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The melting of Arctic ice promises more availability to valuable natural resources and shorter sea routes for international trade. Unfortunately, this has put the Arctic region at the forefront of great power competition. With China, a non-Arctic state, gaining a foothold and influence in the region, the United States must have a more effective US response to its growing activities in the Arctic. To accomplish this, the US should ratify UNCLOS and more importantly, the US should invest in ISR with ally and partner nations.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**A MORE EFFECTIVE US RESPONSE  
TO CHINA'S GROWING ACTIVITIES IN THE ARCTIC**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**MAJOR EUGENIO A. RAZO, USMCR**

AY 2020-21

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## *Executive Summary*

**Title:** A More Effective US Response to China's Growing Activities in the Arctic

**Author:** Major Eugenio A. Razo, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** The United States should develop a more robust response to China's growing activities in the Arctic. To accomplish this, the US should ratify (UNCLOS) to use it as a legal defense mechanism against China's potential actions in the Arctic. More importantly, the US should invest in Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities in the region and encourage its allies to also improve their ISR capabilities. Such cooperation will help the US and its allies acquire much-needed situational awareness of Russian and Chinese activities in the Arctic, as well as help protect civilian shipping through the region.

**Abstract:** Alaska is the largest state in the US and it is full of valuable natural resources. Alaska also makes the United States an Arctic state, and now, it requires the government's attention. Not only for its resources but the importance Alaska plays in the national security of the United States. Full of rare minerals, oil reserves, and untapped fish resources, the Arctic region is at the forefront of great power competition. Governed only by agreements between the eight Arctic states, the Arctic region is now at a crossroads due to growing activities by non-Arctic states, including China, which declared itself a "near-Arctic" state in 2018.

Through its scientific claims and investments, China has gained a foothold in the region. Unfortunately, the icy region that once protected the United States is now melting and exposing vulnerabilities on our northern flank. In addition, China and Russia are cooperating more and increasing their activities in the Arctic region. For example, through its joint Arctic training exercises with Russia, China is becoming a more significant threat to the United States and its allies. China has also announced plans to extend its Belt and Road initiative through a 'Polar Silk Road' in the Arctic region.

The US needs to take two first steps to better protect its interests and influence in the Arctic region. First, the US should ratify UNCLOS to gain legitimacy in matters of the sea. Only then will the US, with the support of international law, be able to truly hold China accountable for any unlawful acts the PRC might take. Secondly, it should lead its allies in investing in unmanned systems to increase our awareness of activities in this hard-to-reach region. An all-domain ISR system can provide the surveillance and tracking of the region through the use of air, surface, and underwater UAS.

**Conclusion:** Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has underinvested in the Arctic region and allowed other great powers to increase their presence and activities in the north. In addition to Russia's militarization of the Arctic, China's long distance power projection into the Arctic region is an important wake up call for the US to invest more in the region. Through multilateral action and investments, the Arctic region can remain an area of cooperation and peace. But if current trends continue, the United will find itself alone with little to no influence in a region with significant strategic value.

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THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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*E. A. Razo  
Alexandria, VA  
March 2021*

## Part I – Introduction

The Arctic region (figure 1), considered by some as the United States' fourth coast, plays an essential part in US national security.<sup>1</sup> Aside from national security, the Arctic region will also have a significant impact on trade and the global economy. According to the 2021 Department of the Navy's strategy, *A Blue Arctic*,

the Blue Arctic will have a disproportionate impact on the global economy given its abundance of natural resources and strategic location. The region holds an estimated 30% of the world's undiscovered natural gas reserves, 13% percent of global conventional oil reserves, and one trillion dollars' worth of rare earth minerals. Of the oil and gas reserves present in the Arctic, an estimated 84% likely reside offshore.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1: Map of the Arctic region, State Department<sup>3</sup>

On the one hand, the Alaskan coast, separated from the rest of the United States by approximately 1,900 miles, is a de facto first line of defense. According to the 2019 Department of Defense Arctic Strategy, "geographically, the Arctic comprises the northern approaches of the United States and represents a potential vector both for attacks on the

homeland and for US power projection."<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, this region is full of untapped resources and economic possibilities that have been protected by year-round ice.

Unfortunately, with global warming, "access to the Arctic's vast energy, mineral, fisheries, and other commercial resources is growing precisely at the same time that global interests in these assets intensify."<sup>5</sup> According to Efron Shira in *The Changing Global Environment and Its Implications for the US Air Force*:

these previously inaccessible hydrocarbons and minerals are becoming attainable as Arctic ice continues to melt. The Arctic has large quantities of phosphate, bauxite, iron ore, copper, nickel, and fish. It also has vast energy reserves. The US Geological Survey estimates that the Arctic contains 90 billion barrels of oil, 1,669 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and 44 billion barrels of liquid natural gas. This represents about 22 percent of the world's undiscovered conventional oil and natural gas resource base<sup>6</sup>

Between the vast amount of resources and the opening of new trading routes, the Arctic region has gained growing international interest from state and non-state actors who seek to share the region's resource potential and strategic position.<sup>7</sup>

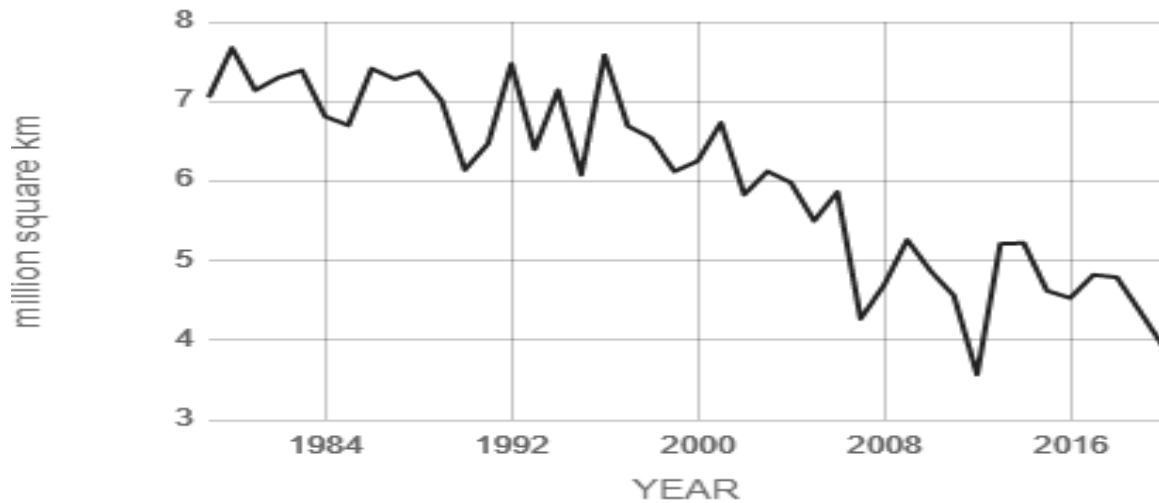
Since the purchase of Alaska on May 28, 1867, some believe the United States has overlooked the Arctic region and has been reluctant to understand the strategic implications of great power competition to the north.<sup>8</sup> Protected by extreme weather and year-round ice, the area was never a significant national security concern. The little interest by nations allowed the Arctic Council to support and keep the region secure.<sup>9</sup> Today, with approximately 90% of all trade traveling across the world's oceans, the Arctic region has the potential to connect nearly 75% of the world's population - as melting ice increases, so does access to shorter maritime trade routes linking Asia, Europe, and North America.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, this long-term interest in resources and navigational routes has brought significant traffic to the Arctic. From Arctic states to non-Arctic states, under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), any nation has the right to freedom of navigation and innocent passage in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of the coastal states and high seas.<sup>11</sup> Although the United States maintains freedom of navigation around the

world and at its own borders, the US government has recently identified one non-Arctic state as a particular threat: China.<sup>12</sup>

Claiming itself as a "near-Arctic" state, China has recently played a more significant role in the Arctic and has indicated that it wants to play an integral part in the Arctic's international rules.<sup>13</sup> This study will examine China's growing activities in the region and explore what actions the United States should take to protect its national interests in the Arctic. The United States should develop a more robust response to China's growing activities in the Arctic. To accomplish this, the US should ratify (UNCLOS) to use it as a legal defense mechanism against China's potential actions in the Arctic. More importantly, the US should invest in Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities in the region and encourage its allies to also improve their ISR capabilities. Such cooperation will help the US and its allies acquire much-needed situational awareness of Russian and Chinese activities in the Arctic, as well as help protect civilian shipping through the region.

