

A background image of an Arctic landscape. In the foreground, there are several buildings and structures, possibly a small settlement or research station. In the middle ground, a large ship is visible on the water. The background shows a vast, flat landscape under a cloudy sky. The image is overlaid with a purple rounded rectangle containing the title and a teal bar at the bottom containing the date.

Polar Initiative Policy Brief Series ARCTIC 2014: WHO GETS A VOICE AND WHY IT MATTERS

September 2014



This policy brief series seeks to share with a wider audience the proceedings of the May 2014 conference at the Woodrow Wilson Center that explored emerging challenges facing Arctic governance, analyzed the goals and policies of stakeholder nations, and evaluated means for promoting international cooperation. The conference was

U.S. National Interests in the Arctic

The United States is an Arctic nation with important strategic interests in this rapidly transforming region. U.S. interests in the Arctic have been strikingly consistent for the past four decades despite the fact that the Arctic Ocean is becoming a new “blue water” ocean. In 1971, President Richard Nixon’s National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM-144) on the Arctic promoted:

the sound and rational development of the Arctic, guided by the principle of minimizing any adverse effects to the environment; promoting mutually beneficial international cooperation in the Arctic; and at the same time providing for the protection of essential security interests in the Arctic, including preservation of the principles of freedom of the seas and superjacent airspace.

The same strategic goals of “advance[ing] U.S. security interests; pursue[ing] responsible Arctic region stewardship and strengthen[ing] international cooperation” were repeated 42 years later in the 2013 National Strategy for the Arctic Region. Yet, despite this policy consistency, the United States (with the exception of the State of Alaska) frequently must remind itself that it is an Arctic nation as noted in the very final paragraph of the 2010 U.S. National Security Strategy, “The United States is an Arctic Nation with broad and fundamental interests in the Arctic Region.”

One of its most important instruments of national protection, the U.S. missile defense system, is in part located in the Arctic (Fort Greely in Alaska, and Thule Air Force Base in Greenland). The United States is also a science power in the Polar regions, spending approximately \$1.5 billion last fiscal year alone.¹

What Does American Arctic Policy Look Like Today?

Historically, U.S. strategic documents related to the Arctic were produced approximately every 10 to 15 years. But in the last two years alone, the United States has been a strategy-drafting machine with the release of numerous strategic documents, such as the May 2013 National Strategy for the Arctic Region. Other strategy documents that followed included the May 2013 U.S. Coast Guard Arctic Strategy, the Defense Department’s Arctic Strategy released in November 2013, the January 2014 Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for the Arctic Region, and the U.S. Navy’s Updated Arctic Roadmap released in February 2014.

In addition to producing strategies, the United States has also issued numerous thick studies and assessments in recent years. In July 2010, the U.S. Coast Guard released its High Latitude Study that examined the Coast Guard’s present and future ability to conduct its missions in the Polar Regions, including the need for additional icebreakers. The following year, the Department of Defense released its report to Congress on Arctic Operations and the Northwest Passage, which addressed strategic national security objectives, necessary improvements to mission capabilities and basing infrastructure, and the need for icebreakers. In March 2013, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issued the Alaska Deep Draft Arctic Port System Study, which identified Arctic navigation improvements in support of maritime missions. The United States has also conducted several icebreaker assessments, including the 2007 National Research Council Report, *Polar Icebreakers in a Changing World: An Assessment of U.S. Needs*; the 2010 U.S. Arctic Research Commission Report; and the 2011 DHS Office of the Inspector General Report.

¹ This is a rough estimate of the National Science Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and National Aeronautics and Space Administration polar budgets.

This increased U.S. report and strategy writing activity is an acknowledgement that: (1) the United States is attempting to strategically come to grips with a new ocean; but, (2) it has not yet come to terms with the budget implications of the infrastructure, development, and security costs of the Arctic's transformation.

U.S. Arctic Policy: Lost and Found?

There are two critical elements missing from U.S. Arctic policy: long-term vision and adequate funding to support the vision. To be successful, the United States must develop a long-term, national economic and stewardship strategy for the Arctic, which would be wisely resourced through public-private partnerships for deep-water ports, aviation assets, infrastructure, communication, and navigational assets for ice-strengthened vessels. Unfortunately, the United States has already fallen behind in developing its long-term vision (other than to assess and monitor Arctic developments) and national budget allocations for infrastructure and stewardship related purposes have not yet happened. In full cooperation with the State of Alaska, Washington must make the Arctic a policy priority now before it becomes a policy problem due to a mass causality or environmental incident.

