctic, May 15, 2013, <http://www.arctic-council.org/epr/agreement-on-cooperation-on-marine-oil-pollution-preparedness-and-response-in-the-arctic/> (accessed March 6, 2015).

51. *Ibid.*, art. 4, § 2.

52. Jonathan L. Ramseur, “Controlling Air Emissions from Outer Continental Shelf Sources: A Comparison of Two Programs—EPA and DOI,” Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, November 26, 2012, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42123.pdf> (accessed March 6, 2015).

53. Admiral Robert Papp, remarks at Fifth Symposium on the Impacts of an Ice-Diminishing Arctic, U.S. Coast Guard, July 16, 2013, http://www.uscg.mil/history/ccg/Papp/SPEECHES/Ice%20Diminishing%20Arctic%20Symposium%207_15%201430.pdf (accessed March 6, 2015).

54. ABS Consulting, “USCG High Latitude Region Mission Analysis Capstone Summary,” U.S. Coast Guard, July 2010, <http://assets.fiercemarkets.com/public/sites/govit/hlsummarycapstone.pdf> (accessed March 6, 2015).

to extend its service life from seven to 10 years. The USCGC *Healy*, the medium icebreaker, is newer, but poses different challenges. It cannot break through as much ice as the *Polar Star*, and it cannot operate in extreme weather conditions. Over the past few years the Department of Homeland Security, which has jurisdiction over the Coast Guard, has requested small amounts of research and development funding for a new heavy icebreaker,⁵⁵ but such a vessel could cost up to \$1 billion.⁵⁶ This would dramatically squeeze the entire Coast Guard acquisition budget for many years and appears to be unachievable. If the United States wishes to participate as a legitimate member of the Arctic Council, it must solve its icebreaker shortfall, possibly by other means than the regular acquisition process. This could include leasing or buying foreign-built icebreakers, or reevaluating the Coast Guard's platform requirements.

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The Coast Guard station in Barrow, which can house fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft, could take on a more significant role as the U.S. seeks to provide a more permanent presence in the Arctic Circle. This facility could be upgraded and provide the U.S. a base of departure in the Arctic, which would support America's goals in the region and its leadership efforts on the council. Yet this facility is not operated during the winter.⁵⁷

The U.S. could also use unmanned systems to enhance its capabilities in the Arctic. For example, the Coast Guard has tested U.S. Navy surveillance unmanned aerial vehicles, giving the

National Security Cutter three times the usual situational awareness radius.⁵⁸ The Navy is also using unmanned underwater vehicles to monitor environmental conditions under Arctic ice.⁵⁹ Such platforms could provide additional situational awareness for the sea services and enable the U.S. to lead the Arctic Council in subsurface presence and information gathering.

The United States has taken some preliminary steps to provide the resources needed to execute leadership on the Arctic Council, but if it wishes to remain a serious Arctic Member nation, it must invest more in the infrastructure and platforms to enhance its ability to manage U.S. Arctic waters and support the other Arctic nations.

The Peaceful Resolution of Arctic Maritime Borders

The U.S. should refrain from needlessly creating new task forces and working groups just for the sake of "doing something." However, when a practical and achievable issue needs to be addressed, the U.S. should use its chairmanship to promote the issue in the Arctic Council.

When the United States assumes the chairmanship, it should support formation of a working group on the Peaceful Settlement of Arctic Disputes (PSAD). The council has already established a half-dozen working groups to manage Arctic issues, including environmental emergencies, pollution, biodiversity, and sustainable development. Yet there is no working group to assist in resolving disputes over maritime boundaries or other issues among Arctic nations.

With fisheries, oil, and other natural resources at stake, the possibility for contentious relations between Arctic nations on maritime boundaries is real. Moreover, most Arctic nations have maritime and territorial boundary disputes with other Arctic nations. Canada, Russia, and Denmark dispute

55. Ronald O'Rourke, "Coast Guard Polar Icebreaker Modernization: Background and Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, January 9, 2015, p. 15, <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/weapons/RL34391.pdf> (accessed March 6, 2015).

56. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

57. Annie Feidt, "USCG Opening Temporary Base in Barrow," *Alaska Public Media*, July 16, 2012, <http://www.alaskapublic.org/2012/07/16/uscg-opening-temporary-base-in-barrow/> (accessed March 20, 2015).

58. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, "U.S. Coast Guard's Acquisition of the Vertical-Takeoff-and-Landing Unmanned Aerial Vehicle," June 2009, http://www.oig.dhs.gov/assets/Mgmt/OIG_09-82_Jun09.pdf (accessed March 6, 2015).