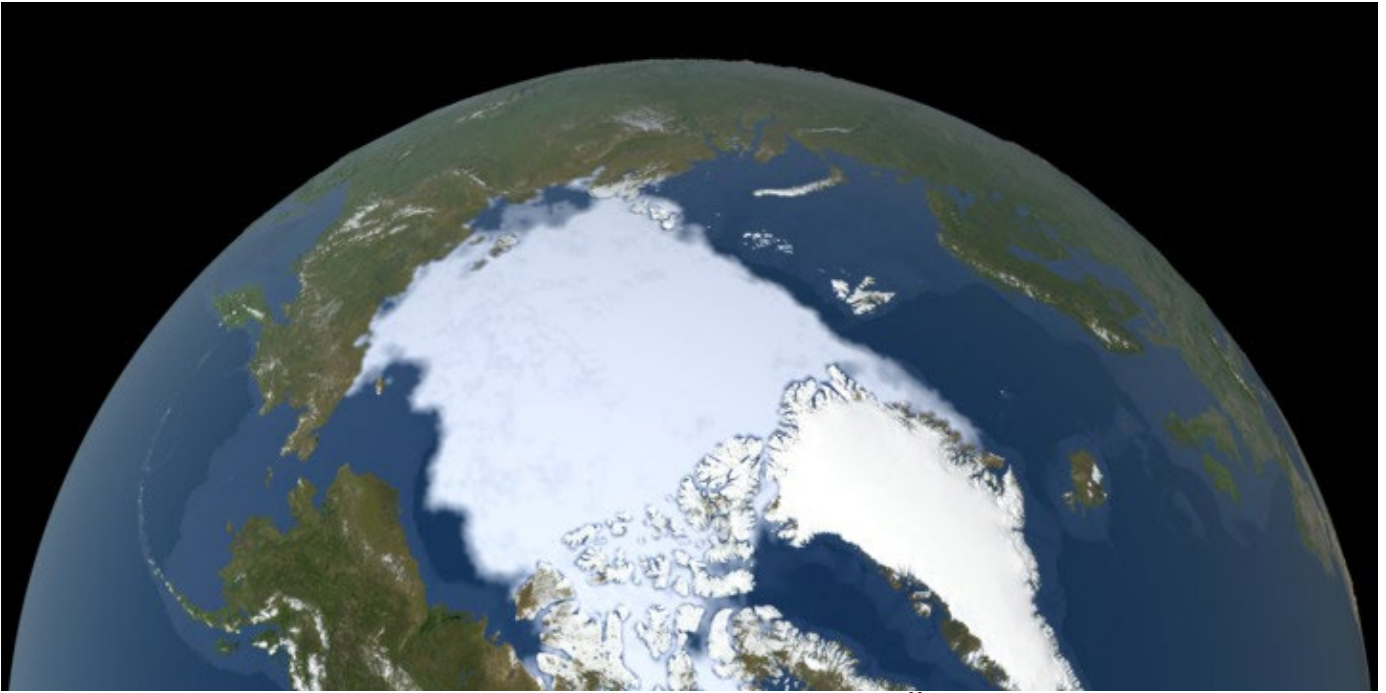
To better understand the United States' concerns with China's actions in the Arctic, it is best to first comprehend the impact of global climate change and its effect on the Arctic region. Figure 2, produced by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, illustrates the decline in the Arctic's sea ice between 1979 and 2020. According to climatologists, the data depicts the region's minimum ice level, a phenomenon that occurs every September, is steadily declining.<sup>14</sup> Using satellite imagery, NASA has calculated that "the September Arctic sea ice is now declining at a rate of 13.1 percent per decade."<sup>15</sup> In 1979, the Arctic sea ice minimum was 7.05 million square kilometers and decreased to 3.92 million square kilometers in 2020, a significant change over that time period (figures 3 and 4).<sup>16</sup> The ice is melting more each summer as temperatures in the region increase twice as fast as the rest of the planet.<sup>17</sup>



Source: [climate.nasa.gov](http://climate.nasa.gov)

**Figure 2: Yearly Arctic Sea Ice Minimum September 1979 - 2018<sup>18</sup>**

This means that global warming has opened up significant sea routes for nations seeking to shorten Asia's maritime distance to Europe considerably. For reference, "a shipping voyage to Japan from Rotterdam usually takes 25-30 days (via the Suez Canal or Panama Canal). Travel through the Northern Sea Route (NSR) would only take 18 days and avoid routes affected by piracy."<sup>19</sup> These savings and the reduced threat make it a worthwhile option. "Chinese officials have repeatedly called the NSR the 'Arctic Golden Waterway,' and Bin Yang, a professor at the Shanghai Maritime University, estimates cost savings between \$60-120 billion per year if China makes extensive usage of Arctic shipping routes."<sup>20</sup> In the not-too-distant future, these sea lanes, including the Northern Sea Route, the Northwest Passage, and eventually the Transpolar Sea Route (see figure 5), will provide economic opportunities by reducing the time and cost of shipping. As the 2010 Quaternary Science Review points out, "the Arctic Ocean may become seasonally ice-free as early as 2040."<sup>21</sup> Although resource mining and Arctic transportation are currently expensive and unreliable, ice-free conditions will alter this paradigm in the next 20 years.



**Figure 3: 1979 Arctic Sea Ice Minimum<sup>22</sup>**



**Figure 4: 2020 Arctic Sea Ice Minimum<sup>23</sup>**

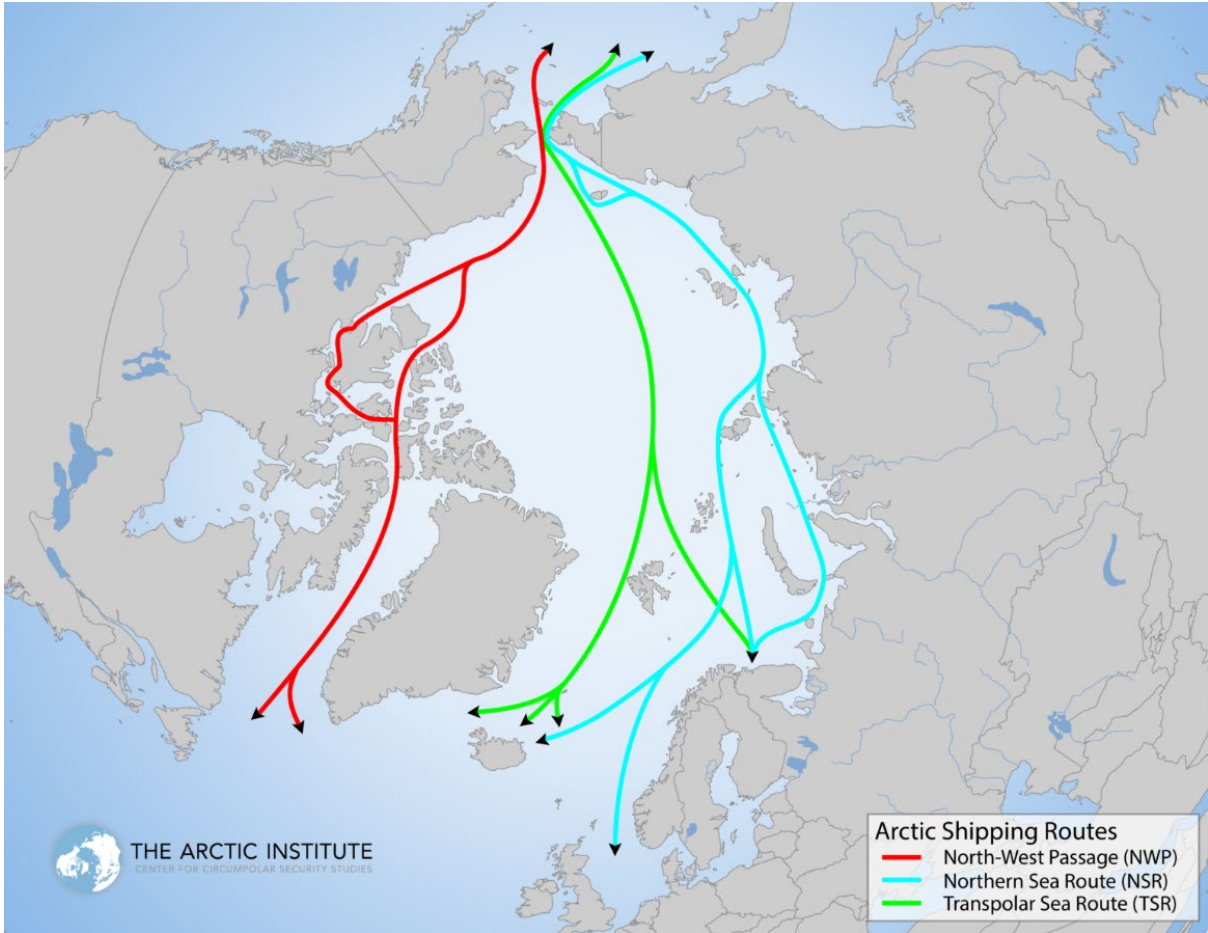


Figure 5: Arctic Shipping Routes<sup>24</sup>

## Part II – China's Growing Activities in the Arctic

China has established itself as a world leader of scientific research in the Arctic region.