The United States has a great opportunity to prioritize the Arctic since, from 2015 to 2017, it will have the chairmanship of the Arctic Council, which will be a prime opportunity to develop America's Arctic policy. This chairmanship will offer Washington an opportunity to highlight that the United States is an Arctic nation and to

educate the American people about U.S. Arctic engagement—generally a good news story—while underscoring the importance of U.S. leadership and engagement in the Arctic region. As the Arctic Council celebrates its twentieth anniversary during the American chairmanship in 2016, the United States should help prepare the way for the Arctic Council's next 20 years.

Another opportunity lies in the appointment of the U.S. Special Representative for the Arctic Region. In July 2014, Secretary of State John Kerry announced that Admiral Robert Papp, former U.S. Coast Guard commandant, will serve as the U.S. Special Representative for the Arctic; and former Alaskan Lieutenant Governor Fran Ulmer, chair of the U.S. Arctic Research Commission, will advise on Arctic science and policy. These officials will play a critical role in advancing U.S. interests in the Arctic region both domestically and internationally, as well as strengthen cohesion and efficiency among U.S. government agencies that address Arctic issues.

While the moment seems particularly ripe for active U.S. engagement throughout the Arctic region, challenging geopolitical times lie ahead. As the crisis over Ukraine continues, relations among Arctic nations, particularly bilateral relations between Canada and Russia and the United States and Russia, have grown very tense, having an immediate impact on the work of the Arctic Council.² Ambitious Arctic cooperative projects have been temporarily set aside, including a joint U.S.-Russian hazards-reduction workshop, which was intended to share information about lessons learned and risks avoided regarding natural disasters in Alaska. Russia's heightened military presence

² For additional information on the effects of the Ukrainian crisis on the Arctic Council, see Yereth Rosen, "U.S.-Russian tensions create worries for Arctic scientists", *Anchorage Daily News*, May 9, 2014, <http://www.adn.com/2014/05/09/3463580/us-russia-tensions-create-worries.html>; and John Crump, "Diplomatic Chill: A new cold war in the warming Arctic?", Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, May 1, 2014, <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/monitor/diplomatic-chill>.

development. We need to think about it for a long time (and 22 federal agencies need to be part of that thinking) before we make a decision." The answer from the State of Alaska is quite different: " We have and must continue

that the United States is not truly interested or invested in a safe and sustainably developed Arctic.

To conclude on a more positive note, the U.S. chairmanship of the Arctic Council provides an incredibly important opportunity for the United States to strengthen its internal and external leadership on three specific topics:

- Strengthen measures for safe Arctic shipping including:
 - » make IMO polar code standards for Arctic shipping mandatory;
 - » improve maritime domain awareness;
 - » improve vessel tracking mechanisms;
 - » and enhance the capacity and effective implementation of the international search and rescue (SAR) and oil spill

response agreements with a specific focus on the Bering Strait.

- » These efforts will require public-private investment, potential new institutions and structures, and collaborative development to enhance safety and protection of the marine environment.

- Seek a far-reaching Arctic Council agreement to reduce black carbon and short-lived climate forcers (SLCF), including methane. This initiative should engage Arctic Council members and observers, such as China and India.
- Finally, increase focus on the health and well-being, subsistence culture, food security, and sustainable development of indigenous communities.

Heather Conley is vice president for Europe, Eurasia, and the Arctic, and director of the Europe Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Prior to joining CSIS, Conley was a senior advisor to the Center for European Policy Analysis. From 2005 to 2008, she was the executive director of the Office of the Chairman of the Board at the American National Red Cross; from 2001 to 2005, she served as deputy assistant secretary of state in the Bureau for European and Eurasian Affairs; and, from 1994 to 2001, she was a senior associate with firm led by former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard L. Armitage. Conley began her career in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs at the U.S. Department of State and, following this assignment, was selected to serve as special assistant to the coordinator of U.S. assistance to the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. Conley received her B.A. in international studies from West Virginia Wesleyan College and her M.A. in international relations from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).