59. Kris Osborn, "Navy Deploys Drones Under Arctic Ice Ahead of Increased Ship Presence," *DoD Buzz*, March 2, 2015, <http://www.dodbuzz.com/2015/03/02/navy-deploys-drones-under-arctic-ice-ahead-of-increased-ship-presence/> (accessed March 6, 2015).

the ownership of the sea and continental shelf surrounding the North Pole; Denmark and Canada dispute ownership of Hans Island; and the United States and Canada, although cooperating closely on demarcating their Arctic maritime boundary, have long-running disputes on an area of the Beaufort Sea and the status of the Northwest Passage.

Unilateral actions in Arctic maritime and territorial disputes have been unhelpful. For instance, by symbolically planting a flag on the North Pole seabed in 2007, Russia sparked a controversy about ownership of Arctic resources and helped to develop a false narrative that the Arctic region was a “Wild West” where various nations were scrambling to secure resources. Similarly, unilateral submissions to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS), an expert body established by the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, have also failed to resolve disputes over the ownership of areas of the Arctic continental shelf. Canada, Denmark, Norway, the United States, and even Japan objected to Russia’s 2001 submission to the CLCS. Denmark’s December 2014 submission to the CLCS compelled both Norway and Canada to notify the commission that Denmark’s claim likely overlaps with their claims. Since the CLCS is prohibited from approving demarcations of the continental shelf when a dispute exists between nations, a PSAD working group could serve as a forum for Arctic nations to resolve their differences regarding continental shelf boundaries and allow them to make joint submissions to the CLCS.

A new PSAD working group would not serve as a binding forum for dispute resolution, but rather a meeting of Arctic nations in which issues of maritime boundaries and other disputes could be regularly addressed. It would facilitate the identification and status of all Arctic disputes and make them a recurring agenda item for the council, with a view to ensuring the eventual peaceful settlement of such matters. While maritime boundary disputes are usually bilateral and must ultimately be resolved between nations through separate treaties, a PSAD working group could serve as a forum to facilitate such settlements and share information. This would help to fulfill the council’s mandate to “provide a

means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States.”⁶⁰

No Place for the EU Commission

National sovereignty should be the cornerstone of U.S. Arctic policy. In the Arctic, sovereignty equals security and stability. Respecting the national sovereignty of others in the Arctic while maintaining the ability to enforce one’s own sovereignty will ensure that the chances of armed conflict in the region remain low. Thus, during its chairmanship the U.S. should pursue policies that defend national sovereignty.

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The question of sovereignty is also important in defining actors in the Arctic. Only nation-states, subnational bodies (e.g., indigenous people), or purely intergovernmental organizations such as the Arctic Council and NATO should have a role in Arctic matters. Nevertheless, due to the possibility of shipping lanes opening, some non-Arctic countries may also have a small stake in the region. For example, China, Singapore, and South Korea have permanent observer status in the Arctic Council. However, supranational bodies, such as the EU Commission, should be excluded from playing a formal role in Arctic matters.

During the 2013 Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Kiruna, Sweden, 14 countries and organizations seeking observer status submitted applications to the Arctic Council. The council accepted all of the applicants except the EU Commission. The EU Commission’s application was also rejected in 2009. The EU Commission’s application will likely be considered again at the upcoming Ministerial Meeting in Canada.

The EU Commission is a supranational organization, meaning that in some areas its authority and

60. Arctic Council, “Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council,” September 19, 1996, <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/document-archive/category/5-declarations?download=13:ottawa-declaration> (accessed March 13, 2015).

polymaking transcends the nationally elected governments of the 28 EU member states. The EU Commission is considered to be the executive branch of the EU and is perhaps the most undemocratic decision-making body inside the EU. The president of the EU Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, does not work for and is not accountable to the EU's member states.

Since the EU Commission is a supranational body and not an intergovernmental organization, it does not meet the observer status criteria established by the Arctic Council in 2011.⁶¹ As part of the process of constantly expanding its policy remit, the EU Commission has long sought a larger role in Arctic issues. However, Canada, the Greenlander representatives in the Danish parliament (because of the EU's position against the seal trade), and Russia have traditionally opposed EU membership of any form in the Arctic Council.⁶²

There is no need for the supranational EU Commission to have a formal role in the Arctic Council. Three permanent members and seven observers in the Arctic Council are in the EU and can ensure that European interests are represented. Observers in the Arctic Council are allowed to attend all meetings and working groups. Observers are also allowed to make oral statements, present written statements, submit relevant documents, and provide views on the issues under discussion. Therefore, EU countries already represented in the Arctic Council will not likely want the EU to gain observer status because it would undermine their own influence in the Arctic Council.