From its research stations to its satellite reception stations, China's interest in the region has surpassed involvement and investments above that of the United States. In *The Arctic Institute's China Series 2020*, Sanna Kopra points out that:

Chinese scholars have conducted Arctic and Antarctic expeditions aboard research icebreaker Xue Long since the early 1990s. Today, China has research stations on Svalbard (Yellow River Station, est. 2004) and Iceland (the China-Iceland Arctic Science Observatory, est. 2018). In Sweden, China has its first overseas land satellite receiving station (the China Remote Sensing Satellite North Polar Ground Station, est. 2016), and with Finland, it has agreed to establish a joint research center for Arctic space observation and data sharing services.<sup>25</sup>

These investments in science and infrastructure have been critical to China's emergence in the Arctic and may now help China maximize its influence through the use of its economic power to create potential for access to policy governance in forums such as the Arctic Council.<sup>26</sup> Through the claims of science, China has gained a foothold within the region.

How did China gain a foothold in the Arctic region when the Arctic Circle's nearest point is approximately 1,600 kilometers away? To answer this question, one must first understand why China believes it has national interests in the region. China's actions and investments, which have resulted in the ownership and co-ownership of various Arctic structures, have occurred for various reasons. Luke Coffey, in *China's Arctic Activity puts Pressure on the US*, says China is motivated to be an active actor in the Arctic region due to:

- 1) New shipping routes and economic development
- 2) Scientific research possibilities (Whether it is for China's sea-based nuclear deterrent, natural resource extraction or commercial shipping, research on polar high-altitude atmospheric physics, glacial oceans, bioecology, and meteorological geology is important for China's strategic interests)
- 3) China wants to lay the groundwork for future military activity in the region
- 4) China sees the region as a way to satisfy its growing demands for energy and food.<sup>27</sup>

With regard to shipping routes and economic development, China has tested the potential savings in both distance and time for Arctic shipping. China's only company involved in Arctic shipping, COSCO, claims to have reduced the total nautical miles (NM) by 163,300 NM and the total sailing time by 508.5 days in 42 voyages between 2013 and 2020.<sup>28</sup> These auspicious numbers show the significance the Arctic sea lanes will have in the near future. An extension to President Xi Jinping's signature Belt and Road Initiative, China envisions the Northeast Passage, Northwest Passage, and the Central Passage as serving as a new "Polar Silk Road."<sup>29</sup> Crossing the Arctic Circle, the "Polar Silk Road," will connect North America, East Asia, and Western Europe.<sup>30</sup> According to China's 2018 Arctic Policy, "the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative), an important cooperation initiative of China, will bring opportunities for parties concerned to jointly build a 'Polar Silk Road,' and facilitate connectivity and sustainable economic and social development of the Arctic."<sup>31</sup>

According to Keith Johnson, in *Putin and Xi Are Dreaming of a Polar Silk Road*, "China is dreamy-eyed about the prospects of shipping goods from Asia to Europe across the top of Russia, with visions of transpolar shipping dominating its brand-new Arctic strategy."<sup>32</sup> With a population exceeding 1.4 billion people, China depends on a significant number of resources from around the world for consumption and for economic benefit.<sup>33</sup> The Arctic has the potential to provide some of what China needs, both in resources and transportation routes. For these reasons, China

is trying to pour money into nearly every Arctic country. It has invested billions into extracting energy from beneath the permafrost on the Yamal Peninsula in northern Russia. It is drilling for gas in Russian waters alongside the Russian company Gazprom. It is prospecting for minerals in Greenland. Furthermore, its telecommunications giant is eager to partner with a Finnish company that wants to lay a huge new undersea internet cable to connect Northern Europe with Asia.<sup>34</sup>

According to its Arctic White paper, China is clear in its intentions and "encourages its enterprises to participate in the infrastructure construction for these routes and conduct commercial trial voyages in accordance with the law to pave the way for their commercial and regularized operation."<sup>35</sup> China is all-in in supporting Chinese businesses and has the fiscal might behind it to ensure its presence in the region.

China's investments in science and in Arctic states' infrastructure has been beneficial for the People's Republic of China (PRC) and has helped it gain favorable status by some Arctic states. In 2013, China became an observer member of the Arctic Council and, in 2018, declared itself a "near-Arctic state" in its first-ever Arctic White Paper.<sup>36</sup> As the Arctic Institute points out, "the White Paper defines China as a 'near-Arctic' state which has legitimate rights in the region – and argues that Arctic states should respect these rights, including the right to conduct scientific research, navigate, perform flyovers, fish, lay submarine cables and pipelines, and even explore and exploit natural resources in the Arctic high seas."<sup>37</sup> Calling itself a "near-Arctic state" is unprecedented because, before 2018, the Arctic Council only recognized the Arctic states and non-Arctic states who could serve as observer members. However, no one besides the United States has raised any issues with this claim. This is important because, in its "White Paper," China makes it clear that it understands that it does not have territorial sovereignty in the Arctic but that it "has rights in respect of scientific research, navigation, overflight, fishing, laying of submarine cables and pipelines in the high seas and other relevant sea areas in the Arctic Ocean, and rights to resource exploration and exploitation in the area, pursuant to treaties such as UNCLOS and general international law (emphasis added)."<sup>38</sup> A monumental claim like this is worrisome for the United States.

In an effort to gain access to resources and outcompete the West, China has increased its cooperation with Russia. According to Somini Sengupta and Steven Myers in, *Latest Arena*

for China's Growing Global Ambitions: The Arctic, "though, natural competitors for Arctic resources and influence, in 2017 they announced that they would set up a joint research center that would study, among other things, changes in sea ice conditions along the Northern Sea Route."<sup>39</sup> The Sino-Russian Arctic Research Center was complete in April 2019. The Poly Group, a Chinese state-owned corporation, also proposed in 2017 a new deep-water port in Arkhangelsk, on Russia's Arctic coast, which will provide a combined sea-land transportation system and improved links to Siberia.<sup>40</sup> Although currently in the planning phase, these are not the only projects that China and Russia are working on. Under this partnership, with China's investment, the world's largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) project (Figure 6) commenced production in the Arctic in December 2017.<sup>41</sup> Only seven months after operations started, the first shipment of LNG from Yamal arrived in Nantong, located in the Jiangsu Province.<sup>42</sup>

## LNG transportation routes and distances from Yamal LNG



eia Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration based on Novatek and IHS.

Figure 6: LNG Transportation Routes and Distances from Yamal LNG<sup>43</sup>

With this project completed and another one in the planning phase, China and Russia have signed two other deals. One is a \$5 billion investment in developing the Payakha oilfield on the Taymyr peninsula in the region of Krasnoyarsk.<sup>44</sup> The second is a framework deal to develop the Zarubino port located southwest of Vladivostok, close to the Chinese border.<sup>45</sup> The new port, which is ice-free year-round, will strengthen links between northeast China and the rest of the world and aid development in Russia's far east. It will also be a critical link on the northeast passage trade route to Europe.<sup>46</sup>

This relationship does not stop with resources and investment; it also includes joint military operations with Russia. When President Obama visited the Arctic in 2015, there was an extensive Sino-Russian naval exercise, which included five Chinese naval vessels off America's Aleutian Islands.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, the Arctic's vast distances, limited surveillance, and outdated radars make it almost impossible to track Russian and Chinese exercises, which causes a headache for the US intelligence community. As the former US Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Paul Zukunft told a virtual audience at the 2020 Defense News Conference, "Things start to get pretty dark once you get up higher than 72 degrees north."<sup>48</sup>

Besides holding military exercises with Russia, Chinese firms attempted to purchase an abandoned naval base in Gronnedal and three airports in Greenland.<sup>49</sup> Greenland, looking for foreign investment, was on board with the deal, and had the US not stepped in, it likely would have allowed Chinese investment and presence in its territory for the first time in history. Seeing the military potential of the facilities, the US intervened and promised Denmark investment in the region. With the support of the United States, Denmark rejected the Chinese offers and ultimately underwrote the building of the new airports.<sup>50</sup> In April 2020, "The United States announced a \$12.1 million economic aid package for Greenland aimed at strengthening mutual ties and boosting a renewed US push for a greater military presence in the Arctic."<sup>51</sup> Although this was a reactive action instead of deterring measures such as

more ISR, the US' investment in Greenland is an excellent example of the greater attention the US needs to pay to China's growing activities in the Arctic. Although geography and history suggest that Russia and China would be natural competitors for Arctic resources and influence, for now, it seems that Russia and China have aligned themselves against the West.<sup>52</sup>

China has the economic clout to play the long game and interfere around the world. As they do in other parts of the world, the People's Republic of China moved deliberately and became more involved in the Arctic in the 1990s with a long-term vision. Although the Chinese present their interventions as harmless economic investments, there is growing evidence that these Chinese efforts provide beachheads for Chinese security and military involvement. According to Mark Rosen,

this nationalist investment pattern has followed in South Asia and West Africa with mostly State-Owned Chinese Enterprises (SOEs). With those actions (commercial on their face) came the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy, which began using the facilities to support their vessels' routine deployments and also started threatening those that might interfere with China's right to make investments and use military force to protect Chinese nationals and their property interests.<sup>53</sup>

With China's pattern of using economic clout to enter an area and then doing as it pleases, the United States cannot allow the same to happen in the Arctic region. The Arctic is much too important for the US to allow it.

### **Part III – A More Effective US Response to China's Activities in the Arctic**

Our network of allied relationships and capabilities is the United States' greatest strategic advantage in the Arctic region. Our defense ties extend and amplify the credibility of our collective deterrent against shared challenges; enhance our ability to contend with strategic competition; and form the basis for a mutual approach to maintaining a secure and stable Arctic region<sup>54</sup>

As the above quote from the 2019 Department of Defense *Arctic Strategy* states, the United States' strategic advantage is its network of allied relationships and capabilities. The US cannot maintain a secure Arctic alone. As such, US allies and partners have demonstrated growing concern over the security implications of Chinese and Russian activities to militarize the Arctic. As previously discussed, Denmark canceled Chinese investment in Greenland due to its concerns over China's interest in the autonomous territory.<sup>55</sup> According to Heljar Havnes in, *The Increasing Security Focus in China's Arctic Policy*, "Japan – a permanent observer member of the Arctic Council, the principal multilateral forum for Arctic governance – has similarly identified China as a threat to the rules-based order governing the Arctic. Arctic nations such as Denmark, Sweden, and Norway have supported the US position or singled China out unilaterally as a potential threat in the Arctic."<sup>56</sup> These actions taken by US allies are critical. They demonstrate that the United States does not stand alone in its view of distrust towards China. With the support and backing of its allies, the US is much stronger than if it were to take unilateral action.

NATO allies also share the United States' concerns for the region. For example, In October 2018, NATO held its largest Arctic military exercise since the Cold War.<sup>57</sup> Trident Juncture 2018 included 50,000 participants from all 29 NATO and partner countries to include 20,000 US troops, 250 aircraft, 65 ships, and up to 10,000 vehicles. This was the first time in nearly 30 years that a US aircraft carrier and strike group ships crossed the Arctic Circle (see figure 7 for AO).<sup>58</sup>

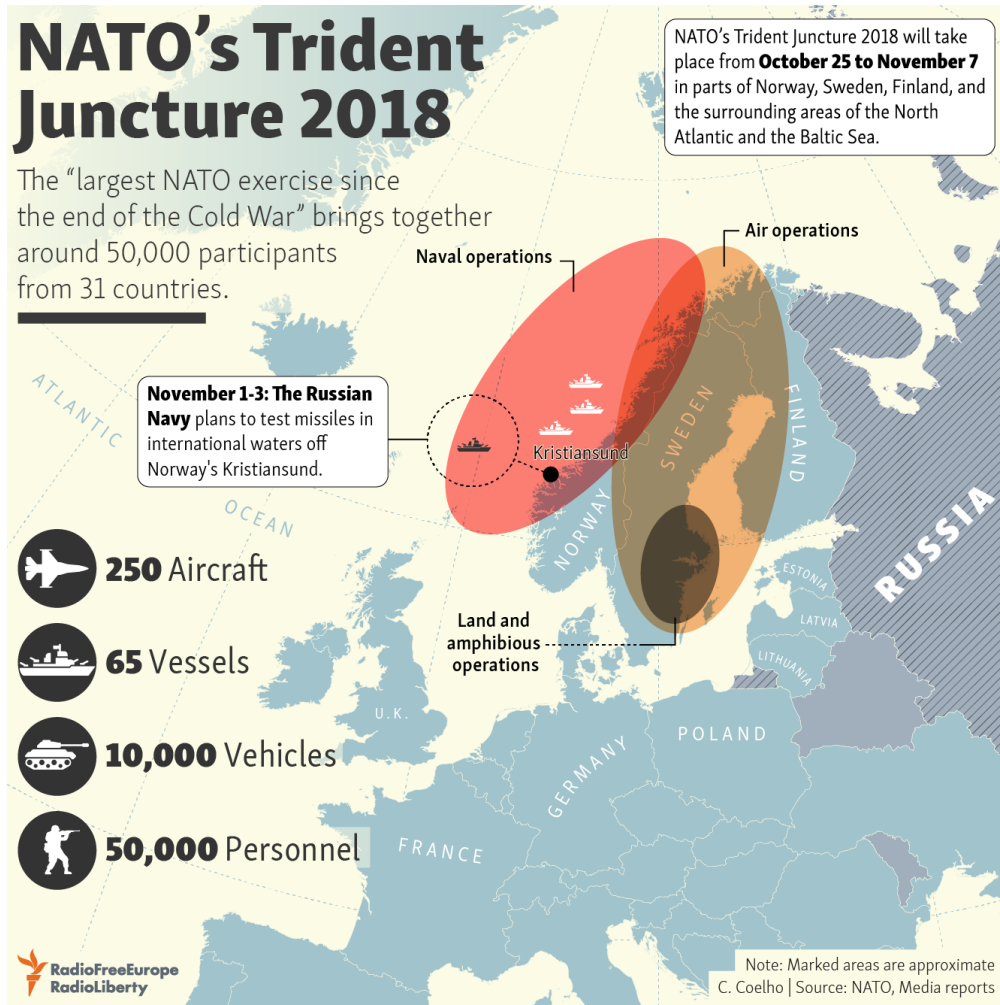


Figure 7: NATO's Trident Juncture 2018 AO<sup>59</sup>

Russia shared its displeasure and opposition to the Trident Juncture 2018 exercise. However, it proved to the world, including China, that the United States and its allies are capable and willing to operate in the Arctic region as one.

"In April of 2019, the Pentagon, in its annual report to Congress on China's military power, included for the first time a section about the Arctic and warned of the risks of a growing Chinese presence in the region, including the possible deployment of nuclear submarines in the future."<sup>60</sup> Since then, DoD is paying more and more attention to the Arctic as a key region for great power competition. For the first time in US history, all of the military services have their own individual Arctic strategies.<sup>61</sup> For the Navy and Marine Corps, its strategy, *A Blue Arctic: A Strategic Blueprint for the Arctic*, identifies the area

"stretching from Maine in the North Atlantic across the Arctic Ocean through the Bering Strait and Alaska in the North Pacific to the southern tip of the Aleutian Island chain" as an area of vital US interests and calls for "fostering compliance with existing rules to assure a peaceful and prosperous Arctic region."<sup>62</sup> The Coast Guard's 2019 strategy points out how China persistently challenges international law with its East and South China Seas activities. It further states that "China's pattern of behavior in the Indo-Pacific region and its disregard for international law are cause for concern as its economic and scientific presence in the Arctic grows."<sup>63</sup> For the Army, it understands that the "Arctic has the potential to become a contested space where United States' great power rivals, Russia and China, seek to use military and economic power to gain and maintain access to the region at the expense of US interests."<sup>64</sup> Aware of the threat, the Army's 2021 Arctic strategy, *Regaining Arctic Dominance*, points out its Arctic intentions from the start. In the strategy's foreword, the Army Chief of Staff states that "the Army is committed to defending our Arctic interests. Accordingly, the Army will field a Multi-Domain Task Force-enabled division and adjust our Alaskan-based brigade combat teams to regain the US Army's Arctic dominance."<sup>65</sup> In July 2020, the Air Force released its Arctic strategy and maintains that the Air and Space Forces will defend the homeland by maintaining vigilance through investment in missile warning and defense, as well as command, control, communications, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C3ISR).<sup>66</sup> As the United States seeks to increase its presence in the Arctic, as each military branch strategy declares, the US must do more to develop a strategic response to China. To secure its interest in the Arctic and promote peace in the region, the United States must do two things. It must ratify UNCLOS, and it must invest in Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities with its Arctic allies.