Granting the EU Commission observer status would set a dangerous precedent of allowing supranational organizations to be represented in the Arctic Council. This would erode the importance of national sovereignty in the Arctic. As an observer in the Arctic Council, EU Commissioners would be able to participate in all meetings and working groups, giving them a forum to air viewpoints on many issues that could run counter to the positions of sovereign nation-states in the Arctic Council.

The U.S. should ensure that undemocratic, unelected, unaccountable, and supranational organizations such as the EU Commission are not given a

voice on Arctic issues when any legitimate concerns the EU may have on Arctic issues can be addressed by the European countries already in the Arctic Council.

What the U.S. Should Do

The U.S. cannot afford to squander the Arctic Council chairmanship. Fifteen years is a long time to wait for the next opportunity, especially when so many important issues need immediate attention. To make the most of the Arctic Council chairmanship, the U.S. should:

- 1. Promote economic freedom in the Arctic as the theme of its chairmanship.** Economic freedom spurs prosperity, innovation, and respect for the rule of law, jobs, and sustainability in the Arctic region. It should be the focal point of the American chairmanship.
- 2. Keep the Arctic Economic Council on track.** The Arctic Economic Council should remain a circumpolar forum for business interaction, cooperation, and development, not become a duplicate or alternative to the Arctic Council.
- 3. Send the Secretary of State to the next Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting.** Secretary of State John Kerry should attend the next Arctic Council Ministerial meeting in April 2015. With the U.S. assuming the chairmanship, it is right and appropriate for Secretary Kerry to represent the U.S. at this meeting.
- 4. Coordinate with Finland.** Finland takes over the chairmanship from the U.S. in 2017. The U.S. should coordinate closely with Finland to ensure continuity of achievements.
- 5. Support formation of a working group on the Peaceful Settlement of Arctic Disputes.** This would provide a regular forum for council members to discuss, evaluate, and resolve Arctic disputes on maritime boundaries, resource allocation, and other matters.

61. Arctic Council, "Observers."

62. Kevin McGwin, "EU Seal Ban: A Seal of Disapproval," *The Arctic Journal*, February 18, 2015, <http://arcticjournal.com/politics/1340/seal-disapproval> (accessed March 4, 2015).

- 6. Block the EU Commission's application.** Nowhere do the Arctic Council's criteria for observer status state that supranational organizations can be observers. The United States should oppose the EU Commission's application for observer status in the Arctic Council and convince the other permanent members to do the same.
- 7. Listen to Alaskans.** A wide gulf exists between the attitudes of most Americans toward the Arctic and the attitudes of the U.S. citizens who actually live there. Alaskans overwhelmingly support a U.S. chairmanship that focuses on economic growth and social development, not one that centers on climate change.
- 8. Ensure freedom of navigation in the Arctic.** Work with Canada and Russia to ensure that shipping lanes in the Arctic are available to commercial traffic, free of onerous fees and burdensome administrative and regulatory requirements.
- 9. Continue to invest in the U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Navy Arctic capabilities.** The harsh conditions of the remote Arctic region make unmanned systems particularly appealing to provide additional situational awareness, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. The Coast Guard should also consider upgrading facilities such as its Barrow station to reinforce its Arctic capabilities and demonstrate a greater commitment to the region.
- 10. Reevaluate the U.S. Coast Guard's icebreaker program.** Due to the costs and the demand for a new heavy icebreaker, the Coast Guard and Congress need to consider alternatives. These could include reassessing the platform requirements of such a vessel, new technologies such as lasers to amplify its capability, or buying or

leasing foreign-built icebreakers that provide the same heavy capabilities at a lower cost. The Coast Guard and Congress need to act expeditiously so that the U.S. can field an adequate ice-breaking capability more quickly.

- 11. Follow through with training exercises.** America's leadership on the Arctic Council is a tremendous opportunity for the country to reinforce its status as an Arctic nation. If the U.S. follows through on its proposed SAR and disaster response exercises, it will highlight America's commitment to and focus on the region.

Conclusion

The last time the U.S. assumed the chairmanship of the Arctic Council was in 1998, and much has changed in the world and the Arctic since then. America's interests in the Arctic region will only increase in the years to come. As other nations devote resources and assets in the region to secure their national interests, America cannot afford to fall behind. The chairmanship offers a powerful opportunity to set an agenda that advances the U.S. national interest. With the Arctic becoming increasingly important for economic and geopolitical reasons, now is not the time for the U.S. to turn away from its own backyard.

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