#### **Part IV – United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**

In the *2019 Report to Congress*, the Department of Defense Arctic strategy states:

Maintaining freedoms of navigation and overflight are critical to ensuring that the Arctic remains a free and open domain and that US forces retain the global mobility guaranteed under international law. DOD will continue to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows. When necessary and appropriate, the United States will challenge excessive maritime claims in the Arctic to preserve the rules-based international order and the rights and freedoms of the international community in navigation and overflight, as well as for other related high seas uses.<sup>67</sup>

What is significant about this is that the 'international law,' that it is describing, UNCLOS, "sets forth a comprehensive regime of law and order in the world's oceans, including the Arctic Ocean."<sup>68</sup> Not yet ratified by the United States, this treaty defines the freedoms of navigation and overflights that the United States enforces. Without UNCLOS, the Arctic would be a lawless region.

According to the Ottawa Declaration, the "Arctic Council does not and cannot implement or enforce guidelines, assessments or recommendations. That responsibility belongs to the individual Arctic states or international bodies."<sup>69</sup> Even without a ruling organization over the Arctic, the region has remained secure and safe through cooperation. Because the Arctic is an ocean basin, unlike Antarctica, a landmass, it does not have a specific treaty for addressing multilateral presence. For this reason, UNCLOS has been adopted by the Arctic nations. Forming the basis for governance of the Arctic, it is now the only international governing instrument that covers the Arctic.<sup>70</sup>

Understanding UNCLOS is therefore an important step for protecting peace and stability in the Arctic region. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), UNCLOS "replaced the four Geneva Conventions of April 1958, which respectively concerned the territorial sea and the contiguous zone, the continental shelf, the high seas, fishing and conservation of living resources on the high seas."<sup>71</sup> Since its adoption in 1982, a total of 162 countries and the European Union have ratified UNCLOS.<sup>72</sup> Although the

United States was instrumental in creating the framework of UNCLOS and drove the process through the United Nations, the US Senate has failed to ratify the treaty.<sup>73</sup> This does not mean that the United States behaves unilaterally. The United States continues to promote freedom of the seas and global mobility of maritime and aviation interest for all nations in accordance with international law.<sup>74</sup> It uses its military to enforce the freedom of navigation throughout the world to include the South China Sea.

US opponents of UNCLOS have argued against its ratification since its inception. According to Aditya Verma in, *A Case for the United States' Ratification of UNCLOS*, one of the historical arguments against UNCLOS is that the "convention violates the United States' sovereignty and that it gives too much power to Communist countries like the Soviet Union."<sup>75</sup> Such opponents still support this claim but now argue that UNCLOS gives too much power to China. Opponents also argue "that the United States might have to surrender sovereignty to the International Seabed Authority (ISA), which has oversight over deep seabed mining."<sup>76</sup>

Although these concerns should be considered, the United States must ratify the treaty to gain legitimacy in the Arctic and around the world. The United States will continue to provide freedom of navigation and protect other nations' sovereignty, but ratifying the treaty will show the world that the US plays by the rules and respects the laws imposed on others. It does not take much to see the benefits of ratifying the treaty. All one has to do is to look at China, which has ratified the treaty. Adhering to UNCLOS, China views the Arctic as belonging to all the people around the world and believes that no nation has sovereignty over it.<sup>77</sup> This grants China the legal right of innocent passage, permitting transit and freedom of navigation as long as these vessels are not conducting activities exclusively prohibited such as weapons testing, polluting, or fishing. For example, the Sino-Russian exercise in 2015, while President Obama was in Alaska, was legal under UNCLOS as long as the vessels

stayed outside of US territorial waters (12 miles from shore).<sup>78</sup> The United States could not take any action as long as China and Russia observed the law.

It is important to recognize China's legal right to utilize Arctic waterways. However, there is a clear irony in China turning to international maritime agreements like the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in the Arctic while completely flouting them in the South China Sea. It is a long past time for the US to ratify UNCLOS. This will allow America to speak with legal authority on China's hypocrisy and obtain leverage in Arctic affairs as climate change accelerates the scramble for offshore and seabed resources."<sup>79</sup>

How does ratifying the treaty help the United States? First off, it will give the United States legitimacy when it comes to enforcing freedom of navigation. As suggested earlier, the United States follows the law of the sea and supports freedom of navigation. On several occasions and quite often, the United States Navy has entered into the contested South China Sea to prove to US allies and partners their rights for freedom of navigation. On February 16, 2021, the USS Russell challenged the unlawful restrictions imposed by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam as it asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the Spratly Islands, which fall within their claim to the nine-dash line (see figure 6).<sup>80</sup> The three countries require either permission or advance notification before a foreign military vessel engages in "innocent passage" through the territorial sea."<sup>81</sup> By sailing in this region, the United States upheld and defended the rights and freedoms recognized in international law.<sup>82</sup> As evidenced by France's patrolling of the South China Sea with a nuclear-propelled attack submarine and warship in February 2021 and Germany's announcement of its plans to sail a warship across the South China Sea in August 2021, more US allies should be willing to fall in line behind it on Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs),<sup>83</sup>

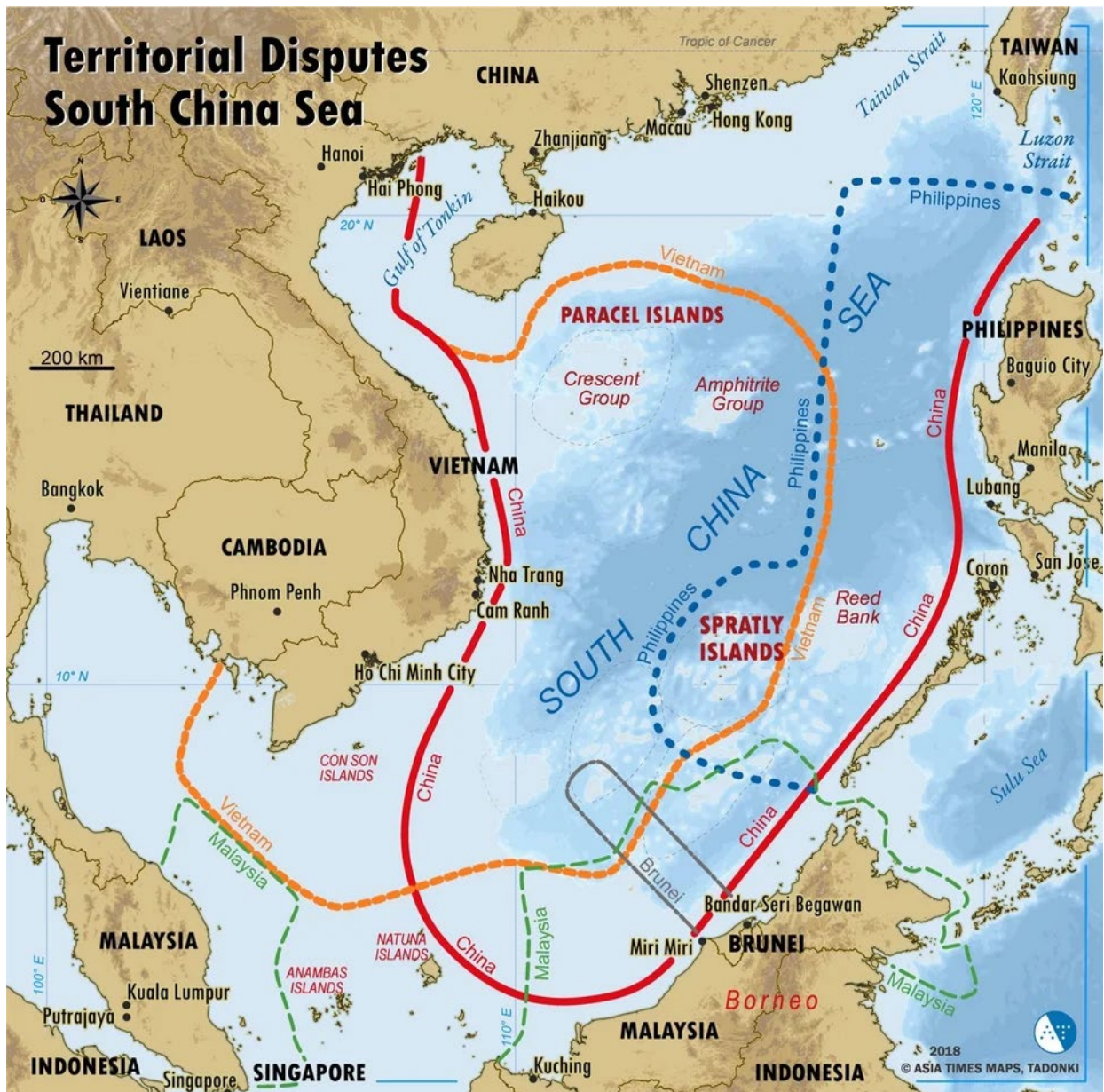


Figure 8: Territorial Disputes South China Sea<sup>84</sup>

Actions like this make it essential for the United States to ratify the treaty, a treaty the US goes to great lengths to support and defend. Ratification of the treaty would strengthen the United States' legitimacy when it does take those actions. It would also help the US hold China accountable to the current rules-based order in the Arctic. Despite the security implications of Chinese polar ambitions, there is room for China in this order—so long as its activities abide by international law.<sup>85</sup> What better way to ensure China's obedience to the

law than having the world's number one power ratify the treaty that most nations follow at sea.

As a rising power, China uses everything it can to damage and delegitimize the United States and international law through the practice of lawfare. Aside from gaining legitimacy, the US' ratification of the treaty would give the US the means to use "constructive" lawfare to counter China's increasing use of "destructive" lawfare.<sup>86</sup> Defined as the "use and misuse of international law to achieve strategic claims," China is a "nation that does not culturally/politically value the rule of law and primarily employs destructive lawfare strategies."<sup>87</sup> For example, in the South China Sea, China requires "prior notification and approval to allow other countries' warships to transit China's EEZ, but it is free to operate its own military vessels in the EEZs of other states that do not restrict military activities in the EEZ."<sup>88</sup> This contradiction between its actions and the expectations in its own backyard is an apparent disregard for Article 87 of UNCLOS, which grants, among other things, freedom of navigation.<sup>89</sup>

One other example of China manipulating the law is apparent in the construction of islands in the South China Sea. Although allowed by law in Article 60, the article also states that "Artificial islands, installations, and structures do not possess the status of islands. They have no territorial sea of their own, and their presence does not affect the delimitation of the territorial sea, the exclusive economic zone, or the continental shelf."<sup>90</sup> In this case, China follows the law to its advantage when it builds the island but then has concerns when the US and other nations sail near said islands. Islands that China sees as an extension to its regional sovereignty rights. To counter this, the US should ratify UNCLOS and call out China on its actions through the international community. As stated in the previous paragraph, the US will then have the legitimacy to take action under constructive lawfare. "The concerted effort of the United States to use the mechanisms of the law, a law-based value system, and an

adherence to the international rule of law as a means of constructing legitimate institutions at local, national, and international levels is both advantageous foreign policy and a moral duty."<sup>91</sup>

Finally, UNCLOS will give the United States the right to claim portions of the Arctic that it currently does not have the authority to claim. Ratifying UNCLOS would help secure the United States' legal rights to more than 386,000 square miles of subsea resources along its extended continental shelf. Once ratified, the United States would have ten years to make claims to that extended continental shelf, which, if validated, would give it the exclusive right to resources on or below the seabed of that extended shelf area.<sup>92</sup> For example, "Canada ratified UNCLOS on November 7, 2003, and had until 2013 to file an extended shelf claim. As a partial submission in 2013, Canada declared sovereignty over approximately 1.2 million square kilometers."<sup>93</sup> Former Commandant of the Coast Guard, Admiral Thad Allen (ret.) summarizes it best:

Without signing on to UNCLOS, any claims we make will be unilateral claims made on behalf of the United States that are not subject to the regime of the Law of the Sea treaty. And a lot of things—how we preach and act around the world, including our positions on the South China Sea and the recent case involving the jurisdictional dispute between China and the Philippines, directly reflect our understanding and the need to abide by the tenets of the Law of the Sea treaty.<sup>94</sup>

As it currently stands, without the ratification of UNCLOS, the US does not have the legal right to hold a position at the table for any law of the sea arbitration. Allen's statement reinforces two things; ratifying UNCLOS would give the United States legitimacy on any actions it takes against China, and second, it would benefit the US on any claims it makes in the Arctic on its extended continental shelf. With a new administration, the US has the opportunity to ratify UNCLOS, bringing the US in compliance with international law and legitimizing the US claims to more Arctic territory.

## Part V – Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR)

Not only should the United States ratify UNCLOS to support its actions in the Arctic, but it should also seek new technologies to improve domain awareness in the region. The Arctic Circle was once a strategic commitment for both NATO and the United States.<sup>95</sup> This commitment involved the construction of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) line, a series of radar stations across the Arctic stretching from Alaska through Canada over Greenland to Iceland (see figure 7).<sup>96</sup> From its conception in the late 1950s, it provided an early warning against any bombers coming over the North Pole that could threaten North American cities.<sup>97</sup>



Figure 9: The Dew Line-Cold War Defense at the Top of the World<sup>98</sup>

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States and other Arctic states have dedicated fewer resources and attention to the region, resulting in less than adequate surveillance capabilities. One can just look at the current situation in Greenland to see how investment and security have dwindled in the High North.

From 1959 to 1991, Greenland was part of the North American Aerospace Defence Command, an integrated chain of 63 radar and communication centres stretching 3,000 miles from Western Alaska across the Canadian Arctic. It had four radars operating on its ice sheet. Two were dismantled; the other two were abandoned and are now slowly sinking into the ice. Today, to monitor its vast area, Greenland has one aircraft, four helicopters and four ships. In addition to enforcing sovereignty, they handle fishing inspection and search and rescue operations. Six sleds powered by 80 dogs patrol the remote northeastern part.<sup>99</sup>

This lack of ISR has depleted the United States and its partners' ability to monitor their own backyard. Many times, the detection of adversary assets or military exercises is left to chance. One such example is given by the former US Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Paul Zukunft when he described a surprising incident. He states that, "the Coast Guard sent a national security cutter to patrol the region in a relatively ice-free portion of the season and they stumbled upon a joint exercise between Russia and China. The intelligence community did not have an awareness that this was going on."<sup>100</sup> On a separate account, on an "August afternoon in 2017, a civilian, Akitsinguaq Ina Olsen, was relaxing in the old harbor of Nuuk, Greenland's capital, when a Chinese icebreaker sailed unannounced into the Arctic island's territorial waters."<sup>101</sup>

The two examples illustrate the region's lack of security and only prove that the Arctic requires better ISR capabilities. The problem is not that Russia and China are conducting exercises in the Arctic. Under UNCLOS, that is their right. However, the issue here is that neither the United States nor its allies can track adversary movements and actions.

The dirty little secret of the Arctic is that we do not really know what is happening up there. Canada only recently launched satellites and expanded the Canadian Air Defence Identification Zone to enable the possibility of surveilling of the entire country. Even so, Canada's new Arctic Policy Framework does not commit to funding full surveillance of the North American Arctic. In other words, before now, we could not see all of the Canadian Arctic. The US Coast Guard also readily admits that it has limited ability to cover the entire Alaskan Coast<sup>102</sup>

As Lindsay Roadman points out, the US and its Arctic allies have insufficient awareness of the growing number of Chinese and Russian activities in the Arctic. If these two cases are

any indicator of what is occurring in the Arctic region, it is best not to leave the tracking and surveillance of peer competitors to chance. "At the end of the Cold War, many considered the Arctic to be a secure border, whose frigid expanse acted as an extra layer of homeland defense. Today, technological advancements by potential adversaries and outdated radar are making this once forbidding border increasingly porous."<sup>103</sup> With limited satellite vision and reduced ISR, the Arctic region is a security black hole. The gaps evident in the region are not acceptable and are even more dangerous in an era of great power competition.

"Among the allies, a consensus has formed that as China and Russia seek to exploit the warming Arctic for new, faster shipping routes and for resources, it is essential they invest in greater surveillance capabilities."<sup>104</sup> In the Arctic, it is necessary to invest in all-domain capabilities, and due to its vast area, the Arctic's security must be a joint venture. These investments can no longer concentrate on surface ISR. As the Air Forces' 2020 Arctic Strategy states, "given the Arctic's vast distances and challenges to surface operations, air and space capabilities have long been essential to gain rapid access and provide all-domain awareness, early warning, satellite command and control, and effective deterrence."<sup>105</sup> To have a secure Arctic region and protect their sovereignty, the ally nations must invest in space, air, surface, and undersea capabilities, which will provide security in the region without increasing military confrontation. As Denmark's Defense Minister Trine Bramsen stated, "we need better surveillance and presence in the region – not to escalate conflicts, but because we need to take the threats seriously."<sup>106</sup>

The Navy's 2021 *Strategic Blueprint for the Arctic* makes it clear that "the Department will assess and prioritize Command, Control, Computers, Communications, Cyber-defense, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C5ISR) capabilities in the Arctic region, to include resilient, survivable, and interoperable networks and information systems of naval tactical forces, operations centers, and strategic planning. These capabilities will enhance

domain awareness with the joint force, US interagency, allies, and partners in the Arctic region."<sup>107</sup> Keywords in their strategy are domain awareness, interagency, allies, and partners. It is clear that the United States cannot do this alone. It would be too costly, both in funding and personnel. To accomplish better oversight of the region, the United States must strengthen and form relationships with other actors to succeed.

For aerial monitoring and reconnaissance, the United States should invest in a fleet of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. One shelf system that could support this requirement without the need to invest in newer technology is the MQ-9 or MQ-9B.

With the right concept of operations, the MQ-9 or the MQ-9B can provide affordable 24/7 coverage of the territory and without risk to human lives, which is important due to harsh environmental conditions and recent provocations by Russian aircraft. The MQ-9B, in particular, offers all-weather features, allows for persistent surveillance with up to 40 hours of endurance, and provides a significant reduction in manpower enabled by automation. These features combined with 'plug and play' architecture and variety of sensor and payload options makes MQ-9B the ideal multi-role platform needed to address the range of capability gaps in the Arctic. Its affordable acquisition and operating costs relative to other aircraft, also allows it to be the perfect complement to other air and surface assets by providing constant situational awareness with the ability to identify, detect, track, and deter potential air and maritime threats, and optimize the use of more expensive manned platforms for interdictions or other operations. Additionally, the MQ-9B can conduct low-cost environmental monitoring and other civil missions critical to the overall stability of the region.<sup>108</sup>

This asset's capability would be beneficial in ensuring better surveillance of the region. It will have the ability to conduct unrestricted operations by 2024. Experts believe that it can also be used to improve over-the-horizon surveillance and communications and augment satellite-based surveillance and communications system.<sup>109</sup> This persistent situational awareness, through the use of the MQ-9, will close a well-known gap that the adversaries regularly exploit to gain a military advantage.

Other Arctic states see this vulnerability and have already acknowledged interest in more ISR in the region. In February 2021, Denmark pledged to significantly strengthen its defense capabilities and spend half of the allocated \$245 million on drones to improve surveillance in

Greenland.<sup>110</sup> For Canada, it recently purchased an Israeli drone system for \$36 million to help the federal government monitor the growing maritime activity in Canada's Arctic.<sup>111</sup> "The Hermes 900 StarLiner, a civilian version of Elbit's medium-altitude long-endurance military drones, will join Transport Canada National Aerial Surveillance Program aircraft fleet. It is expected to be delivered by December 2022."<sup>112</sup> The United States must also invest in undersea ISR technology. This will provide better all domain monitoring of the Arctic.

As the sea ice melts, it not only opens up the sea lanes but also provides the opportunity for submarines to navigate the coast without detection. To counter this, the United States and its allies should also invest in submersible technology that can provide ISR beneath the surface. Current U.S. undersea surveillance cannot reliably track new submarines, which means that enemy submarines can maneuver undetected throughout the Arctic Ocean.<sup>113</sup>

If Chinese nuclear-armed submarines were able to access the Arctic basin undetected, this would be a game-changer for the United States, the NATO states and their partners, and the wider Asia-Pacific. China would be able to target missiles at the United States and Europe with ease; such ability would strengthen China's military dominance in Asia and bolster China's emerging position as a global military power.<sup>114</sup>

The threat of Chinese submarines in the Arctic is a reality. In May 2019, Russian military specialist Alexander Shirokorad raised the possibility of Russia providing port support for Chinese submarines in the Arctic. He also proposed a joint Russia-China air and missile defense system for the Arctic.<sup>115</sup>

Even with this threat, the United States Navy lacks an ice-hardened surface fleet and only operates in the region during the most favorable conditions.<sup>116</sup> For undersea monitoring, Bryan Clark from the Hudson Institute, presents a great idea. For underwater monitoring, the allies must "invest in undersea unmanned vehicles with towed array sensors coupled with the passive Sound Surveillance Systems (SOSUS) that could monitor submarine activity heading toward the Atlantic."<sup>117</sup> This network

of drone submarines and sensor buoys sensitive to sound and interferences in the water would provide the ISR required throughout the region. Last year, the United States invested in research for this capability.

There are other examples of new technologies that can provide the US and its Arctic allies better awareness of foreign activities in the Arctic. On September 29, 2020, the Navy awarded the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution a \$12.6 million contract for the statement of work entitled communications, navigation and unmanned vehicles for Arctic operations.<sup>118</sup>

The work to be performed provides for the design, development, integration and testing of an acoustic navigation network, a distributed communication system, gateway buoy nodes and unmanned vehicle capabilities to support the Arctic Mobile Observing System (AMOS) Innovative Naval Prototype<sup>119</sup>

This investment is focused on enhanced monitoring of environmental changes in the Arctic; however, this work could be a stepping stone to the creation of a wide-area persistent underwater surveillance system in this increasingly strategic region.<sup>120</sup>

Expected to be complete by the end of 2024, the Office of Naval Research (ONR)

envisions the AMOS prototype as consisting of various kinds of unmanned undersea vehicles (UUV), including fully-autonomous types, along with fixed sensors. All of this would be tied together through a series of communications and data sharing nodes, suspended underwater underneath buoys installed on the surface of the ice.<sup>121</sup>

The publicly stated goal of AMOS is to monitor and assess activity underneath the ice in the Arctic.<sup>122</sup> Once tested, this system can be networked throughout the Arctic with a fleet of UUVs, an array of fixed sensors, and communication nodes to monitor underwater activity. AMOS would then provide a better understanding of the operational environment for any military operations, and more importantly, it would "help monitor submarine traffic and other maritime movements across broad areas of the open ocean."<sup>123</sup> The question of ISR is not whether we need it or not but how fast it can be implemented with US allies. The system that is finally put in place will have

to reach throughout the vast region of the Arctic. It will have to consist of land, air, and sea capabilities that will work as all domain sensors. Most importantly, ISR infrastructure and capability will be required to function with ally capabilities. As the Department of the Navy's *Unmanned Campaign Framework* states,

strengthening international alliances and strategic partnerships has never been more important. Actively pursuing and investing in international cooperative programs will maximize innovation potential, synergize S&T and R&D efforts, and enable joint solutions that are interoperable or even interchangeable by design.<sup>124</sup>

Failure to partner with allies and invest in ISR will only benefit China and will be detrimental to the United States' ability to secure the Arctic.

## **Part VI – Multilateralism and the New Administration**

With global warming causing drastic changes in the Arctic and raising the chance of accidental conflict, the United States' recent change in administration presents it with an opportunity. It presents an opportunity to explore a more robust multilateral response to China with the support of the United States allies and partners. A response in which the United States is supported by the Arctic Indigenous people, Canada, and other NATO members.<sup>125</sup> With Canada and NATO, the US would benefit from using this alliance within the Arctic region like in other parts of the world. As Secretary Blinken reasserted from the NATO headquarters earlier this year, NATO is “the treaty alliance that has defended the security and freedom of Europe and North America for nearly 75 years.”<sup>126</sup> Unfortunately for various NATO countries, the melting of the Arctic ice gives Russia and China new avenues of approach to their borders and security, including US strategic defenses.

Fortunately, the Biden Administration, to include the Secretary of State, believe that the United States needs strong alliances and partnerships to counter China. On March 24, 2021, in his speech at the NATO Headquarters, Secretary of State Blinken reasserted the American government and its people’s commitment to US allies. In his opening remarks, not only does he call out China, but he confirms how the administration and the American people support and believe in a strong alliance with NATO.

Now, Americans disagree about a few things, but the value of alliances and partnerships is not one of them. According to a recent poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, nine in ten Americans believe that maintaining our alliances is the most effective way to achieve our foreign policy goals. Nine in ten. It's not hard to see why. They look at the threats we face – like climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic inequality, an increasingly assertive China – and they know that the United States is much better off tackling them with partners, rather than trying to do it alone. And all our allies can say the same.<sup>127</sup>

The answer to counter China's aggression in the Arctic or anywhere else is not unilateral action but multilateral action supported by NATO allies and other partners. In his same speech to NATO leaders, Secretary of State Blinken provides the United States own experience after the 9/11 attacks. He reaffirms the importance of NATO's support after the attacks that many Americans still hold dear. By adding the United States experience with NATO and the gratitude of the American people, Secretary Blinken pledges US commitment to NATO.

When America was attacked on 9/11, our NATO Allies immediately and unanimously invoked Article 5 – an attack on one is an attack on all. This is still the only time in history that Article 5 has been invoked – and it was to protect the United States. We will never forget it. And our allies can expect the same from us today. As President Biden said to the Munich Security Conference last month, you have our unshakable vow: America is fully committed to NATO, including Article 5.<sup>128</sup>

His speech at the NATO headquarters signifies a strong commitment to America's allies and partners.

Although this study focuses on the ratification of UNCLOS and ISR, there is much more that should be done once both requirements are achieved. A true secure Arctic will need to include a multilateral agreement between the NATO allies, the Arctic's indigenous people, and the United States to ensure a multinational presence in the region. From the indigenous communities, the impact and knowledge the US and allies would gain are indispensable. They would be an important piece of this alliance and would likely agree in supporting it as their dependency on the sea for trade and transport increases. In January 2021, President Biden, in an executive order, gave indigenous leaders a more significant say in projects and policies that impact them.<sup>129</sup> Understanding the importance of their knowledge and experience within the region, President Biden stated,

My administration is committed to honoring Tribal sovereignty and including Tribal voices in policy deliberation that affects Tribal communities. The

Federal Government has much to learn from Tribal Nations, and strong communication is fundamental to a constructive relationship.<sup>130</sup>

The alliance between the US, NATO, and the Indigenous people in the region would look much like the Arctic Council. The critical difference would be that the alliance would be there to protect not only the Arctic states from Russia and China's aggressions but those NATO countries that are also affected by the region's reduction in ice throughout the year.

From large training exercises to new and updated ISR systems spanning from Norway to Alaska, the Arctic will require the investment of money and personnel. It will also require the experience and knowledge that the Indigenous people have gained from living in such a remote and cold area. Together, with a strong multilateral partnership, the Arctic can remain a region with strategic advantages for the United States and its allies against any Chinese and Russian aggression.

## Part VII – Conclusion

Climate change has transformed the Arctic "from an insular region with limited geopolitical and geoeconomic relevance into the next great frontier of opportunity for countries around the world."<sup>131</sup> Long overlooked by the United States, the Arctic region has become an area of economic opportunity and a region that can affect the sovereignty of the US and the other Arctic and non-Arctic states. CSIS Senior Vice President Heather Conley testified to Congress that "the failure of the US and its allies to develop an operational plan that envisions a persistent security presence in the Arctic, will erode the ability to shape policy outcomes, exacting national security consequences and working in favor of China's and Russia's interests."<sup>132</sup> It is crucial for US policymakers to become more aware and not ignore the increase in Chinese and Russian activities in the Arctic and adequately understand the growing threats to US national interest in the region.

As examined in this paper, the United States should ratify UNCLOS and invest in ISR throughout the region. The United States is an Arctic state by right of Alaska, but China "believes that in line with international legal treaties — especially the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Spitsbergen Treaty — it enjoys such rights as scientific research, freedom of navigation, and overflight, fishery, cable-laying and resource development in the Arctic high seas."<sup>133</sup> Throughout China's Arctic White Paper, China references its actions as legal rights by the authority of UNCLOS. In this aspect, China has the upper hand. It does, "since its inception, much of the discussion about the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) has centered on the United States' refusal to ratify it which, according to proponents of ratification, has left US interests unsecured in a rapidly warming and increasingly accessible Arctic."<sup>134</sup> It is difficult for the US to justify its seat at the table during arbitration when it refuses to ratify the law of the sea. To counter this and any attempt China may make to have higher stakes in the region, the United States must

ratify UNCLOS. The ratification of UNCLOS would give the US legitimacy in maritime affairs and strengthen its hand in limiting China's activities in the Arctic.

UNCLOS is only one part of the requirement; the region will also require better surveillance and tracking. The Department of the Navy's *Unmanned Campaign Framework* states that "Unmanned systems will increase lethality, capacity, survivability, operational tempo, deterrence, and operational readiness."<sup>135</sup> The US cannot continue to rely on chance to find Chinese nor Russian activities in the Arctic. It must act now. Stretching a vast area that is almost impossible to monitor, the US and allies will have to work together to place a robust system of sensors and unmanned capabilities that will allow for all-domain ISR. This feat that cannot be accomplished by the United States alone. Fortunately for the Arctic region's future, the October 2018 Maritime Unmanned Systems initiative, "is led by the United States and is an exemplar for international collaboration and innovation delivered at pace."<sup>136</sup> Signed by the defense ministers from 17 nations, the initiative is an excellent example of strengthening global partnerships to achieve advancements in the unmanned space.<sup>137</sup>

As China continues to work and invest with Russia, China's clamp in the Arctic will only increase. The United States can decide not to do anything in the region, but as Conley warned,

If the US chooses not to enhance its physical presence in the Arctic or use multilateral instruments like the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the Arctic Council, and other entities to protect our interests and reinforce international legal norms, US access to and influence in the Arctic region will diminish and our allies and partners in the region will increasingly accommodate Russia's and China's preferred policy outcomes.<sup>138</sup>

As she states, if the US fails to recognize the necessity for multilateral action and it continues to ignore the region as it has done for over 150 years, the US will find itself weak and alone in its own backyard. Now is the time for the US to take action, ratify UNCLOS, and invest with allied partners in the region's security utilizing a system of

all domain ISR. The melting of the Arctic ice is inevitable, and it will continue to bring interested parties to the region. As resources become available, China and Russia will push to ensure their share of the wealth. As Conley stated to the 116th Congress,

The US finds itself lagging behind its peer competitors. A lack of policy priorities, commitment of multi-year financial resources, and political will has shifted the US from being a reluctant Arctic power to an inadequate Arctic power. The US must reassert its presence in all its manifestations to protect American sovereignty, ensure US access to the region, and shape and influence its future development.<sup>139</sup>

The United States must develop a more effective response to China's growing efforts in the Arctic and it needs to do this with the support of its allies. Together, the US and its allies can ensure a safe and secure Arctic where everyone's interests and sovereignty are protected.

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[https://www.navy.mil/Portals/1/Strategic/20210315%20Unmanned%20Campaign\\_Final\\_LoWRes.pdf?ver=LtCZ-BPIWki6vCBTdgtdMA%3D%3D](https://www.navy.mil/Portals/1/Strategic/20210315%20Unmanned%20Campaign_Final_LoWRes.pdf?ver=LtCZ-BPIWki6vCBTdgtdMA%3D%3D)

<sup>125</sup> The six permanent participants of the Arctic Council representing the Indigenous peoples are the Aleut International Association, Arctic Athabaskan Council, Gwich’in Council International, Inuit Circumpolar Council, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, and the Saami Council. Out of a total of 4 million inhabitants of the Arctic, approximately 500,000 belong to Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples’ organizations have been granted Permanent Participants status in the Arctic Council, <https://arctic-council.org/en/about/permanent-participants/>.

<sup>126</sup> Antony J. Blinken, “Secretary Antony Blinken in Brussels: Reaffirming and Reimagining America’s Alliances,” (speech, Brussels, Belgium, March 24, 2021), NATO Headquarters Agora, <https://useu.usmission.gov/secretary-antony-blinken-in-brussels-reaffirming-and-reimagining-americas-alliances/>.

<sup>127</sup> Antony J. Blinken, “Secretary Antony Blinken in Brussels: Reaffirming and Reimagining America’s Alliances.”

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Amanda Batersby, “Biden hands Indigenous leaders greater say,” *Upstream.com*, January 28, 2021, <https://www.upstreamonline.com/politics/biden-hands-indigenous-leaders-greater-say/2-1-952008>.

<sup>130</sup> Amanda Batersby, “Biden hands Indigenous leaders greater say,” *Upstream.com*.

<sup>131</sup> Shiloh Rainwater, “International Law and the ‘Globalization’ of the Arctic: Assessing the Rights of Non-Arctic States in the Hight North,” *Emory International Law Review* 1 (2015), 117, [https://law.emory.edu/eilr/\\_documents/volumes/30/1/comments/rainwater.pdf](https://law.emory.edu/eilr/_documents/volumes/30/1/comments/rainwater.pdf).

<sup>132</sup> Nicola Johnson, “Establishing a Persistent Presence: The Value of Versatile and Affordable UAVs in the Arctic,” *Defense News*.

<sup>133</sup> Swee Lean and Collin Koh “China’s Strategic Interest in the Arctic Goes Beyond Economics,” *Defense News*, May 12, 2020,

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<sup>134</sup> <https://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2020/02/24/unclos-in-the-arctic-a-treaty-for-warmer-waters/>

<sup>135</sup> Department of the Navy. *Unmanned Campaign Framework*, 6.

<sup>136</sup> Department of the Navy. *Unmanned Campaign Framework*, 30.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>138</sup> *The Cost of Doing Nothing: Maritime Infrastructure Vulnerabilities in an Emerging Arctic: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation*, 116<sup>th</sup> Cong., 48 (2019) (statement of Heather A. Conley, Senior Vice President for Europe, Eurasia, and the Arctic, Center for Strategic and International Studies).

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<sup>138</sup> *The Cost of Doing Nothing: Maritime Infrastructure Vulnerabilities in an Emerging Arctic: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation*, 50.

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